

The **Hoax**

CLIFFORD IRVING

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THE HOAX



**Clifford
Irving**

The Hoax

Clifford Irving

An [*e - reads*] Book

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Author Biography

Clifford Irving, his wife Edith, and his collaborator, Richard Suskind, went to prison for the efforts. But, as the author himself writes: "...beyond all the naivete and stupidity, beyond the vulgarity inherent in the amount of money involved – beyond all this a certain grandeur had rooted itself in the scheme, and I could still spy a reckless and artistic splendor to the way we had carried out."

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Author's Note

A great deal has been written about the Hughes hoax, including a few truths culled from documents and indictments. The bulk of it, however, has been defensive posturing and gossip masquerading as fact, as well as a plethora of tales woven from the whole cloth. “But,” asked one critic, in his review of *Hoax* — a book-length compendium of newspaper clippings, misquotation, and muddled journalistic fantasies — “even if Clifford Irving’s own, projected book tells the story more fully — who on earth is going to believe it?”

The answer to that question is simple and painful. My wife, Edith, Richard Suskind, and I have testified to the facts — under oath — before Federal and New York State grand juries. An extensive investigation has been conducted, which included the sworn but hitherto unknown testimony of other witnesses, to determine that we told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Robert Morvillo, Chief of the Criminal Division of the United States Attorney’s Office of the Southern District of New York, has explained to me — and without mincing his words — that if the facts contained in this book are at variance with sworn testimony and the body of truth known to the prosecutors and the courts, Richard Suskind and I are open to a charge of perjury which carries a sentence of up to five years’ imprisonment. We like to think, despite the Kafkaesque quality of the past months, that we are still sane. And no sane man would risk an additional five years in prison.

This book, therefore, contains the truth-however bizarre it may appear to be, and however shameful and regretful I may feel about what happened, particularly in regard to the plight of my wife and children. It bears my name as author, but it is a joint effort of myself and Richard Suskind, as was *The Autobiography of Howard Hughes*. Edith has also contributed recollections of her various journeys to Zurich.

Although he has been consistently pigeonholed and labeled by the press as “Irving’s researcher,” Dick Suskind is and was far more than that. He is an author in his own right, and many of the passages in this book which deal with shared experiences have been written by him from my point of view. We shared the responsibility for the caper and we share the credit, or lack of it, for this final revelation.

And so this book is dedicated to the many friends to whom we lied over the course of the affair and who, when the truth was known, still remained loyal and offered us their unqualified and unstinting help. They know who they are and need not be named.

Clifford Irving
East Hampton, New York
March, 1962

You may look for motive in an act, but only after the act has been committed. An effect creates not only the search for a cause, but the reality of the cause itself. I must warn you, however, that the attempt to establish relationships between acts and motives, effects and causes, is one of the most time-wasting games ever invented by Man. Do you know why you kicked the cat this morning? Or gave a sou to that beggar? Or set forth for Jerusalem rather than Gomorrah?

— Jean le Malchanceux

The *Juan March* stood off the docks of Palma harbor. I needed coffee. A little after eight o'clock of a December morning, not yet full daylight, a raw wind blew off the mountains that fringed the northern coast of Mallorca. Shivering, I pulled up the collar of my overcoat as I joined the crowd at the rail.

I spotted Dick Suskind at once. There was no missing that huge bulk, hands jammed in his pockets, planted in front of the terminal building. The gangway was lowered and a few minutes later we were shaking hands and grinning.

"Let's grab coffee here," Dick said, "and give Ginette time to get Raphael off to school. The landlady she'll fix you a real breakfast."

We sipped our *café con leche* at the counter inside the terminal. On each side of us groups of longshoremen were munching thick sandwiches of *sobreasada* and drinking glasses of red wine.

I had telephoned him yesterday from Barcelona to explain that Edith's mother had died ten days before and that with our two boys, Nedsky and Barney, we had flown to Germany for the funeral. We returned to Barcelona in a one-year-old Mercedes sedan, part of Edith's inheritance. A rich man's car — absurd for the island of Ibiza, whose dirt roads made a jeep the ideal vehicle. But it was mine now and I was willing to learn to live with it. Edith and the kids had taken the morning plane home to Ibiza and I had put the car on the big ferry.

The *Juan March* was not due to continue its passage to Ibiza until eleven. Dick and I had seen each other seldom since he had moved from Ibiza to Mallorca. In those four years he had written and published a handful of history books; now he was halfway through a biography of Richard the Lion-Hearted for teenagers. He had run into a snag: Richard's rampant homosexuality. "How the hell do you get around something like that? I can't talk about sodomy and buggery — my editor would turn green." The book was taking a long time to write, and Dick was in trouble. "I'm in hock to the grocery store, the landlady, Raphael's school — you name it. So what's with you? How's Edith? How's the Danish problem?"

I ducked that last one. "Can't complain," I said. I was two-thirds of the way through my new novel and I had a four-book contract with my publisher, McGraw-Hill, calling for a total advance of \$150,000. I knew that I would have to offer Dick some money before I went on to Ibiza. Par for the course, and no problem. We had borrowed from each other in the past, and had always — although sometimes it took a while — repaid the loans.

"It's no Mercedes," Dick said cheerfully, opening the door of a battered gray Simca, "but it gets me there — most of the time." We started along the coast road toward his home on the outskirts of Palma. A horde of new hotels and apartment buildings had risen since my last visit. I remembered how it had been in 1957, when Dick and I had first met to play chess at a sidewalk cafe in Ibiza: a few scattered hotels, a dozen ancient taxis, empty and pristine beaches where you rarely wore a bathing suit. My hand encountered the stiff crinkling of the *Newsweek* in my overcoat pocket. I pulled it out and opened it to the article on Howard Hughes — "The Case of the Invisible Billionaire."

"See this? I read it on the boat last night."

Hughes had just escaped from his Las Vegas fiefdom to Paradise Island in the Bahamas, from the

ninth floor of one hotel to the ninth floor of another. His Nevada empire looked as though it might be toppling. Dick, after a quick glance, turned his attention back to the road. "What's with that guy?" he said. "I read the same story in this week's *Time*. There's American decadence and lunacy in a nutshell. That's why I couldn't go back there to live, not even on a bet. The Biafrans are starving, the Pakistanis are starving, I'm on the edge of starvation, but some old fart with two billion dollars flies off for vacation in the Bahamas and the press goes ape. What the hell has Howard Hughes done except discover Jane Russell's tits and build that ridiculous flying boat?"

"It's not what he's done, it's the way he lives. He's the Lone Ranger of big business. He's practically a hermit. Do you know he hasn't been interviewed for fifteen years? The people who would interview for him have never even met him."

"I wouldn't be surprised if he was dead and it was all a cover-up for those guys around him to steal the whole boodle." Laughter rumbled in Dick's chest. "Why wasn't I born a Mormon?"

"Convert," I suggested. "It's never too late. But listen — I've got a wild idea."

"Your last idea was to ride an elephant from India to Ibiza and have NBC film it and pick up the tab. Just so Edith could start a zoo and have some way to crush tin cans. You were also going to sail to Odessa in that leaky tub you call your yacht. What's the latest brilliancy?"

"Look, I'm laying this on you because you think clearly and you're one of the foremost cynics I know." Dick chuckled, accepting the compliment. "If you think I've flipped my lid, tell me so. Okay?"

"You flipped your lid a long time ago, when you took up with the Dane again. So tell me the idea."

"Well, Hughes fascinates me. There's never been a real biography written about him because he's so secretive. No one can get close to him. Suppose I went to a publisher — let's say my own publisher McGraw-Hill — and cooked up a scheme with them to pretend I'd met Hughes and he'd commissioned me to write his authorized biography. Authorized, you understand, by The Man himself." I would do the book, I explained, based on tape-recorded interviews with Hughes — just as I had written my last book, *Fake!*, based on tape-recorded interviews with Elmyr de Hory, the art forger — except that in this case I would never meet Hughes and the interviews would be faked. A hoax, a gorgeous literary caper, in which publisher and author would collaborate.

Dick's eyes swerved to me. "And you think McGraw-Hill would back you on a thing like that?"

"It's worth a try. They're always looking for best-sellers. Hughes would never be able to surface to deny it, or else he wouldn't bother. I'd *have* to get a publisher to back it because there's a tremendous amount of research involved. It would have to be a definitive biography with plenty of quotes from The Man himself. I bet you they'd pay a hundred grand for a book like that — which we'd damn well need. We'd have to travel all over the States, dig into records wherever Hughes has lived, interview hundreds of people who knew him, see ..."

"Hold on a minute. *We*?"

"I'm no researcher. Besides, it's too big a job for one man."

"Listen," Dick said, "I think I'd rather ride on the elephant with you. McGraw-Hill's a big outfit, not to mention the most conservative publisher in New York. They'd never go for an idea like that. Pay up a hundred thousand bucks for a hoax? You tell them that, man, and then duck. But don't include me in it."

Dick slammed on the brakes at the end of a short, dead-end dirt road marked Calle Gamundi. His poodle gave us a noisy welcome at the iron gate and led the way down the cobbled path. "You *have* flipped your lid," Dick concluded. "But never mind, mental masturbation is an occupational disease. All writers have it. You finish your novel and I'll finish *Richard the Lion-Hearted*, a study in royal medieval pederasty."

Dick's French-born wife, dark red hair hanging loose about her shoulders, greeted me with a kiss on both cheeks. Bacon and pancakes were already sizzling in separate pans. Dick and I wandered

through the house to his study. I started to say, "How about if Hughes ..." but Dick cut me off. He wanted to know about the housing situation in Ibiza. He and Ginette missed their old friends there, life on Mallorca was dull and expensive. "Look around for us," he said. "Something big and cheap. And give me a ring. We've both got telephones now, we can keep in touch. I'm lonely. I'm fed up. I feel middle-aged."

"So do I. It's a funny feeling."

"The first forty years is text," Dick said, quoting Schopenhauer. "The rest is commentary."

"But I don't feel ready to give up writing the text." Gloomily, I promised to do my best with the househunting chore and then, after breakfast we climbed back into the Simca and headed for the docks. The subject of money arose and I parted with 10,000 pesetas, about \$150, so that the Suskinis could eat for the first month of the new year. "Pay me back when you can," I said. "I don't give a damn."

We were still rattling down the hill to join the coast road when I was struck with a variation on the theme. "Listen, on that Hughes thing, suppose ..."

"Go to Odessa," Dick said.

"No, hear me out. You're probably right, no publisher would go for the idea if they knew it was a hoax. But suppose they *didn't* know? Suppose I told McGraw-Hill I was in touch with Hughes. I mean suppose I convince them it was true. Don't ask me how, just assume I could do it. Assume I could work out a phony private contract between me and Hughes forbidding communication between him and the publishers. Think what a great book could be done, what a great character could be created — using the known facts about the man and inventing the rest. I'd still fake the interviews. I'd still research the book and write it the same way. Only the publisher wouldn't know."

Dick had listened attentively, slowing down to approach the crossroad of the coast highway. He reached for the stick shift, to gear down into second. "That," he said softly, "is a worthy idea. That's not bad at all ..."

"They'd put up the money for the research, an advance, and then later ... maybe ... when the book was done, I tell them it's a hoax. Or I don't tell them. Who knows? Either way, I keep the rest of the money intact for repayment. And either way there's a book, and it could be a dilly. I'll finish my novel by April or May ... I could start right after that."

"Jesus Christ," Dick murmured. Thinking aloud, I had got through to him. He slammed the gear stick so hard that it snapped off nearly at its base, two inches off the floorboards. "*That could work ...*"

The Simca drifted off the road and came to a bumpy halt in a patch of cactus. Dick stared dreamily at the length of stick clutched in his thick fingers. "What a fantastic idea! You know, it *could* work. We could do it ..."

"We?"

"You asked me to help you before." He looked indignant. "Didn't you?"

"Get me to the goddam boat. I've got a wife and two children waiting for me. Think about it for a few days and then I'll call you. And don't get so excited about things — next thing you'll wind up with the steering wheel in your hands."

Dick trapped the stub of the gear stick between his thumb and forefinger and wiggled the lever into second gear. We chugged along the coast road, concentrating on traffic lights and cars and the minutes ticking away. The *marineros* were already unroping the gangway when we reached the dock. I leaped out, fumbling in my pocket for the boat ticket. Dick snatched at my sleeve.

"Listen, if Hughes is ..."

"I'll call you," I promised. "And drive carefully. And don't lose any sleep over this. It's a wild idea — mental masturbation, you called it. There's got to be a dozen snags in it. So think about it. I'll"

call you," I repeated, and stumbled up the swaying gangway.

The Old Town of Ibiza soared dramatically from the dark blue Mediterranean, a pyramid of white cubes crested by the cathedral tower. The bay sparkled under the sharp light of the winter sun. I scanned the quay searching for Edith, who had promised to meet the boat with the children. There was no sign of her. An hour later the *marineros* had finally unloaded the Mercedes and still she had not appeared. I drove home, out the San José road into the countryside, with a slightly sick feeling in my stomach. When Edith said she would do something, she did it.

The *finca* was four miles out of town, a converted 15-room peasant farmhouse festooned with bougainvillaea and held together by 300 years of whitewashing, rambling over an acre of rocky land and gardens. The monkey, Eugen, whom I had won in a poker game back in 1966 and given to Edith as a birthday present, was always the first to hear a car purr or snort up the dirt driveway. As I jumped out with a suitcase clutched in each hand and a straw Ibiza basket hanging from my shoulder, I heard her squealing. The front door was open. The uproar alerted Nedsky and he raced out, blond hair rumpled and flowing, yelling: "Daddy! Daddy!" Dropping a suitcase, I scooped him up in one arm. Barney was next door, I guessed, teasing the chickens of Antonia, the peasant neighbor who tended the gardens and acted as his honorary grandmother.

"Where's Mommy?" I asked.

Inside the house, crammed with antique French furniture, books, and paintings, Edith appeared from the kitchen. She wore jeans and an old corduroy shirt and her honey-colored hair fell to her shoulders. Her face was drawn, unsmiling.

"What the hell's going on?" I thumped down in an overstuffed chair with Nedsky on one knee. I looked for you at the boat. I got scared to death. I thought the plane crashed, or you cracked up the car, or God knows what. Home is the sailor, home from the sea. What's behind all this good cheer I'm greeted with?"

"This," Edith said, and tossed an envelope in my lap. I could see now that she had been crying. My anger vanished. I reached out to touch her but I knew what was in the envelope before I even saw it.

"I went this morning to the bank," Edith said, "what I thought would be a favor to you, to pick up your mail."

"And who told you to open it?"

"I *knew*. I don't know the handwriting, but I caught one look at that letter and I smelled it. I knew it was from her."

"Caught," I said, "not 'caught.'" Born in Germany and educated in Switzerland, her English grammar was roguish and unpredictable; and to me, endearing. But she was in no mood for lessons today.

The envelope bore a London postmark but no return address. The scrawled note inside was unsigned. I scanned it.

Darling,

I heard through the grapevine that you were in London last month. You bastard — I agree that we agreed not to see each other, but you could have called me at least. I'll be coming to Ibiza in January. Do you think I could pop up to the studio and that you could spare a minute to see me?

“That bitch,” Edith raged. “The madonna that smiles so sweetly and swears to my face — just last summer! — that she doesn't know whether or not she loves you, and you swear it's only platonic or some such bullshit. And what she does is try to steal another woman's husband! If I see her on the street in Ibiza,” Edith vowed, tears beginning to film her eyes, “I cut her face with a razor. If she comes up to your studio, I kill her.”

I coaxed Nedsky out of the room and told him to find Barney and Antonia and Rafaela, the maid. Then I turned to Edith, who sat on the red leather couch, head buried in her hands.

“Darling, listen. I *didn't* see her in London. I didn't even call her. That's the whole point, isn't it?”

Raising her head, Edith said scornfully: “You couldn't. You were with me. If you'd been alone you would have called her.”

“Never,” I lied. “It's over. We agreed to that. She agreed to it, too. I haven't seen her since last summer and you know that's true. And she's not asking for anything in her letter. For Christ's sake read it! All she asks is can she pop up to the studio for a minute to see me. Is that so godawful?”

For nearly an hour the argument veered back and forth, raking up the past, bemoaning the present, portraying either a bleak or blood-drenched future. She was the hurt wife who feared the other woman. I was the man who knew the truth but dared not say it. Her world was that of a fairy tale where the prince and princess lived happily ever after in a castle in Spain, safe from all dragons. Her rage rose to a volcanic crescendo when I said: “It's a perfectly innocent letter, and if you'd read it without being prejudiced and without hating her guts, you could see that.”

“You mean she calls you 'darling' and that's innocent? What you think I am, a fool? One of your mindless sluts you lay because you're bored with your wife, your home, your children, your work, your life?”

I winced inwardly. Her words had jabbed at the periphery of a truth — not the center, but close enough to make me uneasy and want to veer away.

A vase filled with red and purple geraniums, freshly picked from the garden for my homecoming, stood on the big coffee table. Edith sprang to her feet, snatched up the vase in both hands, and smashed it on the tile floor at my feet. I had jumped up, trying to duck to safety, but it was too late. Glass flew in all directions, water drenched my trousers and shirt, and a few of the geraniums, by some law of physics that still puzzles me, landed on top of my head. With that red and purple wreath garlanding my soaked hair, and water dripping down my cheeks, I stood astonished, unable to speak. I checked for blood and embedded glass, but there were only flowers.

“You fool,” Edith said, trying to keep a straight face.

There was nothing to do after that but laugh, and then kiss and make up, which we had done so many times before.

I unpacked the car and then, later in the day after a siesta, drove up to my studio. Five miles from the house, behind the Roman walls of the Old Town of Ibiza and perched on a rock that jutted out above the sea, reached only by a narrow, winding dirt road, the studio was my sanctuary from the world. It had long been agreed between us that Edith only came there by invitation. The sun flooded through the glass doors and there was no need to turn on the gas heater. I sat down at the desk, shoved the pages of my novel to one side, and stared out at the sea.

If my life had had any design for the past seven years, it had been woven chiefly of four threads: my work, Edith Sommer, and Nina van Pallandt.

Ibiza was home. I had first come there in 1953, settling there to work for a season because it was cheap and old and exotic and beautiful: all that Europe should be for a young American who dreamed of being a writer. *La isla blanca*, the Spaniards called it — the white island. I kept coming back. By 1970 I had written four novels there and a book about Elmyr de Hory, the art forger who was my neighbor, and for a writer the place you work well in is often the place you wind up calling home. I had good friends there, a house, a sailboat, an easy life. But more than that, for me, it was the place where everything that seemed important in my life had happened. Claire, my second wife, who had died in a California car crash when she was eight months pregnant, had been introduced to me on Ibiza. Then, in 1960, wandering along the port, I saw a girl of fragile beauty whose red hair sparkled like warm blood in the sun. Her name was Fay. We traveled around the world, we were married, we had a son, and we were divorced — which is a poor way to sum up five years, but the story has its place in this tale.

Again on Ibiza — before that divorce, in the spring of 1964 — I met Nina van Pallandt.

I was separated from Fay, who was living in the village of Santa Eulalia while I had a small apartment in the Old Town of Ibiza. Nina, Danish born, was married to Frederik van Pallandt, a bearded, good-looking Dutch baron who fancied himself an intellectual and a guru in the mysteries of the Sufi sect. I had met Frederik some months before and after fifteen minutes' conversation with him I had a feeling of *déjà entendu*; his speeches reminded me of the discussions we had indulged in during my sophomore philosophy courses at Cornell. He and Nina sang folksongs for a living and had a strong following among the mums and dads of the English midlands. In public they were the golden couple: beautiful, talented, titled, and in love, with two beautiful, golden-haired children. In private life they were miserable — "You and the children," he had said to her once, "are the stones round my neck that keep me from becoming the man I need to be" — although they kept up what pretense they could for the sake of their career.

The pretense vanished when Nina and I met. Frederik had bought a yacht and was sailing it down from England to Ibiza, where they were building a summer home. Nina and I, and two friends, were part of an expedition to dig for Phoenician relics on the north coast of the island. We toiled up the mountainside in the hot spring sun and then dug for hours, with our hands, in the cool of the cave. A few potsherds and a cracked head of the goddess Tanit were our reward, and if the goddess had visited with a curse on those who ravaged her resting place, we were its victims. What words we exchanged that day I have long forgotten. When you fall in love, other voices speak to you and the words you really hear are of little consequence.

We were together for three weeks when Frederik returned unexpectedly to Ibiza. He had been seasick in the English Channel, gone ashore in France, and entrusted the yacht to its crew for the remainder of the passage to Spain.

"I can't lie to him," Nina said, and I replied: "Don't. Tell him the truth. I love you and I want you to go away with me."

She came to me the next afternoon in tears. Frederik, she said, had begged her not to go, had pleaded: "Don't take my children from me ..."

“He wants to try again. He took me for granted. He never realized he could lose me. He swears will be different.”

“And what do you want, Nina?”

“I don’t know ...”

A week later she was still on the rack of uncertainty, torn between her husband, her children, her career, her guilt — and a man she had known for less than a month. “I love you, my sweet, but I can’t throw it all away. I can’t do it to him.”

“Then stay with him.”

“Is that what you want?”

“No. I want you with me,” and she added, sobbing, “I can’t let you go, either.”

But she was pinned to the rack and as it stretched her day by day, she grew weaker and thinner and came to me each time bearing the scars. The great blue eyes that had always smiled with such wistful pleasure were permanently filmed with tears. The lines cut deeper into her cheeks and she would rock back and forth in a chair, her mass of golden hair cupped by suddenly veined hands. It was an agony for her, and I heard her repeat Frederik’s constant refrain: “*Don’t take my children from me ...*”

My own marriage to Fay had ended six months earlier and I had lost a two-year-old son. As much as compassion I had my own guilt, my own fears.

“You can’t decide,” I said.

“No. Don’t you see that I can’t? Clifford, tell me what to do.”

We were sitting on the rocks by the sea, on a headland near the town of Ibiza. “Go back to him,” Clifford said. “You have to. What you’re doing now will kill you. Give it a chance. You love him, I know that. You’re in love with me but maybe it will pass. Call it a summer romance that came a little out of season.”

She looked at me solemnly. “Do you believe that?”

“No,” I said after a while. “I don’t believe it for a minute. But you’re going back to him and I’ve got to pretend it’s true, for the sake of sanity. And so do you.”

I said goodbye to her and left her there on the rocks above the sea, the tears unchecked and streaking her cheeks and her body huddled on the stone, shaking.

The memory of Nina lay between Edith and myself from the beginning, when we met that summer while I was finishing my fourth novel, *The 38th Floor*. I still had the apartment in the Old Town and Edith owned a small *finca* in the country. She was Swiss, a painter, a lovely and ebullient 28-year-old girl who prized her independence above everything else. When I met her in July, she had two daughters and was separated from her husband, a German industrialist from the Ruhr. By December they were divorced. We let love come to us slowly, with neither pressure nor promises, and in January we began living together. The *finca* on the San José road became our home.

But the shadow of Nina was always there. I had some money for the first time in my life and Edith and I traveled through southern Spain, to Morocco, to the West Indies. She was the most giving woman I had ever known and she held back nothing, but the shadow followed me. I knew from mutual friends that Nina and Frederik’s marriage had cracked within a year of our parting; the only thing holding it together was their career. And in the summer of 1966 she came to my studio at Los Molinos

and the affair began again. For both of us it was an obsession that lurked below the surface of our lives, ready to spring forth at a look from the far corner of a room, the mention of a name, the sudden flicker of memory. Call it love, call it madness — it may have been both. The only difference now was the presence in my life of Edith. I wanted her, too, and I refused to turn away from a harmony and warmth that grew season by season. Call it love, call it greed — again, it may have been both. The man who is willing to define his love has proved its artifice.

In January of 1967 I went to New York for a month, and Nina flew north from a holiday in Antigua to meet me. We were together in the city for almost two weeks, and word of the rendezvous leaked back to Ibiza. When I came back in February to the *finca* on the San José road, Edith was with someone else. My clothes were packed. “Go,” she begged.

Her hurt and my guilt were too much for me to deal with. I moved to my studio in Los Molinos. Nina was in London, still with Frederik, still unhappy, busily decorating a new apartment on the Chelsea embankment. We wrote to each other, but she was too involved to leave and I felt instinctively, that it would be a mistake for me to go to her. Whatever was to happen would have to happen in its own time. We were all in flux and I knew somehow that to fly from one woman to another would be to follow the path of a fool. Nina, equally unsure, knew it too.

Edith left the island for a month, but when she returned I was at the airport to meet her, and I said, “It’s you I love. If you feel the same way, forgive me, and let’s try again.”

Wounds of the sort that we had inflicted on each other heal slowly. Edith was uncertain and I was restless. Throughout the end of May we read the papers and listened to the radio, and in that season the Arab threats against Israel mounted to a crescendo. I talked with several Jewish friends on the island. We considered volunteering. We could drive a bus in Tel Aviv, we could do whatever was needed. I was quixotic, but our feelings were real; yet inertia triumphed and we did nothing. On June 2, 1967, I left the island on the night boat to Alicante, headed for Gibraltar where I had to change the license plates on my old Peugeot station wagon. The next afternoon, in Granada, I read that Israeli tanks had broken into the Sinai desert. The Spanish newspapers carried only the stories of Egyptian victories.

I telephoned the Israeli Embassy in Paris and was told that no flights were leaving for Tel Aviv. I went on to Gibraltar and then back up to Malaga before I made up my mind. I flew to Paris, and there I waited. Two days after the war officially ended, flights began; I booked the only seat available on an Air France jet and cabled Edith: *FLYING ISRAEL CONTACT ME KING DAVID HOTEL JERUSALEM TRUST ME LOVE YOU CLIFF.*

In Jerusalem I was able to get press credentials. When I had flown out I hadn’t really known why I was going, other than out of some primitive streak of Jewishness and the driving need simply to be there. But as soon as I had gone to the Golan Heights and spoken to the soldiers, I knew there was one thing I could do: write a book. On the way back from Jericho I stopped with another correspondent at the King David Hotel. A telegram awaited me at the desk. I read: *ARRIVING ISRAEL ALITALIA FLIGHT THURSDAY NIGHT TRUST ME TOO LOVE YOU TOO EDITH.*

Her coming to Israel was an act of bravery. You had to know Edith’s history to understand. Born Catholic, she had been a child in Germany during the Second World War, the youngest daughter of a Swiss clockmaker in a southern Alpine town. She had lived through the bombings, had seen her

mother and father led away by the Nazis to be shot, then rescued at the last minute by a local official. The Six-Day War for Edith was a memory of nightmare. If she read a book with true tragedy in it she would often cry, and if she saw a movie with bloody scenes or torture she would leave the theater, trembling. The fighting in the Middle East was over, but it lingered in the aftermath in both sight and smell. She had been flown out because I was there. She faced it with great simplicity. I was her man, and she would follow me.

We traveled together to the Dead Sea, Gaza, the Syrian Heights, and then down through Sinai in a military convoy with Irwin Shaw, Martha Gellhorn, and Jules Dassin. We trailed the convoy in a jeep, accompanied by a myopic captain of Israeli Intelligence who carried only an old rifle. The desert was full of stragglers from the routed Egyptian Army. I drove while Edith perched uncomfortably in the back of the jeep atop a litter of supplies, busily sewing two flags. One of them was white with a red cross, the other red with a white cross. "What the hell are you doing back there?" I asked.

Finishing her handiwork, she held it up proudly. "One is the Red Cross flag, the other Swiss. If we meet any Egyptians, I wave both. The soldiers, the poor ones, will recognize the Red Cross flag. The officers will recognize the Swiss flag because they all have bank accounts there."

Two things of moment happened to us in Israel. We fell in love again, and we decided to get married and have a child. I bought a thin gold wedding ring from a local jeweler and put it on Edith's hand. And then, one day in the lobby of the Dan Hotel, interviewing an Israeli pilot, I ran out of tape. I asked Edith to get a fresh reel from my suitcase upstairs. In the suitcase she found Nina's last letter to me, still unanswered.

"One thing," Edith said, a cold but somehow frightened light in her amber-green eyes. "You write to her. Tell her it's all over, and you don't want to see her again."

I felt trapped into an act that seemed final — and where I wanted, I realized, no finality.

"Is that an ultimatum?"

"I want you to do it," Edith said, unswerving. "And then you give it to me to mail. *You must.*"

I sat down at the desk and wrote the letter, sealed it, and then Edith went downstairs and dropped the envelope into the mailbox.

By any standards, the years from 1967 on were good ones for me. They started disastrously, in December of that year, two days after we were married, when a fire in my father's New York apartment destroyed the book I was writing about the Six-Day War and the almost-finished draft of a 900-page novel. But then I wrote *Fake!*, which sold well, although not up to expectations. Like most writers, I blamed it on the publisher's failure to promote it properly. And that summer, on Ibiza, my mother suffered a stroke which left her paralyzed in a Manhattan nursing home.

But at the center of my life I felt a sense of well-being. In April 1968, Edith gave birth to a son. His given name was John-Edmond and we came to call him Nedsky. A year and a half later Barne was born. I wrote a screenplay and started a new novel. With Edith, I thought, I could live out the rest of my life and make no fundamental compromises; I could graduate from the shadowy evening of my youth to what I supposed would be a calmer middle age, because I loved my wife, my children, my home. I could keep in check the restlessness that had dogged me for so many years. I had found an answer. Beside the wife whom I loved and who expected so much from me, I had a mistress whom

loved — and she expected very little. I had Nina.

The letter from Tel Aviv had kept us at bay for more than a year, but in the winter of 1968, on Ibiza, we met again. Our affair had never ended and we came to believe that it would probably never end. We would make no promises, we would have no hopes, but we would take from each other whatever sustenance and joy was there when the season was ripe. To both myself and Nina I said repeatedly: “Edith must never know. Edith must never be hurt.”

And Nina would echo my words and add: “She loves you too much, and I know you love her. You’d be a fool to leave her, because what we have together is good the way it is. And I don’t know where I’m going. I don’t know what’s going to happen to me ...”

She and Frederik had finally separated. He had his own apartment in London. He had fathered a child by another girl. That, for Nina, had stifled whatever qualms she may have felt about declaring her independence. We saw each other when and where we could, without rocking my domestic boat from 1968 onward. Of necessity, I lived with the assumption that Edith suspected little and knew nothing. In July, returning from my father’s funeral in New York, I stayed three days with Nina in her London flat.

The only real crisis of those years came two weeks later, on Ibiza. A rapprochement had been in effect for a long time; the island was small, we had too many mutual friends not to meet from time to time at a party or at the Salinas beach. For her birthday party, Nina asked Edith and me to dinner together with a dozen other people. Throughout the evening Nina and I never danced, never touched. Once, at the candlelit dinner table in the big beamed kitchen of Nina’s *finca*, we looked at each other. The look was neither brief nor long. No word was spoken. But what passed silently between us across the pine table must have had an eloquence that neither of us knew how to conceal.

Driving home, Edith said: “I know now. And I think I’ve always known. You looked at her in a way you haven’t looked at me since the time we first met.” Her voice was weary, almost dispassionate. “You’re still in love with her. What I beg you — don’t deny it.”

And at home, in the living room, after we had talked until four o’clock in the morning, I no longer tried to deny it. I dug for the truth, but all I reached was confusion — and Edith’s tears. “Do you want to go with her?” Edith cried.

“No.”

“Then will you give her up? Will you stop seeing her?”

“I can’t do that,” I said, and felt I would strangle on the words.

Two days later, on a hot July afternoon, Edith drove out the Santa Eulalia road and up the mountain to Nina’s *finca*. It was the first time in more than three years that they had ever talked alone. All Edith demanded to know was what Nina wanted from me. “Do you love Cliff?” she asked, and Nina replied: “I don’t really know ...”

“I can’t live with him, this way, with a man divided, killing him and killing me worse. If you want him,” she said brutally, “you take him. I pack his clothes and he’ll go.”

“I don’t know if I want it,” Nina said. “And I won’t break up a marriage. You have two children. He loves them, and he loves you. I couldn’t do it.”

“Then let him be,” Edith pleaded. “Don’t see him again. Can you at least save my life and agree to that?”

“Yes,” Nina said at length. “I won’t see him any more.”

Edith returned to the house on the San José road. She had humiliated herself, but she had won. “And you?” she said to me. “Do you agree?”

“Yes,” I said, because there was no other way.

That was where things stood in December of 1970, five months after our promises, on the day that Edith found Nina’s letter waiting for me at the bank and on the same day that I returned to Ibiza from

Palma where I had said to Dick Suskind: "I've got a wild idea ..."

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