

The Ninth Gate

by

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And John Brownjohn

Based on the novel
"La Novena Puerta" aka "El Club Dupas"

by

Arturo Perez-Reverte.

ANDREW TELFER, a scrawny seventy-year-old, is writing a note at his desk in one corner of a big, book-lined room. Dangling from the central chandelier is a noose. A chair stands beneath it.

TELFER looks up for a moment. Blankly, he eyes a framed photo-portrait on his desk: a beautiful, thirty-something blonde returns his gaze with an enigmatic smile. He stops writing and folds the sheet, scrawls something on the back, and leaves it on the desk. Then he walks to the centre of the room and climbs on the chair. He puts his head through the noose and tightens it around his neck. He kicks away the back of the chair, but it doesn't fall. Frantically, he tries again: this time the chair topples over. The chandelier squeaks as it swings on its hook, but it holds.

Fragments of plaster come raining down. TELFER's neck isn't broken: he starts to choke. His feet perform a convulsive dance in mid-air only six inches above the floor; one of his shoes comes off.

The CAMERA leaves the dying man and MOVES IN on the bookshelves. To the accompaniment of choking sounds, it PANS across the serried rows of volumes until it reaches a gap that shows where one of them has been removed. The choking sounds cease. The CAMERA enters the black void left by the missing book. Absolute, abysmal DARKNESS.

The Manhattan skyline seen through a picture window. Above it, reflected in the windowpane, the face of an OLD WOMAN seated with her back to the room. Her expression is impassive and self-absorbed, her twisted mouth suggests she's a stroke victim. She seems quite uninvolved in the action behind her.

CORSO (O.S.)

An impressive collection. You have
some very rare editions here. Sure
you want to sell them all?

We now discover the speaker, DEAN CORSO: a tall, lean, rather unkempt man in his 30's. Steel-rimmed glasses, crumpled old tweed jacket, worn cords, scuffed brown oxfords. He could almost be a shabby university teacher if it weren't for the street-wise glint in his eye. He replaces a book on a shelf. Standing beside him is the Old Woman's SON, a middle-aged man with a puffy red face.

Her DAUGHTER-IN-LAW looks on, one hand cupping her elbow, the fingers of the other playing avidly with her lower lip. The SON is cuddling a large Scotch on the rocks like it's an integral part of his anatomy. His tone is too lugubrious to be true.

SON

They're no use to Father, not anymore - not now he's passed away. His library was his own little world. Now it's just a painful memory for Mother here.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

Unbearably painful.

CORSO glances at them over the top of his glasses, then at the OLD WOMAN. It's clear that the OLD WOMAN's true source of pain is their rapacious desire to convert her late husband's library into hard cash. CORSO picks up a notebook, adjusts his glasses with an instinctive, habitual movement, taps the notebook with his pencil.

CORSO

Well, at a rough, preliminary estimate, you have a collection here worth around two hundred thousand dollars.

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

(almost jumps)

Two hundred thousand?!

CORSO

Or thereabouts.

He smiles sweetly at the DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. The OLD WOMAN continues to stare blankly at her reflection in the window. Behind her, the SON sidles up to CORSO, who indicates the volumes in question.

SON

How much were you thinking of...

CORSO

Hmm... I couldn't go higher than four grand -- four-and-a-half tops.

Corso takes an envelope from his shoulder bag and starts peeling off some bills

CORSO strides briskly along the corridor toward the elevator with the canvas bag slung from his shoulder. He's grinning to himself. The bag is obviously heavier than it was. The elevator doors open just as he's about to press the button. He almost collides with a bespectacled, briefcase-carrying man in a three-piece suit and bow tie (WITKIN) -- a cross between an intellectual and a business executive.

(CONTINUED)

WITKIN
(caustically)
You here? You didn't waste much
time.

CORSO
Hello, Witkin. There's a small
fortune in there.
(smiles sardonically)
Help yourself.

WITKIN
(eyes CORSO's beg
suspiciously)
You're a vulture, Corso.

CORSO
Who isn't in our business?

WITKIN
You'd stoop to anything.

CORSO brushes past him into the elevator, turns and pats his
shoulder bag.

CORSO
For a 'Quixote' by Ybarra? You bet
I would.

WITKIN
(indignantly)
Unscrupulous, thoroughly
unscrupulous!

CORSO
(thumbs the elevator
button)
Good hunting!

The doors close on WITKIN's indignant face.

A sign says "CLOSED." CORSO pushes open the door of an old
fashioned semi-basement bookstore -- 'BERNIE'S RARE BOOKS' --
and enters. He walks up to the counter and deposits his bag
on it.

BERNIE (O.S.)
Witkin just called me. He's
spitting blood.

CORSO looks around. The voice came from ten feet up and three
bookcases along. BERNIE FELDMAN, a man around CORSO's age
with dark, curly hair receding at the temples, is perched at
the top of a spiral staircase.

CORSO
What's his problem?

BERNIE
(replacing some books)
He says you're a double-dealing,
money grubbing bastard. He says he
had that sale tied up, and now
you've queered his pitch.

CORSO
(grins to himself)
He should be quicker off the mark.

The spiral staircase judders as BERNIE starts to descend.
CORSO goes over to a wall cupboard and opens it. An
assortment of bottles and glasses come to light.

CORSO (CONT'D)
May I?

BERNIE
Your valuation was way over the
odds it's brought those people out
in a rash. They're now asking twice
what the books are worth.

CORSO, still grinning, pours himself a slug of Scotch. BERNIE
reaches the ground.

BERNIE (CONT'D)
He's talking about suing you. Well,
let's face it: you screwed him.
That's what it's called.

CORSO
I know what it's called.

BERNIE comes up close.

BERNIE
He also says you snaffled the 'Don
Qui ...

He breaks off as CORSO produces the four volumes of the
'Quixote', bends over to examine them, whistles
appreciatively.

BERNIE (CONT'D)
The Ybarra 'Don Quixote', 1780,
four volumes. Fantastic!
(opens one)
Sonofabitch, you're the best in the
business. Definitely.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORSO

And the most expensive.

(smiles slyly)

That client of yours, the Swiss, is
he still interested in this
edition?

BERNIE smiles back, then redirects his attention to the
books.

BERNIE

Sure, but Witkin will blow a fuse.
I told him I had nothing to do with
this operation.

CORSO knocks back his Scotch in one. Extracting a crumpled
cigarette from the pocket of his overcoat, he sticks it in
his mouth and lights it.

CORSO

Nothing except your ten percent.

BERNIE

Twenty. The Swiss is my client,
remember.

CORSO

(shakes his head)

No deal.

BERNIE

Fifteen.
(cynically)
For my children's sake.

CORSO

You don't have any.

BERNIE

I'm still young. Give me time.

CORSO

(expels a lung-full of
smoke, unmoved)

Ten.

EXT. BALKAN BUILDING - DUSK

A taxi pulls up outside an opulent building downtown. CORSO
gets out, dodges a persistent beggar, and enters.

The sign above the entrance reads: 'BALKAN PUBLICATIONS'.

6 INT. BALKAN BUILDING - LOBBY - DUSK

6

CORSO nods to the SECURITY GUARD at the desk and makes his way across the lobby to a door at the back. Beside it stands an easel-mounted announcement:

'Demons and Medieval Literature, by Boris Balkan, Ph.D.'

It's adorned with a medieval engraving depicting an Inquisition torture scene.

7 INT. BALKAN BUILDING - LECTURE ROOM - DUSK

7

BORIS BALKAN, standing at a state-of-the-art lecturer's desk, is a bulky, imposing figure of a man around 50 years old. His thick gray hair is slicked back to reveal a domed forehead. The eyes beneath it radiate keen intelligence through a pair of heavy horn-rims. He speaks in a deep, slow, almost monotonous voice, but with great authority.

BALKAN

Relevant information may be found in Antoine Martin del Rio's 'Disquisitionum Magicarum', Louvain 1599, and earlier, in in 'De la d,monomanle des sorciers' by the Frenchman, Jean Bodin...

His eyes flicker in the direction of the door as CORSO enters. CORSO's entrance has also been noted by a GIRL in jeans and white sneakers: childlike face, short hair and green, feline eyes. He sits down in the same row, but on the other side of the aisle, settles himself in his chair and scans the AUDIENCE, most of whom are middle-aged and female.

He gives the GIRL a cursory glance, then concentrates on BALKAN.

BALKAN ((CONT'D))

Bodin was probably the first to attempt to establish a system - if the term system may be applied to the Middle Ages - for classifying the contemporary perceptions of evil. In Bodin we find one of the first definitions of the word 'witch'. I quote
(cocks his head for a better look at the text)
'A witch is a person who, though cognizant of the laws of God, endeavors to act through the medium of a pact with the Devil...'

As BALKAN's lecture proceeds, CORSO's eyelids begin to droop.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED:

We PAN over the faces of the AUDIENCE (THE GIRL is still covertly observing CORSO). BALKAN's voice drones on, fades away.

8 INT. BALKAN BUILDING - LECTURE ROOM - NIGHT

8

CLOSE on CORSO fast asleep.

BALKAN (O.S.)

I see you enjoyed my little talk,
Mr. Corso.

CORSO gives a start and opens his eyes. He takes a moment or two to focus on BALKAN, who's standing over him. Peering around through his steel-rimmed glasses, he sees that the lecture is over. The last of the AUDIENCE are filing out. We glimpse THE GIRL making her exit.

CORSO

Did I snore?

BALKAN

Nice of you to ask. No, not that I
noticed. Shall we go?

He gestures at the door with a cold and impassive air. CORSO gets to his feet.

9 INT. BALKAN BUILDING - LOBBY - NIGHT

9

BALKAN walks swiftly across the lobby to the elevators with CORSO at his heels. They leave behind a buzz of conversation from members of the AUDIENCE who are still discussing the lecture.

BALKAN

Don't you sleep nights?

CORSO

Like a baby.

BALKAN

Strange, I'd have bet a brace of
Gutenberg Bibles you spend half the
night with your eyes peeled. You're
one of those lean, hungry, restless
types that put the wind up Julius
Caesar - men who'd stab their
friends in the back...

They reach the elevator. BALKAN presses a button and turns to CORSO, who yawns.

(CONTINUED)

BALKAN (CONT'D)

Not, I suspect, that you have many friends, do you, Mr. Corso? Your kind seldom does.

CORSO

(calmly)

Go to hell.

BALKAN is unruffled by CORSO's discourtesy. The elevator doors open. He stands aside to let CORSO pass, then follows him in.

BALKAN punches a code number on the elevator's digital keyboard. With a subdued hiss, the elevator starts to ascend.

BALKAN

You're right, of course. Your friendships don't concern me in the least. Our relations have always been strictly commercial, isn't that so? There's no one more reliable than a man whose loyalty can be bought for hard cash.

CORSO

Hey, Balkan, I came here to do some business, not shoot the breeze. You want to expound your personal philosophy, write another book.

BALKAN

You don't like me, do you?

CORSO

(shrugs)

I don't have to like you. You're a client, and you pay well.

The elevator reaches its destination, the doors open.

The elevator opens straight into a spacious room faced with black marble. The walls are bare save for a big, back-lighted photograph of a ruined castle overlooking a desolate valley. Two huge windows in the right-hand wall extend from floor to ceiling.

Visible outside on the building's floodlit facade, gargoyles gaze out over the city with their monstrous heads propped on their claws.

The centre of the room is occupied by a rectangular block of tinted glass resembling a big black monolith. Vaguely discernible through the glass are shelves filled with antique books in exquisite bindings. BALKAN leads CORSO over to the 'monolith'. He gestures at it proudly, soliciting admiration.

BALKAN

Well?

CORSO

Yup.

BALKAN

You're privileged, Corso. Very few people have ever set foot in here. This is my private collection. Some bibliophiles specialize in Gothic novels, others in Books of Hours. All my own rare editions have the same protagonist: the Devil.

CORSO is impressed but does his best not to show it.

CORSO

May I take a look?

BALKAN

That's why I brought you here.

He goes over to the 'monolith' and punches a keyboard on a control panel, gestures to CORSO to come closer. CORSO puts out his hand. Before he can touch the glass, it glides aside with a faint hum. He adjusts his glasses and glances at BALKAN, who looks on calmly. His eyes roam along the spines of the books. BALKAN comes and stands beside him.

BALKAN (CONT'D)

Beautiful, aren't they? That soft sheen, that superb gilding... Not to mention the centuries of wisdom they contain -- centuries of erudition, of delving into the secrets of the Universe and the hearts of men... I know people who would kill for a collection like this.

CORSO shoots him a quick glance.

BALKAN (CONT'D)

The Ars Diavoli! You'll never see as many books on the subject anywhere else in the world. They're the rarest, the choicest editions in existence. It has taken me a lifetime to assemble them.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED: (2)

BALKAN (CONT'D)

Only the supreme masterpiece was missing. Come...

He has accompanied CORSO on his tour of the collection. They come to the end of the 'monolith'. Gesturing to CORSO to follow him, BALKAN goes over to an ultramodern, brushed steel lectern standing beside one of the huge picture windows. As he approaches the lectern, CORSO briefly glimpses the sheer drop beyond the window, the twinkling lights of traffic passing in the street far below. Reposing on the lectern is a black book adorned with a gold pentagram. CORSO opens it at the title page, which displays the title in Latin and a pictorial engraving.

CORSO

(not looking at BALKAN)

'The Nine Gates of the Kingdom of Shadows'...

BALKAN

You're familiar with it?

CORSO

Sure. Venice, 1623. The author and printer was Aristide Torchia, burned by the Holy Inquisition, together with all his works. Only three copies survived.

BALKAN

One.

CORSO

The catalogs list three copies surviving in private ownership: the Fargas, the Kessler, and the Telfer.

BALKAN

True. You've done your homework, but you're wrong nonetheless. According to all the sources I myself have consulted, only one is authentic. The author confessed under torture that he'd hidden one copy. Only one.

CORSO

Well, three are known.

BALKAN

That's the trouble.

CORSO resumes his inspection of the book.

CORSO

Where did you get it?

(CONTINUED)

BALKAN
I bought it from Telfer.

CORSO
(surprised)
Telfer?

BALKAN
(looking out the window)
Yes, he finally sold it to me. The
day before he killed himself.

CORSO
Good timing.

BALKAN ignores this. CORSO turns the pages with care. He
lingers over AN ENGRAVING OF A KNIGHT IN ARMOR RIDING TOWARD
A CASTLE WITH A FINGER TO HIS LIPS as though enjoining the
reader to silence.

Below it is a caption. BALKAN draws closer and reads over
CORSO's shoulder:

BALKAN
Nemo pervenit qui non legitime
certaverit.

CORSO
You only succeed if you fight by
the rules?

BALKAN
More or less. Ever heard of the
'Delomelanicon'?

CORSO
Heard of it, yes. A myth, isn't it?
Some horrific book reputed to have
been written by Satan himself.

BALKAN
No myth. That book existed. Torchia
actually acquired it.

He returns to the window overlooking the sheer drop. Gazing
down, he goes on:

BALKAN (CONT'D)
The engravings you're now admiring
were adapted by Torchia from the
'Delomelanicon'. They're a form of
satanic riddle.
(MORE)

11 CONTINUED: (4)

BALKAN (CONT'D)

Correctly interpreted with the aid of the original text and sufficient inside information, they're reputed to conjure up the Prince of Darkness in person.

CORSO

You don't say.

He continues to turn the pages.

BALKAN

Are you a religious man, Corso? I mean, do you believe in the supernatural?

CORSO

I believe in my percentage. I also believe that books grow old and decay like the rest of us... Don't you get dizzy, standing there?

BALKAN continues to stare down at the nocturnal cityscape.
CORSO changes tack.

CORSO (CONT'D)

What the hell do you want from me, Balkan?

BALKAN leaves the window and confronts him.

BALKAN

I want you to go to Europe and play the detective. The other two copies are in Portugal and France. You must find some way of comparing them with mine: every page, every engraving, the binding - everything. I'm convinced that only one can be authentic, and I want to know which one it is.

CORSO

Could be an expensive trip.

BALKAN takes a folded check from his pocket and hands it to CORSO, who slips it into his breast pocket unexamined.

BALKAN

That's to get you started. Spend what you need.

CORSO

What if I find your copy's a forgery?

BALKAN stares at him coldly for a moment.

(CONTINUED)

BALKAN

It's quite on the cards.

CORSO seems mildly surprised. He looks at the book again, 'listens' to the quality of the paper by putting his ear to the pages and riffling them with his thumb.

CORSO

Really? It doesn't appear to be.
Even the paper sounds kosher.

BALKAN

Even so. There may be something
wrong with it.

CORSO continues to examine the book. He smiles ironically.

CORSO

You mean the Devil won't show up?

He shuts the book and replaces it on the lectern.

BALKAN

Don't be flippant.

(quotes)

'There are more things in heaven
and earth than are dreamt of in
your philosophy.'

CORSO

Hamlet believed in ghosts, not
demons.

BALKAN

If all three copies turn out to be
bogus or incomplete, your work will
be done. If one of them proves to
be genuine, on the other hand, I'll
finance you further.

CORSO stares at him, then unfolds the check and glances at the amount - a substantial sum, from the way he raises his eyebrows.

BALKAN (CONT'D)

I shall want you to get it for me
at all costs, never mind how.

CORSO

Never mind how sounds illegal.

BALKAN

It wouldn't be the first time
you've done something illegal.

11 CONTINUED: (6)

CORSO
Not that illegal.

BALKAN
Hence the size of the check. Do a
good job, and I'll double it.

He picks up 'The Nine Gates' and holds it out. After a
moment's hesitation, CORSO replaces the check in his pocket
and takes the book.

BALKAN (CONT'D)
Be careful, Corso.

CORSO
What do you mean?
(indicates the book)
With this?

BALKAN
Just be careful.

12 INT. CORSO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

12

A diminutive kitchenette. CORSO, one hand wrapped around a
Scotch, uses the other to remove a TV dinner from the freezer
compartment of his refrigerator and insert it in a microwave.
He shuts the door, sets the timer, and strolls out into the
living room. A bleak bachelor pad: no pictures, ornaments or
photographs, just books on every available shelf and surface.
Against one wall, a desk with a computer on it. On the floor
beside the desk, CORSO's shabby canvas bag. On the desk
itself, 'The Nine Gates'.

CORSO goes over to the desk. He stares down at the book for a
long moment, meditatively sipping his Scotch. Then, without
putting his glass down, he opens the book one-handed and idly
turns a few pages, pauses at THE ENGRAVING OF THE KNIGHT IN
ARMOR RIDING TOWARD THE CASTLE. We slowly MOVE IN until the
screen is filled with an INSERT of the knight with his finger
enigmatically raised to his lips.

13 INT. TELFER HOUSE - SITTING ROOM, LIBRARY - DAY

13

CORSO, canvas bag on shoulder, is standing in the middle of a
luxuriously furnished sitting room. The decor, which includes
a smiling portrait of Andrew Telfer, is extremely opulent.

CORSO is looking up at the portrait when the door opens. He
turns to see LIANA TELFER on the threshold with a business
card in her hand. His appreciation of her looks is evident.
LIANA (whose photo-portrait we saw in Scene 1) is a very
sexy, thirty-ish blonde with milky skin and a figure whose
generous curves are far from concealed by her ultra chic
black costume. She gives CORSO the once-over, then enters,
closing the door behind her.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO

Mrs. Telfer?

(gestures at the business
card)

Dean Corso. Sorry to trouble you at
a time like this.

LIANA comes over and sits down on a sofa, simultaneously
motioning CORSO into the armchair that faces it over a coffee
table. She puts his card down, crosses her lovely legs, and
waits. CORSO sits down with his leg between his feet. Opening
it, he produces 'The Nine Gates'. LIANA involuntarily
stiffens at sight of it.

CORSO (CONT'D)

It would be very helpful, ma'am, if
you could tell me what you know
about this book.

He holds it out. After a momentary pause, LIANA slowly
reaches for the book, opens it at random, turns a page or
two. She speaks with a slight French accent.

LIANA

(casually)

Isn't this one of my husband's
books?

CORSO

Right. It was in his collection
until very recently. He sold it to
a client of mine. I'm trying to
authenticate it.

LIANA

He sold it, you say? How strange.
It was one of his most treasured
possessions.

CORSO

He never mentioned the sale?

LIANA is fractionally late in answering. CORSO spots her
hesitation.

LIANA

No. It's news to me. Who bought it?

CORSO

A private collector.

LIANA

May I know his name?

CORSO

I'm afraid that's confidential.

(CONTINUED)

LIANA

I suppose he has a bill of sale?

CORSO

No problem there.

LIANA

Is this your job, authenticating rare books?

CORSO

And tracking them down.

LIANA

(smiles)

You're a book detective.

CORSO

(smiles back)

Kind of.

(pause)

Do you recall when and where your husband acquired this book?

LIANA

In Spain. We were vacationing at Toledo. Andrew got very excited -- paid a great deal of money for it. He was a fanatical collector.

CORSO

So I gather.

LIANA deposits 'The Nine Gates' on the coffee table and rises.

LIANA

I'll show you.

CORSO rises likewise. Then a thought strikes him: swiftly retrieving 'The Nine Gates' and his bag, he stows one in the other as he follows her undulating hips to a door at the far end of the room, which she opens.

LIANA (CONT'D)

Look.

She walks on ahead into the library in which Andrew Telfer hanged himself. CORSO is still eyeing her delectable rear view.

CORSO

Magnificent...

Reluctantly, he drags his eyes away from LIANA and surveys the crowded shelves.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO (CONT'D)
Really magnificent...

He goes over to inspect the bookshelves. In passing he glances up at the chandelier, which is still hanging slightly askew.

LIANA
Andrew used to spend many hours in here. Too many.

CORSO
Did he ever try it out?

He asks the question with an air of spurious innocence, looking around the room as he does so. LIANA frowns.

LIANA
I don't understand.

CORSO
The book -- did he ever use it to perform some kind of ritual intended to... well. Produce a supernatural effect?

LIANA
Are you serious?

CORSO
Absolutely.

LIANA
A Black Mass, you mean?

CORSO
More or less. An attempt to conjure up the Devil.

LIANA
Andrew was a trifle eccentric, Mr. Corso, but he wasn't insane.

She gives a mournful shrug, every inch the recent widow.

LIANA (CONT'D)
It's true he'd been acting strangely those last few days. He shut himself up in here -- seldom emerged except for meals.

She draws a deep breath, glances at the chandelier.

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED: (4)

LIANA (CONT'D)

That morning I was woken by the screams of the maid: he'd hanged himself.

(pauses, looks at CORSO.)

Whatever he was up to, I certainly can't see him chanting mumbo-jumbo or trying to raise the dead.

The flippant tone of the last few words sounds rather forced. CORSO smiles at her faintly over his glasses, pats his shoulder bag.

CORSO

The Devil, Mrs. Telfer. This book is designed to raise the Devil.

14 EXT. TELFER HOUSE - DAY

14

CORSO crosses the forecourt to the street. A man with a MUSTACHE and a scarred face is leaning against a limo parked outside the house, smoking a small cigar. They eye each other briefly. CORSO reaches the sidewalk just as a cab sails past. He raises his hand too late to flag it down, looks around for another.

The MUSTACHE's cellphone beeps. He reaches into the limo and picks up the receiver.

15 INT. REFERENCE LIBRARY - DAY

15

The big reference library is divided up by freestanding bookshelves and has a gallery running around it at second-floor level. NUMEROUS READERS are occupying the rows of tables in the central area. CORSO is seated at one of the tables with the 'Nine Gates' in front of him. Beside it reposes a large catalog and his notebook. The 'Nine Gates' is open at the frontispiece, which displays the title - 'De Umbrarum Regni Novem Portis' - and the words 'Sic Luceat Lux' separated by an emblem consisting of A TREE ENCIRCLED BY A SNAKE DEVOURING ITS OWN TAIL. As we MOVE IN ON THE COILED SNAKE, we hear CORSO translating to himself in a low voice:

CORSO (O.S.)

Sic Luceat Lux ... Thus ... let the light ... shine...

16 INT. REFERENCE LIBRARY - DUSK

16

Many of the tables are now deserted, and the shaded reading lights have been switched on. CORSO shuts a catalog and gets up to replace it in the wall of books behind his chair, runs his finger along a shelf till he comes to another fat tome and removes it. He's startled to see, framed in the resulting gap, the face of THE GIRL at Balkan's lecture: short hair, green, feline eyes. The face recedes and disappears.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO quickly rounds the end of the bookshelf: no sign of her. He looks both ways, but the aisles are deserted. Puzzled, he resumes his seat and opens the second catalog. Then, sensing that he's being watched, he swings around. Nothing outwardly suspicious, just two BESPECTACLED STUDENTS comparing notes in sibilant whispers. He looks right: a scattering of READERS. He scans the reading-room at large: still nothing untoward.

He turns some pages in 'The Nine Gates', comes to AN ENGRAVING OF A NAKED WOMAN RIDING A SEVEN-HEADED DRAGON WITH A CASTLE ABLAZE IN THE BACKGROUND. He consults the second catalog, which displays a small reproduction of the same scene with text wrapped around it, and jots something down in his notebook. Wearily, he straightens and stretches, removes his glasses, pinches the bridge of his nose.

As he idly scans the reading room, his astigmatic vision gives him an unfocused glimpse of THE GIRL looking down at him from the gallery overhead. By the time he replaces his glasses, she's gone.

EXT. CORSO'S APARTMENT HOUSE - NIGHT

It's raining hard. CORSO trudges up the steps of his brownstone with the canvas bag on his shoulder and a bag of groceries in his arms.

INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT

CORSO rides the elevator up.

INT. CORSO'S APARTMENT HOUSE - PASSAGE, APARTMENT - NIGHT 19

CORSO emerges from the elevator and walks down the passage to his door. He inserts his key in the mortice lock and tries to turn it. Nothing doing: It's unlocked already. Next, he inserts his key in the second lock and turns it. Not being double-locked, the door opens at once. It takes him a moment to digest the significance of this fact. Just then he hears a muffled crash from inside the apartment: a window has been flung open in a hurry. He bursts into the living room. No one there, but the light is on.

Dropping his shoulder bag and groceries, he dashes into the bedroom. The window is open and the curtains are billowing out into the room. CORSO darts to the window, flings one leg over the sill and climbs out on the fire escape.

EXT. FIRE ESCAPE - SIDE STREET - NIGHT

Feet can be heard clattering down the fire escape. CORSO peers over the rail just in time to see a DARK FIGURE emerge into the side street beneath him and sprint off through the rain.

20 CONTINUED:

CORSO
(yells halfheartedly)
Hey, you!

He gives up and climbs back inside.

21 INT. CORSO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 21

CORSO scans the living room. The only immediate sign of the intruder's presence is that the chair has been pulled away from the desk and one of the drawers is open. CORSO pushes the chair back into place and shuts the drawer.

22 INT. BERNIE'S BOOKSTORE - DAY 22

ON 'The Nine Gates' lying open on BERNIE's desk. He's reverently turning the pages with CORSO at his elbow.

BERNIE
Son of a bitch... Where did you get this?

CORSO
Balkan. He wants me to research it.

BERNIE
Balkan owns a 'Nine Gates'?

CORSO
Recently acquired from the late lamented Andrew Telfer.

BERNIE
Trust Balkan. What does he need you for? I don't suppose he plans to sell it.

CORSO
He wants me to compare it with the other two surviving copies in Portugal and France. I'm off to Europe.

BERNIE
Compare it?

CORSO
Yeah. Only one of the three is authentic, he says.

BERNIE
Well, this one looks genuine enough. Must be worth a million. Jesus! Take good care of it.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO

That's why I'm here. I need you to
stash it for me. I'm starting to
see things.

BERNIE stares at him.

BERNIE

Like what?

CORSO

Uninvited visitors, unfamiliar
faces. I don't trust anyone, not
even Balkan.

(reflects for a moment)

Come to think of it, I don't even
trust you.

BERNIE registers a mixture of affection and cynicism.

BERNIE

That's mean, buddy. You know I'd
never screw you without a damn good
reason: money, women, business.
Anything else, you can relax.

CORSO taps the book with his forefinger.

CORSO

You'll answer for this with your
balls, Bernie.

BERNIE

(still engrossed)

Sure, man, sure. You can castrate
me personally.

CORSO

I'll pick it up on my way to the
airport.

BERNIE

No problem.

He continues to pore over the book, turns another page, reads
aloud:

BERNIE (CONT'D)

'Virtue lies vanquished', huh?
These engravings are terrific.

CORSO

(leans over his shoulder)

Or horrific, whichever.

(CONTINUED)

BERNIE nods absently. He smiles to himself with an air of enchantment.

BERNIE

Beautiful, just beautiful...

Visible through the bookstore's semi-basement windows, the legs of PASSERSBY accelerate as they scurry past: it has started to rain. A pair of MAN'S LEGS in dark slacks come to a halt. The butt of a small cigar falls to the sidewalk, the LEGS walk on. Two WHITE SNEAKERS come into view. They step on the butt and extinguish it.

CORSO is in the bedroom, packing some articles of clothing and toiletries in a small Samsonite suitcase lying open on the bed. The doorbell rings. Fractionally startled, CORSO straightens up, dumps a handful of socks on the bed and goes out into the lobby. He peers through the spy-hole: LIANA TELFER is standing outside. CORSO pauses for a moment, thinking hard, then opens the door.

LIANA

May I come in?

CORSO, rather bemused, steps aside and ushers her in.

CORSO

This way.

He shows her into the living room. LIANA starts to unbutton her coat.

CORSO (CONT'D)

Allow me.

He helps her off with her coat and drapes it neatly over a chair. She's dressed to kill in a black, low-cut cocktail gown.

LIANA

Thank you.

CORSO

Sit down, won't you?

LIANA sinks gracefully onto the sofa, taking in the decor of his bachelor apartment as she does so.

LIANA

I've come to talk business.

CORSO

Great. Everyone's talking business to me lately.

LIANA takes a slim gold cigarette case from her purse, extracts a black Russian, and lights it with a gold Dupont. Meantime:

LIANA

Yesterday, when you came to see me about that book, I was too surprised to react as I should have done. I mean, it really was one of Andrew's favorites.

CORSO

So you said.

LIANA

I'd like to get it back.

CORSO

That could be a problem.

LIANA

Not necessarily. It all depends.

CORSO

On what?

LIANA

On you.

CORSO stares at her, absorbing the lines of her figure, the slim legs sheathed in sheer, black silk stockings.

CORSO

I don't understand, Mrs. Telfer.
The book isn't mine to dispose of.

She sits back, showing off her superb legs to even better advantage.

LIANA

You work for money, I take it?

CORSO

What else?

LIANA

I have a great deal of money.

CORSO

I'm happy for you.

(CONTINUED)

LIANA

You could stage a theft. I'm sure
your client is well insured.

CORSO

I'm a professional, ma'am.

LIANA

You're a professional mercenary.
Mercenaries work for the highest
bidder.

CORSO

I make a living.

LIANA

(huskily)

I could throw in a bonus.

CORSO

This has happened before someplace.

LIANA

I know. In the movies.

CORSO

And she had an automatic in her
stocking top.

CORSO watches, mesmerized, as she slowly, very slowly, slides
her skirt up her thighs to reveal the creamy flesh between
her stocking tops and black lace garter belt.

LIANA

No automatic.

Just as slowly, she smooths her skirt down over her thighs.
CORSO swallows hard. He rises and goes to his drinks corner,
a shelf with an array of bottles and glasses on it. Over his
shoulder:

CORSO

Want one?

LIANA

Why not?

(CONTINUED)

CORSO splashes some Scotch into two tumblers and carries them over to her. LIANA sits motionless for an instant, looking up at him. Then, very slowly, she stubs out her cigarette, extends the same hand, and fondles his crotch.

CORSO, with the tumblers encumbering both his hands, can only stand there like a bird hypnotized by a snake. His Adam's apple bobs some more.

Holding his gaze, LIANA withdraws her hand and rises. They're only inches apart now. She takes one of the tumblers and clinks it against CORSO'S, then drains it. CORSO, in a kind of trance, does likewise.

Very deliberately, LIANA relieves him of his glass and puts it down on the table with hers. Then, cupping his face between her hands, she proceeds to eat him alive. CORSO responds. He pulls up her skirt, she reaches for his zipper and yanks at it. He bears her backward and downward onto the sofa. Their bodies coalesce into a heaving mass. The gown slips down over LIANA's left shoulder, revealing a small tattoo in the shape of a snake devouring its own tail.

ON LIANA's hand reaching across the floor for Corso's canvas bag. It gropes in the bag, then inverts it, spilling the contents: a couple of packs of Luckies, a notebook, an envelope full of bills, a Swiss Army knife, an expert's magnifying glass, some pencils, etc. We discover CORSO and LIANA on the floor, their clothing dishevelled. CORSO is lying back, still panting and sweating from his exertions, LIANA is sitting up.

LIANA

Well, where is it?

CORSO

Where's what?

LIANA

Don't fuck with me, Corso.

CORSO

I thought that's what we were doing.

LIANA's eyes narrow. Then, with an animal cry, she goes for his face with her nails and teeth. CORSO turns his head away just in time and scrambles to his feet, pulling up his trousers. LIANA, beside herself with fury, flies at him with both hands extended like claws. He manages to grab her wrists and immobilize them, so she sinks her teeth in his chest.

With an agonized yell, CORSO releases her wrists, clasps his chest and staggers back - hardly a dignified proceeding, because he's hobbled by the trousers that have slumped around his ankles. LIANA looks around wildly for a weapon of some kind, catches sight of the Scotch bottle and seizes it by the neck. CORSO, one hand holding his trousers at half mast, the other raised in supplication, comes shuffling toward her.

CORSO (CONT'D)

Hey, look, be reasonable...

Unmoved, LIANA raises the bottle and smashes it over his head.

CORSO recovers consciousness, gingerly feels his aching head. Some blood has trickled down his face. He surveys the room, which is in chaos and has obviously been ransacked. He goes into the bathroom and inspects himself in the mirror, takes a hand towel and gingerly dabs his scalp. Holding the towel to his head, he returns to the living room, where he picks up the phone and punches out a number. We hear a recorded announcement:

BERNIE (V.O.)

Hi, this is Bernie's Rare Books.
I'm not available right now. If you
want to leave a message, please
speak after the beep...

CORSO

(into phone)

Bernie, you there? Bernie? Pick up!

No response. He replaces the receiver.

CORSO, bag on shoulder, is lurking in a doorway across the street from the bookstore. The place looks silent and deserted, but a dim glow indicates that a light must be on somewhere inside. CORSO quits the doorway and hurries across the street. He walks down the steps to the door and tries the handle. The door opens.

Only Bernie's desk light is on. No sign of Bernie himself. CORSO listens intently, looks up at the top of the spiral staircase, which is in shadow, calls in a low voice:

CORSO

Bernie?

No response. He listens some more: nothing but the sound of a passing car.

(CONTINUED)

He makes his way cautiously along the bookcases and rounds a corner, then stops short with a look of horror on his face. BERNIE has been lashed upside down to the handrail of the spiral staircase. His mouth and eyes are open, and his battered face is streaked with blood.

CORSO (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ!

He puts out a hand toward BERNIE, but the man is so obviously dead that he withdraws it. He looks around in an involuntary, apprehensive way. Then, satisfied that he's alone, he starts to climb the staircase. Once past BERNIE's corpse, which he studiously avoids touching, he climbs faster. The staircase creaks and sways. Reaching the third tier of bookshelves, he presses a hidden button. With a faint click, a panel springs open to disclose a recess filled with books. CORSO expels a deep breath. There it is, safe and sound: 'The Nine Gates'. He looks down at BERNIE.

CORSO (CONT'D)

Thanks, man... I'm sorry...

CORSO, ensconced in a window seat, is moodily gazing out at some passing cloud-castles. The sun is setting.

The brightly illuminated arrivals hall is thronged with PASSENGERS in transit. CORSO, wearing his overcoat and carrying his suitcase, threads his way through them with the canvas bag on his shoulder. Weary and unshaven, he stares straight ahead with an abstracted expression, adjusts his glasses.

CORSO's footsteps echo as he walks, bag on shoulder, along one of Toledo's narrow medieval streets. Very few people to be seen. The sun is shining brightly, but there's a strong wind blowing. Rounding a corner, CORSO heads down an alleyway flanked by scaffolding swathed in protective netting and blue tarpaulins. It's completely deserted. No sound but that of canvas billowing in the wind like a ship's sails. He consults a street sign, turns another corner. He reaches a doorway leading to an inner courtyard, bumps into a BOY who comes running out. We hear the strident cries of a woman.

BOY

Si!, si, mama!!!

A flight of steps in one corner of the courtyard leads down to the basement. CORSO descends them and stops outside a door. A grimy window beside it serves to display some old books and religious prints. The sign on the door reads

(CONTINUED)

HERMANOS CENIZA RESTAURACION DE LIBROS. Below it:

On parle Francais' and 'English spoken'.

CORSO opens the door, which creaks.

CORSO enters. A gaunt, bent-backed old man (PEDRO CENIZA) with a pair of glasses perched on the end of his big nose looks up from an old hand press. Everything about him is as gray as the cigarette ash that rains down on his clothes and the books he's working on. He's a chain-smoker.

PEDRO

Senor.

CORSO

Buenas tardes.

PEDRO

Buenes tardes.

PABLO (O.S.)

Buenas tardes.

CORSO turns to see another old man (PABLO CENIZA) surface from behind some stacks of paper. His resemblance to PEDRO - bent back, big nose, spectacles - is such that they can only be twins. PABLO wipes his inky hand on a rag before shaking CORSO'S. PEDRO follows suit. CORSO hesitates briefly, taken aback by this dual apparition.

PEDRO and PABLO look him up and down with their keen, twinkling little eyes. Their movements are slow and serene, their expression carries a hint of mockery, and they often exchange knowing smiles. They're so in sync that they communicate by means of glances and finish off each other's sentences.

CORSO

You speak English?

They nod simultaneously. He produces 'The Nine Gates' from his shoulder bag.

CORSO (CONT'D)

I'd appreciate your opinion on this.

PEDRO takes the book with tremulous hands. PABLO quickly clears away some parchments on the workbench to make room for it. Some ash from PEDRO's cigarette falls on the cover. PABLO clicks his tongue and blows it off.

(CONTINUED)

PABLO
(reprovingly)
What a habit for a bookbinder!
(smiles at CORSO)
'The Nine Gates...' A superb
edition. Very rare.

PEDRO
(opens it)
The Telfer copy.

CORSO
You used to own it, right?

PEDRO
We used to, yes.

PABLO
We sold it.

PEDRO
We sold it when the opportunity
presented itself. It was too...

PABLO
... too good to miss. An excellent
sale.

PEDRO
An excellent buy - impeccable
condition.

PABLO
Impeccable. You are the present
owner?

CORSO
A client of mine.

PABLO
(over his glasses)

I would never have believed she
would part with it.

CORSO
She?

(PABLO)
(without looking up)
Senora Telfer.

CORSO reaches into his overcoat pocket and extracts a
crumpled cigarette. He's raising it to his lips when he stops
short, produces the equally crumpled pack and offers it to

31 CONTINUED: (2)

PEDRO, who has just discarded his butt. PEDRO helps himself to a Lucky, breaks off the filter and jams it in his mouth. CORSO lights both of them.

CORSO (CONT'D)

I understood it was Mr. Telfer that bought it.

PABLO

He paid for it.

PEDRO

It was the senora who made him buy it. He did not seem particularly...
(glances at PABLO)

PABLO

..interested.

PEDRO has finished examining the text. He looks at the spine.

PEDRO

A superb specimen.

CORSO

(hesitates briefly)
Could it be a forgery?

PEDRO

(suspiciously, almost
indignantly)
A forgery?
(turns to PABLO)
You heard that, Pablo?

PABLO wags his finger reprovingly in CORSO's face.

PABLO

I took you for a professional, senor. You speak too lightly of forgeries.

PEDRO

Far too lightly.

PABLO

Forging a book is expensive. Paper of the period, the right inks....
(makes a dismissive
gesture)
Too expensive to be profitable.

PEDRO and PABLO assess the effect of their words on CORSO, who digests them.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO

I'm aware of all that, but could some part of it be forged? Restorers have been known to replace missing pages with pages taken from another copy of the same edition. Have you never done that yourselves?

The old men look at each other, then turn to CORSO simultaneously. PEDRO, looking flattered, nods.

PEDRO

Of course it can be done.

PABLO

It requires great skill, naturally, but yes, it can be done.

CORSO

Couldn't that be the case here?

PABLO

What makes you ask?

CORSO

My client wishes to satisfy himself of the book's authenticity.

The brothers eye each other over their glasses. CORSO adjusts his own.

CORSO (CONT'D)

His name is Balkan. Boris Balkan of New York.

PABLO and PEDRO exchange another glance. CORSO detects the hint of a smile that passes between them.

PEDRO

All books have a destiny of their own.

PABLO

Even a life of their own. Senor Balkan is a noted bibliophile. He's no fool. He must know this book is authentic.

PEDRO

We know it.

PABLO

So must he.

(CONTINUED)

PEDRO

This book was with us for years.

PABLO

Many years.

PEDRO

We had ample opportunity to examine it thoroughly. The printing and binding are superb examples of 17th century Venetian craftsmanship.

He picks up the book and riffles the pages under CORSO's nose.

PEDRO (CONT'D)

Finest rag paper, resistant to the passage of time! None of your modern wood pulp!

PABLO

Watermarks, identical shades, ink, type faces... If this is a forgery, or a copy with pages restored, it's the work of a master.

PEDRO

A master.

CORSO contemplates the brothers with a smile.

CORSO

Did you study the engravings? They seem to form a kind of riddle.

PEDRO and PABLO reopen the book and look at the engravings.

PABLO

Well, yes...

(another glance at PEDRO)

Books of this type often contain little puzzles.

PEDRO

Especially in the case of such an illustrious collaborator.

CORSO looks at PEDRO with sudden interest, then at the book, then back at PEDRO.

CORSO

Collaborator?

PEDRO shrugs, PABLO refocuses on CORSO.

(CONTINUED)

PEDRO

You cannot have proceeded very far
with your research. Come, look
closely.

He takes a magnifying glass and holds it over one of the
engravings, which shows A HERMIT WITH TWO KEYS IN HIS HAND
AND A DOG AND A LANTERN BESIDE HIM. A microscopic inscription
can be detected in the bottom right corner. CORSO bends over
it, looking mystified. PEDRO grows impatient.

PEDRO (CONT'D)

Don't you see? Only seven of the
engravings were signed by Aristide
Torchia.

CORSO

And the other two?

PEDRO

This is one of them. Look.

CORSO peers through the magnifying glass once more.

We see the INSERT 'Invenit L.F.'

CORSO

'L.F.'? Who's that?

PEDRO

Think.

CORSO

Lucifer?

PEDRO and PABLO chuckle heartily.

PEDRO

You're a clever man, senior. Torchia
was not alone when they burned him
alive.

CORSO

But that's absurd! You don't
honestly believe...

PEDRO

The man who wrote this did so in
alliance with the Devil and went to
the stake for it. Even Hell has its
heroes, senior.

CORSO looks from one to the other, trying to figure this out.

32 EXT. TOLEDO - ALLEYWAY - DAY

32

CORSO walks back along the narrow alleyway with the canvas-covered scaffolding. He glances over his shoulder. Not a soul in sight. The blue canvas flaps in the wind, the scaffolding creaks and groans. He walks on. He hears a sudden rending sound, looks back and up. There's little time to react: the scaffolding has come away from its mountings. It's starting to buckle and fall out into the street. Desperately, he breaks into a run. Behind him, collapsing like a house of cards, the mass of canvas and metal gains on him as he sprints for the end of the alley, summoning up all his energy for a final burst. The last of the scaffolding hits the ground only inches behind him. He looks back at the tangled mass that has only just failed to engulf him.

33 EXT. TRAIN - NIGHT

33

A train speeds through the darkness.

34 INT. TRAIN - DINING CAR - NIGHT

34

The dining car is deserted save for CORSO and a STEWARD, who is lolling against the kitchen bulkhead at the far end.

CORSO, with a coffee cup and a brandy glass at his elbow, has 'The Nine Gates' lying open in front of him at THE ENGRAVING OF THE HERMIT WITH THE KEYS, DOG, AND LANTERN. There's some cigarette ash trapped between the pages.

Smiling faintly, he blows it away. Then he reaches into his bag for his magnifying glass, pushes up his steel-rimmed specs, and screws the glass into his eye. He examines the engraving at close range.

We see again the INSERT of the inscription 'Invenit L.F.'

CORSO straightens up and removes the glass from his eye. He finishes his brandy and beckons the STEWARD.

35 INT. TRAIN - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

35

The clickety-clack of wheels on tracks swells in volume as CORSO, bag on shoulder, crosses the sliding floor-plates that connect one car to another. He enters the next corridor and stops short: there's a lone figure leaning against a window, looking out: it's THE GIRL we saw at Balkan's lecture: short dark hair, catlike green eyes, slim, athletic figure, jeans and white sneakers. CORSO sets off along the corridor. When he reaches her, they eye each other's reflections in the windowpane.

THE GIRL
(softly)

Hi.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO pauses to look at her, unable to make up his mind.

CORSO
I've seen you before, haven't I?

THE GIRL
Have you?

CORSO
Yes, somewhere.

A brief silence.

THE GIRL
Are you traveling in this car?

CORSO
The next one.

THE GIRL
The sleeper.
(smiles)
I travel on the cheap.

CORSO
Are you a student?

THE GIRL
Something like that.
(looks out the window
again)
I like trains.

CORSO
Me too. What's your name?

THE GIRL
Guess.

CORSO
(shrugs, smiles)
Greeneyes.

THE GIRL
That'll do. What's yours?

CORSO
Corso.

THE GIRL
Strange name.

CORSO
Italian. it means 'I run'.

(CONTINUED)

THE GIRL

You don't look like a runner to me -
more the quiet type.

They look at each other's reflections once more. THE GIRL's gaze is direct and unwavering. CORSO terminates their encounter with a diffident little nod.

CORSO

Well, have a good trip.

THE GIRL

And you.

CORSO walks on down the corridor. There's something weird about this chance encounter, but he can't figure out what.

THE GIRL (CONT'D)

See you around, maybe.

CORSO pauses and looks back. She's still leaning against the window, staring out. He nods.

CORSO

Maybe.

It's a damp, gray morning. A sign reads: 'SINTRA'. CORSO, bag on shoulder and Samsonite suitcase in hand, gets off the train.

One of Sintra's traditional horse-drawn carriages drops CORSO in front of a massive gateway flanked by stone walls thick with ivy. Some birds peer down at him from a branch. The gateposts are surmounted by two mildew-covered female busts in gray stone, one of them with its face obscured by ivy. CORSO contemplates them for a moment, then pushes open the gate, which squeaks protestingly. Beyond it, a neglected drive.

A gray, desolate, infinitely melancholy scene. Dead leaves litter a gravel driveway flanked by crumbling statues, some of which have toppled over onto the long-neglected, weed-infested lawn. CORSO's muffled footsteps are the only sound. Near the house is a dried-up, dilapidated fountain faced with tiles and topped by a mouldering cherub. The waters of the ornamental pond beside it are dark as molasses and coated with dead leaves and water lilies. The Quinta Fargas is a gloomy, four-square, 18th century mansion. CORSO walks up the steps and tugs the old-fashioned bellpull. A mournful jangling sound issues from the recesses of the house.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO waits, glances at his watch. Echoing footsteps approach. A sound of bolts being withdrawn, and the door opens to reveal VICTOR FARGAS. Tall and emaciated as an El Greco saint, he has a drooping white mustache. His baggy trousers and oversized woollen sweater contrast with a pair of old but immaculately polished shoes. His appearance perfectly matches his melancholy surroundings.

FARGAS

Yes?

CORSO

Dean Corso, Mr. Fargas.

(Puts out his hand)

How do you do.

FARGAS hesitates before shaking hands. Then his face clears.

FARGAS

Corso, ah yes. Please come in.

FARGAS, who has a slight limp, leads the way through two reception rooms, once imposing but now entirely bare and empty. By the dim light that filters through their dusty windows, CORSO observes the patches on the walls that indicate the former location of paintings, curtains, pieces of furniture, etc.

FARGAS

Home, sweet home!

He ushers CORSO into a large but sparsely furnished drawing room.

FARGAS (CONT'D)

You won't say no to a brandy, I take it?

He goes over to a side table and pours some cognac into two fine crystal glasses. CORSO, meantime, is surveying the room. At the far end, a huge open fireplace. Two ill-assorted armchairs, a table, a sideboard, some candlesticks, a violin case - and books. They're neatly stacked on the floor and the few pieces of furniture. CORSO has just discovered them when FARGAS comes over with the glasses. He puts his bag down and takes one.

CORSO

Thanks.

(admiringly)

Handsome glasses.

FARGAS

These are the only ones I have left. CORSO looks around the room.

CORSO

Must have been a beautiful place.

FARGAS

It was, but old families are like ancient civilizations: they wither and die.

He raises his glass in a silent toast. CORSO reciprocates. FARGAS gestures at the books.

FARGAS (CONT'D)

There they are, eight hundred and thirty-four of them. A pity you didn't see them in better times, in their bookcases. I used to have five thousand. These are the survivors.

CORSO, runs his fingers caressingly over a book.

CORSO

So this is the Fargas collection. Not quite as I imagined it.

FARGAS

C'est la vie, my friend. But I keep them in perfect condition, safe from damp, light, heat and rats. I dust and air them every day. It's all I do do, in fact.

CORSO

What happened to the rest?

FARGAS

Sacrificed in a good cause. I had to sell them to preserve the others. Five or six books a year. Almost all the proceeds go to the state in taxes.

CORSO

Why don't you sell up?

FARGAS

Sell the Fargas family estate? It's obvious you're an American, my friend. There are things you can't be expected to understand.

CORSO continues to survey the books, fascinated.

CORSO

If you sold all these your financial problems would be over...
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORSO (CONT'D)
(picks up a book and
examines it)
Look at this, Poliphilo, for
example: a real gem!

He replaces it. FARGAS leans over and carefully adjusts the book until it's precisely in its original position.

FARGAS
I know, but if I sold them all I'd
have no reason to go on living.
More brandy?

He heads for the bottle on the side table without waiting for a reply.

CORSO
What about 'The Nine Gates'?

FARGAS
(puzzled)
What about it?

CORSO
That's why I'm here.. I told you on
the phone.

FARGAS
The phone?
(pause)
Yes, of course, I remember now.
Forgive me. Of course, 'The Nine
Gates'.

He looks around several times as if trying to collect his thoughts, drains his cognac, and limps over to some books on a rug near the fireplace. FARGAS and CORSO kneel on the rug side by side. CORSO examines the books, which all deal with magic, alchemy and demonology.

FARGAS (CONT'D)
Well, what do you think?

CORSO
Not bad.

FARGAS
Not bad indeed. These I will never
sell. At least tan of them are
exceedingly rare. Look, Plancy's
'Dictionary of Hell', first
edition, 1842, Leonardo
Fioravanti's 'Compendi di Secreti'
of 1571... But this is what
interests you, no?

He picks up a black book with a gold pentacle on the cover -

(CONTINUED)

the second copy of 'The Nine Gates' - and holds it out. CORSO takes it carefully and gets to his feet. FARGAS rises too.

FARGAS (CONT'D)

There it is, in perfect condition.
It has travelled the world for
three-and-a-half centuries, yet it
might have been printed yesterday.

CORSO takes the book over to a window. FARGAS follows.

CORSO

Is it in order? You haven't
detected anything unusual?

FARGAS

Unusual? No. The text is complete,
the engravings too. Nine plus the
title page, just as the catalogs
state - just like the Kessler in
Paris and the Telfer in New York.

CORSO

It Isn't the Telfer anymore. Telfer
killed himself, but he sold his
copy to Balkan first.

FARGAS

Balkan... If he sets his heart on a
book, no price is too high...

He reflects for a moment, shaking his head and staring at the floor.

FARGAS (CONT'D)

It's strange he should have sent
you here, if he already...

He breaks off as If something has just occurred to him. He points to CORSO's bag.

FARGAS (CONT'D)

You have it with you? May I see it?

CORSO fetches the book, and they go over to a table. FARGAS places the two copies side by side, bends over them.

FARGAS (CONT'D)

Superb, beautiful, identical. Two
of the only three that escaped the
flames, reunited for the first time
in over three centuries.

The shadows are lengthening. FARGAS reverently turns the pages of each book In turn, caresses the yellowing paper with his fingertips.

(CONTINUED)

FARGAS (CONT'D)

Look at this imperfection In the
fourth line here - the damaged S.
The same type, the same impression.

He turns both copies of 'The Nine Gates' over to reveal their
backboards.

FARGAS (CONT'D)

You see? If it weren't for this
slight discoloration on the back of
my copy, one couldn't tell them
apart.

CORSO

If it's all right with you, I'd
like to stay awhile and study them
in detail.

FARGAS

(eyes him keenly)

What are you looking for, Mr.
Corso?

CORSO

I wish I knew.

FARGAS looks suddenly grave.

FARGAS

Some books are dangerous. Not to be
opened with impunity.

CORSO

(with equal gravity)

Very true.

A fire is burning on the hearth. FARGAS, seated at a window,
is practicing the violin. He repeats the same short piece
over and over again, occasionally pausing to take a sip of
brandy. CORSO is sitting at a table with both copies of 'The
Nine Gates' open in front of him at the engraving of THE
KNIGHT WITH A FINGER TO HIS LIPS. CORSO compares the two
copies with the aid of his magnifying glass. They look
identical. CORSO turns over several pages in each book until
he comes to THE HERMIT WITH THE KEYS, DOG, AND LANTERN. He
compares the two copies. Again, no apparent difference. He
proceeds to a third engraving: A WAYFARER APPROACHING A
BRIDGE WITH TWO GATE TOWERS AND AN ANGELIC ARCHER IN THE
CLOUDS OVERHEAD. Another seemingly identical pair. Then he
stops short and returns to the second engraving. It looks the
same, but... Then he spots it: in Balkan's copy the keys are
in the Hermit's right hand, in Fargas's copy in his left!

(CONTINUED)

Fascinated by this discovery, CORSO peers closely at each signature in turn. Balkan's reads 'A.T.', Fargas's... 'L.F.' CORSO turns to an engraving of A JESTER OUTSIDE A MAZE WITH TWO ENTRANCES. Comparison of the two copies reveals that in Fargas's copy one of the doorways is open; in Balkan's it's bricked up. The signatures, too, vary: 'A.T.' in one, 'L.F.' in the other.

CORSO
(excitedly, under his
breath)
Now we're getting somewhere...

An old-fashioned telephone bell starts ringing in the bowels of the house. CORSO looks up. FARGAS doesn't hear the bell immediately. He plays on for a bar or two, then pauses and listens with his head cocked. The telephone continues to ring. His chair scrapes the floorboards as he gets to his feet. He puts the violin down and limps out.

INT. QUINTA FARGAS - DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT

CORSO's open notebook now displays a chart consisting of two horizontal rows of nine boxes. One row is marked 'BALKAN', the other 'FARGAS'. CORSO is busy filling in the boxes with either 'A.T.' or 'L.F.' FARGAS reappears. He gives CORSO a friendly nod, returns to the window and launches into the same old piece on his violin. CORSO has now filled in all the boxes. He studies them for a moment, then rings all the 'L.F.'s in red.

EXT. QUINTA FARGAS - GATEWAY, ROAD - NIGHT

Under an owl's vigilant gaze, CORSO shuts the gate. His breath is visible as steam in the chilly night air. After a last backward look at the statue-bordered driveway and the neglected garden, he turns up his overcoat collar, settles his bag on his shoulder, and sets off down the road toward the lights of Sintra, which are visible in the distance. His footsteps re-echo from the wall that bounds the Fargas property.

Then it happens: he hasn't gone far when two headlights snap on behind him. Simultaneously, the car starts up and takes off with a squeal of tires. CORSO spins around. He stands there transfixed for a moment, then dodges behind a projecting buttress as the car hurtles past, missing him by a whisker. The car, a big dark sedan, skids to a halt some twenty yards away. The driver's door opens and A TALL MAN gets out. He momentarily hesitates when he sees CORSO still on his feet. Just then we hear a motor vehicle - a noisy one - rounding the next bend. The TALL MAN is captured by a beam of light. CORSO has seen him before: it's the MUSTACHE. The MUSTACHE decides to beat it. He dives back into the car and takes off fast. CORSO, trembling with shock, watches the tail lights recede and disappear. The sound of the approaching vehicle increases in volume. CORSO turns to stare at it.

42 CONTINUED:

Wobbling unsteadily along the road comes a lone PEASANT astride a ramshackle motorbike with a blown exhaust. The PEASANT honks as he goes by. CORSO retrieves his bag from the roadside.

43 EXT. SINTRA HOTEL - NIGHT

43

CORSO enters a small hotel.

44 INT. SINTRA HOTEL - RECEPTION, LOUNGE - NIGHT

44

CORSO, still looking pretty rocky, collects his key from the reception desk and sets off in the direction of the elevator. Visible in the background is the hotel lounge. TWO ELDERLY FEMALE TOURISTS, possibly retired English schoolmarmes, are quietly conversing at one table while AN OVERWEIGHT GERMAN COUPLE sip cocktails at another.

CORSO, idly scanning the lounge as he makes for the elevator, stops short: a pair of legs in jeans and white sneakers are jutting from an inglenook fireplace in the far corner. He goes over to investigate. THE GIRL is snuggled up in an armchair with a book on her lap. He hesitates for a moment. She looks up.

CORSO

Hi. You didn't say you were bound for Sintra.

THE GIRL

Neither did you.

CORSO

What are you doing here?

THE GIRL

Reading.

CORSO

I can see that.

THE GIRL

And bumping into people unexpectedly.

CORSO

Unexpectedly is right.

THE GIRL

Are you on a business trip?
(indicates his shoulder bag)

Is that why you always carry that thing around?

CORSO doesn't answer, adjusts his glasses. Inquiringly at her book. THE GIRL hands it to him. We see the title:

(CONTINUED)

The Devil in Love' by Jacques Cazotte.

CORSO
You like Gothic novels?

THE GIRL
I like books. I never travel
without one.

CORSO
Been traveling long?

THE GIRL
Ages.

CORSO eyes her, intrigued. She uttered the word in the simple, natural way that characterizes all her behavior.

CORSO
You said you were a student?

THE GIRL
Did I?
(shrugs)
So I am. In a way.

CORSO shakes his head and smiles. He's getting nowhere fast. THE HOTEL PORTER appears at his elbow.

HOTEL PORTER
Excuse me, senhor. Phone call.

CORSO
(surprised)
For me? Are you sure?

HOTEL PORTER
Si, senhor.

He withdraws. CORSO turns back to THE GIRL.

CORSO
Well, sorry I disturbed you.

He hands back the book and turns to go.

CORSO picks up the receiver with a puzzled frown. He gestures

CORSO
Yes?

BALKAN (V.O.)
Mr. Corso?

CORSO
(startled)
Balkan? How did you find me?

BALKAN (V.O.)
Made any progress?

CORSO
Progress? You could call it that.

BALKAN (V.O.)
Well?

CORSO
I've examined the Fargas copy. It's authentic. At least it looks that way. Like yours. But there are discrepancies.

BALKAN (V.O.)
Discrepancies?

CORSO
In the engravings. Like keys in different hands, doorways open in one copy and bricked up in the other.

BALKAN (V.O.)
I see.

CORSO
And there's another thing.

BALKAN (V.O.)
Yes?

CORSO
The ones that differ are all signed 'L.F.' Seems like some kind of riddle.

(A long pause.)
Are you still there? Where are you, anyway?

BALKAN (V.O.)
I think you'd better get it for me.

CORSO
The old man wouldn't sell it to save his life - he said as much.
(Another long pause.)
Balkan?

A click, and the line goes dead.

46

INT. SINTRA HOTEL - CORSO'S ROOM - DAWN

46

The curtains are drawn, but there's light enough for us to see CORSO lying fast asleep on his back in bed, one limp arm trailing over the edge. A knock at the door. He grunts and props himself on one elbow.

CORSO
(sleepily)
Just a minute.

He rolls out of bed and wraps the bedspread around his waist. Then he opens the door and stands there, a tousled figure with Liana's teeth marks clearly visible on his chest. THE GIRL is outside.

THE GIRL
You left your phone off the hook.

CORSO
Jesus...
(peers blearily at his
watch)
What time is it?

THE GIRL
Early, but you have to go.

CORSO
(bewildered)
Go where, for God's sake?

THE GIRL
The Fargas place.

CORSO is at first too bemused to find it odd that she should know the name.

CORSO
Fargas? I already saw Fargas.

THE GIRL
I think you should see him again.

CORSO
What is this, a practical joke? Who the hell are you? What do you know about Fargas?

THE GIRL
Better get dressed. I'll wait for you downstairs.

47

EXT. QUINTA FARGAS - DRIVEWAY/HOUSE - DAY

47

CORSO and THE GIRL are walking in silence up the driveway, with its carpet of dead leaves and avenue of crumbling statues. He eyes her, mystified, as she strides briskly along with a blue duffel coat over her usual attire. The early morning mist is dispersing.

With another look at THE GIRL, who remains standing at the foot of the steps, CORSO goes up to the front door and yanks at the bell-pull, producing the same muffled jangling sound as before.

THE GIRL

Don't bother. He isn't there.

CORSO

(sarcastically)

Really. So where is he?

THE GIRL

Over there.

She points in the direction of the ornamental pond. CORSO stares at her, then walks over to it and freezes:

VICTOR FARGAS's corpse is floating face up among the dead leaves and lily pads. An empty brandy bottle is floating alongside.

CORSO

(mutters)

God Almighty!

He emerges from his stupor and walks back to THE GIRL, who's still standing outside the front door. Ignoring her, he tries the handle, but it's bolted.

THE GIRL

You want to get inside?

CORSO nods wordlessly, too shocked to bandy words with her. THE GIRL looks up at the facade. Then, with unsuspected agility, she shins up a drainpipe beside the door and climbs onto the balcony above it. One of the French windows is broken. She reaches inside, releases the catch, and disappears from view.

CORSO waits, casting occasional glances at the ornamental pond and its occupant. There's the rattle of a bolt being withdrawn, and THE GIRL opens the front door from the inside.

CORSO

Wait here. He enters the house.

48 INT. QUINTA FARGAS - RECEPTION ROOMS/DRAWING ROOM - DAY 48

CORSO traverses the empty reception rooms and reaches the drawing room. His foot crunches on something as he crosses it on his way to the rug on which the occult books were stacked: it's the remains of one of Fargas's treasured brandy glasses. He pauses for long enough to identify it, then walks on. The books are lying scattered across the rug: no sign of 'The Nine Gates'.

CORSO
Shit! Shit! Shit!!!

He looks around helplessly. Then he sees it:

the last of the fire is still smoldering on the hearth, and lying open among the ashes, charred around the edges, is Fargas's 'Nine Gates'. He picks up the mutilated volume, looks at it for a moment, ruefully shaking his head, and stows it in his canvas bag.

49 EXT. QUINTA FARGAS - DAY 49

CORSO emerges from the house.

THE GIRL
Well, did you find it?

CORSO
You know too damned much. More than I do. Why do you keep following me around? What are you, a groupie or something? IRS, CIA, Interpol? Who are you working for?

THE GIRL
You're wasting time, asking all these questions. We'd better get out of here. There's a flight from Lisbon to Paris at noon. We should just make it.

CORSO
What's with the 'we'?

THE GIRL
There are two of us, aren't there?

50 INT. AIRLINER CABIN - DAY 50

A sunlit mountainscape of dazzling white cloud glides past the window beside which THE GIRL is drowsing with her head on CORSO's shoulder. The cabin is bathed in milky radiance, the atmosphere is tranquil and soothing. CORSO looks down at THE GIRL.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO

Somebody's playing a game with me.

THE GIRL

(drowsily)

Of course. You're a part of it.

CORSO

What exactly happened back there?

THE GIRL

Fargas caught someone stealing, I guess.

CORSO

And what do you guess happened to him?

THE GIRL

(simply)

He drowned.

CORSO

With a little help from who?

THE GIRL

(shrugs)

He's dead. Who cares?

CORSO

I care. I could wind up the same way.

THE GIRL

Not with me around to take care of you.

CORSO

I see. You're my guardian angel.

THE GIRL

Something like that.

She removes her head from his shoulder, turns away, and snuggles up against the window instead.

CORSO makes his way across the bustling arrivals hall. THE GIRL, now with a backpack slung over her blue duffel coat, is trailing along in his wake. He glances back at her occasionally. The PASSENGERS slow as they reach the bottleneck at immigration control. CORSO, shuffling along in line, takes out his US passport in readiness to show it. He looks around for THE GIRL, but there's no sign of her.

52 INT. PARIS HOTEL - DAY 52

A taxi drops CORSO in front of a modest but respectable three-star hotel. He hands some money through the driver's window and heads for the entrance.

53 INT. PARIS HOTEL - LOBBY/RECEPTION DESK - DAY 53

CORSO walks up to the reception desk, which is presided over by a desk clerk (GRUBER). A short, squat reincarnation of Erich von Stroheim, he wears his uniform like a Prussian grenadier.

CORSO
Hello, Gruber.

GRUBER looks up, acknowledges CORSO's presence with a curt, faintly military inclination of the head.

GRUBER
Welcome, Mr. Corso. Delighted to
see you again.
(consults his computer
screen)
We don't have any vacancies, but
I'm sure I'll be able to organize
something.

CORSO
Thank you, Gruber.

Discreetly, he slides a 100 franc bill across the desk. GRUBER makes it vanish with elegant alacrity and smiles - almost.

GRUBER
Thank you, sir.

54 INT. PARIS HOTEL - CORSO'S ROOM - DAY 54

A bottle of Scotch and a glass repose on a small desk, likewise Balkan's 'Nine Gates' and Fargas's charred copy. A Lucky is smouldering in the ashtray beside them. CORSO is turning the pages of what remains of Fargas's copy. He pauses at a page of text bearing a distinctive ornamental capital, peers at the gutter, and detects that the page facing it has been torn out. Thoughtfully, he runs his finger along the rough edge. Then he opens Balkan's copy at the same place. What is missing from the charred copy is the engraving of THE HERMIT WITH THE KEYS, DOG, AND LANTERN. CORSO takes a pull at his Scotch and leans back with the Lucky between his lips, thinking hard. Then he glances at his watch and stands up.

55 EXT. PONT DES ARTS - DAY 55

It's a fine day. CORSO, canvas bag on shoulder as usual, is striding across the bridge toward the Left Bank.

56 EXT. KESSLER BUILDING - DAY 56

CORSO walks up to the entrance of a tall, well-preserved old building overlooking the Seine.

57 INT. KESSLER BUILDING - DAY 57

A grim-faced CONCIERGE is sitting in her cubby-hole. She eyes CORSO inquiringly.

CONCIERGE
Monsieur?

CORSO
The Kessler Foundation.

CONCIERGE
Derni šretage.

She jerks her head in the direction of an old-fashioned elevator like a gilded cage.

58 INT. KESSLER BUILDING - LOBBY - DAY 58

The SECRETARY is a big-bosomed, middle-aged woman with horn-rims and scraped-back hair. She looks up at CORSO with an inquisitorial air.

CORSO
Dean Corso. I have an appointment
with Baroness Kessler.

Having consulted her appointments book and her watch, the SECRETARY rises. She speaks with a French accent.

SECRETARY
This way.

She walks ahead of CORSO down a panelled corridor and stops outside a heavy wooden door.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)
You have thirty minutes.

She knocks on the door and opens it.

59 INT. KESSLER BUILDING - OFFICE/LIBRARY - DAY 59

A spacious room filled with luxuriant potted plants. Beside the window, a large desk. Covered with papers and books, some of them open. CORSO follows the SECRETARY in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BARONESS KESSLER, an elegant little white-haired old lady with a Hermes scarf draped around her shoulders, turns her electric wheelchair to face him. She speaks with a pronounced German accent.

BARONESS KESSLER

Mr. Corso? Come in. I've heard a great deal about you.

She approaches with her left hand extended. We see that her right arm has been amputated at the elbow.,

CORSO

Nothing good, I hope.

They shake hands.

BARONESS KESSLER

(to the SECRETARY)

Merci, Simone

(to CORSO)

You hope right.

The SECRETARY exits, closing the door behind her.

CORSO

(dryly.)

I'm reassured, Baroness. In my trade, to be spoken well of can be professionally disastrous.

He surveys the room. Visible through some open double doors on the right is a vast library. He focuses on it. BARONESS KESSLER follows the direction of his gaze.

BARONESS KESSLER

Yes, there it is: the Kessler Collection.

CORSO

Very impressive too. I know your catalog almost by heart.

BARONESS KESSLER

Strange we haven't met before. Your name is a byword among dealers and collectors but I imagine you know your own reputation better than I do.

CORSO

It keeps the wolf from the door.

(smiles to change the subject)

Were you in the middle of something?

(CONTINUED)

BARONESS KESSLER beckons him over to the desk. CORSO looks at the array of books and papers. An elegant fountain pen lies on top of some handwritten notes.

BARONESS KESSLER

My latest work: 'The Devil: History and Myth' - a kind of biography. It will be published early next year.

CORSO

Why the Devil?

BARONESS KESSLER

(laughs)

I saw him one day. I was fifteen years old, and I saw him as plain as I see you now: cutaway, top hat, cane. Very elegant, very handsome. It was love at first sight.

CORSO chuckles, doing his best to charm the old lady.

CORSO

Three hundred years ago they'd have burned you at the stake for saying that.

BARONESS KESSLER

Three hundred years ago I wouldn't have said it.

They both laugh.

BARONESS KESSLER (CONT'D)

Nor would I have made a million by writing about it.

(abruptly businesslike)

What is it you wish to discuss, Mr. Corso?

CORSO

(adjusts his glasses)

There's a book in your collection I'd like to examine.

She smiles as if that were already obvious.

CORSO (CONT'D)

It's 'The Book of the Nine Gates of the Kingdom of Shadows'.

BARONESS KESSLER

(unsurprised)

The Nine Gates? An interesting work. Everyone's been asking about it lately.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO
(stiffens almost
imperceptibly)
Really?

BARONESS KESSLER eyes him for a moment.

BARONESS KESSLER
Come with me.

Swinging her wheelchair around, she steers it toward the double doors and into the library beyond them. CORSO follows.

CORSO
You really believe in the Devil,
Baroness?

BARONESS KESSLER
Enough to devote my life and my
library to him, not to mention many
years of work. Don't you?

CORSO
Everyone's been asking me that
lately.

BARONESS KESSLER looks mildly amused.

She sends her wheelchair gliding over to a bookshelf and removes the third copy of 'The Nine Gates'.

BARONESS KESSLER
This book demands a certain amount
of faith.

CORSO
My faith is in short supply.

They both go over to a small table in the centre of the room. BARONESS KESSLER opens the book and turns a few pages. There are handwritten slips of paper inserted throughout.

BARONESS KESSLER
I know this book extremely well. I
studied it for years.

CORSO
Do you have any doubts about its
authenticity?

BARONESS KESSLER
(glances at him
suspiciously)
None whatever.

CORSO

You're sure?

BARONESS KESSLER

My knowledge of this book is profound. I wrote a biography of its author.

CORSO

Aristide Torchia?

BARONESS KESSLER

A courageous man. He died for the sake of this very book in 1623. He had spent many years in Prague, a centre of the occult. While there he studied the black arts and acquired a copy of the dread 'Delomelanicon'. This is his adaptation of that work, which was written by Lucifer himself. After they burned him at the stake, a secret society was founded to perpetuate its memory and preserve its secrets: the Brotherhood.

CORSO

The Brotherhood?

BARONESS KESSLER

Yes, a kind of witches' coven. For centuries they have met to read from this book and worship the Prince of Darkness. Today they've degenerated into a social club for bored millionaires. I myself belonged to the Brotherhood many years ago, but time is too precious at my age. I told them to go to the Devil.

She titters at her own little joke.

CORSO

They still meet?

BARONESS KESSLER

Every year.

CORSO

And you say they read from this book?

He stares from the book to BARONESS KESSLER.

BARONESS KESSLER

No, I took mine back when Liana Telfer acquired the one in Toledo. Victor Fargas is an unbeliever - he has always refused to participate, so naturally they use the Telfer copy. Not that it has ever worked.
(pause)

They never do, to be honest.

CORSO

So Andrew Telfer never took part?

BARONESS KESSLER

Never. He knew nothing of these activities until that creature Liana de Saint-Damien married him for money. She used his dollars to buy the book and renovate her chateau. An old and aristocratic family, the Saint-Damiens, but penniless. They have dabbled in witchcraft for hundreds of years.

CORSO

Telfer hanged himself last week.

A brief silence. She looks stunned for a moment.

BARONESS KESSLER

I see. And Fargas?

CORSO looks at her impassively.

CORSO

He was alive the last time we spoke.

BARONESS KESSLER

When was that?

CORSO

Two days ago.

BARONESS KESSLER digests this, looks at him keenly.

BARONESS KESSLER

Who exactly are you working for, Mr. Corso?

(CONTINUED)

CORSO

My client's name is irrelevant,
Baroness. I'm simply trying to
authenticate his copy - the one
Telfer sold him before he died.

BARONESS KESSLER

(catches on)

How stupid of me! I should have
guessed!

Angry now, she swings her wheelchair around to face him full
on.

BARONESS KESSLER (CONT'D)

You've overstayed your welcome, Mr.
Corso.

CORSO

I was hoping to examine your copy
in detail.

BARONESS KESSLER

Certainly not. Tell your client,
who can only be Boris Balkan, to
come and examine it himself - if he
dares. Tell him not to send any
more wolves in sheeps' clothing.
And now, kindly leave.

Sternly, she points to the door with her stump. Her
wheelchair hums as she shepherds CORSO out through the
office. He opens the door to the corridor.

BARONESS KESSLER (CONT'D)

You don't know what you're getting
yourself into, Mr. Corso. Get out
before it's too late.

CORSO

I'm afraid it already is, Baroness.

BARONESS KESSLER

Some books are dangerous, and this
is one.

CORSO

(smiles wryly)

So people keep telling me. Thanks
for your time.

BARONESS KESSLER watches him exit. He's hardly out the door
when she picks up the phone.

60 INT. KESSLER BUILDING - LOBBY - EVENING 60

CORSO walks back along the corridor. The SECRETARY, who has been peeling an orange, unsuccessfully hides it below desk level and gives him a curt nod as he passes.

61 EXT. KESSLER BUILDING/RIVERSIDE STREET - EVENING 61

CORSO emerges from the building. As he does so he catches sight of the MUSTACHE leaning against the parapet of the riverside promenade across the way.

The MUSTACHE stiffens and straightens up. CORSO, with one eye on him, starts walking. The MUSTACHE starts walking too, keeps level with him on the other side of the street. CORSO comes to a cafe. For want of a better idea, he goes inside.

62 INT./EXT. RIVERSIDE STREET - EVENING 62

CORSO sits down at a table, orders a drink. Looking out the cafe window, he sees the MUSTACHE leaning against the parapet in his former pose, watching. The MUSTACHE lights a small cigar without taking his eyes off CORSO.

63 INT./EXT. CAFE/RIVERSIDE STREET - NIGHT 63

CORSO is still sitting at his table, which now has several checks on it. The lights come on, blotting out his view of the street through the window. All he can now see is a reflection of the cafe's interior, including his own seated figure.

He drums on the table irresolutely, glances at his watch, deliberates. He can't postpone the moment of decision any longer.

He adds up his checks and puts some money on the table. Then, settling his bag on his shoulder, he makes for the door. He peers across the street, sees no sign of the Mustache, and exits.

64 EXT. RIVERSIDE STREET/SEINE QUAYSIDE - NIGHT 64

CORSO emerges from the cafe. Still no sign of the Mustache. He sets off along the sidewalk, glancing across the street as he does so. Then, over his shoulder, he catches sight of a car with dipped headlights - a dark-colored sedan - crawling along the curb some twenty yards behind him.

On impulse, he darts across the street to the riverside promenade and dashes down the flight of steps that leads to the quay. The car's headlights blaze up. It accelerates, tires squealing, and swerves across the one-way street in pursuit.

65

EXT. SEINE QUAYSIDE/PROMENADE - NIGHT

65

CORSO races down the steps, hears the car skid to a halt, and sprints off along the quay with his overcoat flapping and the shoulder bag bumping against his flank. It's misty down on the quayside, and the streetlights cast a yellowish glow that hinders visibility rather than helps it. A couple of hundred yards along the quay he runs out of steam and slows, turns to look: no sign of the Mustache, no sound of pursuing footsteps. Relieved but still wary, he leans against the embankment wall to catch his breath and light a cigarette.

Then, with a final backward look, he walks on to the next flight of steps. He's halfway up them when the MUSTACHE, a tall, menacing figure, appears at the top. He turns to flee, but the MUSTACHE is too quick for him. He darts down the steps and punches his retreating figure behind the ear.

CORSO misses the last couple of steps and lands face down on the quayside. The MUSTACHE is on him in a flash. He bends down and yanks the strap of the bag off his shoulder.

CORSO resists, hugs the bag protectively, gets kicked in the stomach, doubles up and hangs on for dear life. As he lies there with the MUSTACHE kicking him repeatedly and tugging at the strap, he sees, silhouetted against the yellowish, misty glow of the nearest streetlight, a ghostly figure flying down the steps: It's THE GIRL, with her duffel coat streaming out behind her like Superman's cape.

The MUSTACHE has finally gotten the bag away from CORSO. Just as he straightens up and turns to go, THE GIRL performs a flying leap and kicks him in the solar plexus. He grunts and goes sprawling on his back, dropping the bag.

THE GIRL is stooping to retrieve the bag when the MUSTACHE scrambles to his feet and lunges at her. He throws a punch at her head. Although she neutralizes most of its force by riding it, he catches her a glancing blow on the nose.

THE GIRL reacts like lightning, kicks him in the balls. He yelps and goes into a crouch. Then, with a spin kick, she floors him once more. He lies there, spitting blood and glaring up at her. She seems to have knocked the fight out of him at last.

With one wary eye on the MUSTACHE, THE GIRL picks up the shoulder bag and turns to CORSO, who's struggling to his feet. Beyond her, he sees the MUSTACHE get up and make for the steps.

CORSO
Hey, he's getting away!

(CONTINUED)

THE GIRL merely turns to look. CORSO sets off after the MUSTACHE, who has already started up the steps, and just manages to grab one of his legs.

The MUSTACHE kicks his self free and continues up the steps with CORSO clumsily following a few feet behind.

Waiting at the top of the steps, engine idling and passenger door open, is the dark sedan, a Mercedes. CORSO reaches street level in time to catch a glimpse of the glamorous blonde behind the wheel: it's LIANA TELFER.

The MUSTACHE jumps in and slams the door. The car burns rubber as it accelerates away.

THE GIRL calmly climbs the last few steps with CORSO, a beg in one hand and his glasses in the other. She hands them to him.

THE GIRL

They're broken. You should be more careful.

CORSO, leaning back against the promenade wall and breathing heavily, stares at her with his mouth open. He slides down the wall and subsides into a sitting position on the sidewalk.

CORSO, one lens of his glasses cracked, is still sitting on the sidewalk with his back against the wall. THE GIRL is sitting beside him. He produces a crumpled Lucky and lights it. It takes him quite a while, his hands are shaking so badly. THE GIRL's nose is bleeding. She wipes it on her sleeve. CORSO produces a handkerchief as crumpled as his cigarette and hands it to her.

CORSO

When did you learn all that?

THE GIRL

What?

CORSO aims a feeble kick in the air.

CORSO

That stuff.

THE GIRL

(casually)

Oh, ages ago.

CORSO

No shit.

66 CONTINUED:

THE GIRL gets up and holds out her hand. CORSO takes it and rises with an effort. He flicks his cigarette over the parapet. They walk off along the promenade side by side.

67 INT. PARIS HOTEL - LOBBY/RECEPTION DESK - NIGHT 67

CORSO goes up to the reception desk, where GRUBER is on duty.

CORSO

I need a favor, Gruber.

GRUBER looks up, registers his broken glasses and dishevelled condition. THE GIRL is standing in the background.

GRUBER

Certainly, Mr. Corso.

CORSO

Liana Telfer, maiden name Saint-Damien. Thirtyish, blond, dishy. Probably accompanied by a big man with a Clark Gable mustache.

Impassive as ever, GRUBER make some notes on a pad.

CORSO (CONT'D)

I want to know if they're staying at some hotel here in Paris.

GRUBER

It could take a little time.

CORSO

Of course. Start with the five-stars. They're the best bet.

GRUBER

Very good, sir.

(pause)

Are you feeling all right?

CORSO

I've felt better. Thanks, Gruber. Let me know if you locate them.

GRUBER watches CORSO and THE GIRL walk to the elevators.

68 INT. PARIS HOTEL - BEDROOM - NIGHT 68

CORSO is filling a plastic laundry bag with ice from a tray in the minibar. THE GIRL is sitting on the bed with her head tilted back and a bloodstained handkerchief to her nose. The bedside light bathes the room in a subdued glow.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO

Here, hold this against your neck
and lie back.

He sits down beside her and hands her the improvised ice pack. She applies it to the nape of her neck, lies back and shuts her eyes.

CORSO (CONT'D)

You were great down there by the river. I haven't really thanked you.

She opens her eyes and smiles at him.

CORSO

Like to tell me what's going on?

THE GIRL

(shrugs faintly)
Someone's after your book.

CORSO

They didn't have to kill Fargas to get it. They didn't have to mutilate his copy, either. They tore out the engravings and ditched the rest. There's got to be more to it than that.

Her nose has stopped bleeding.

THE GIRL

Do you believe in the Devil, Corso?

CORSO

I'm being paid to. Do you?

THE GIRL

(smiles)
I'm a bit of a devil myself...

She reaches up, removes his glasses, and puts them on the bedside table. CORSO eyes her uncertainly. Then the spell is broken: her nose starts to bleed again. She puts her fingertips to it and inspects the blood on them. Very deliberately, she dabbles them in the blood some more, reaches up, and gently draws four vertical lines down his face from his forehead to his mouth, where her fingertips linger. CORSO's face approaches hers. They melt into a passionate kiss, Then she pushes him away, rolls him over on his back, unbuttons his shirt, and rests her palms on his chest. Playfully, she runs her forefinger over the imprint of Liana's teeth.

(CONTINUED)

68 CONTINUED: (2)

THE GIRL (CONT'D)
(smiles mischievously)
Would you know a devil if you saw
one?

69 INT. PARIS HOTEL - STAIRS/LOBBY/RECEPTION DESK - DAWN 69

CORSO, tieless and unshaven, descends the stairs to the lobby carrying his beg. The JUNIOR DESK CLERK, a spotty youth, is dozing on a chair behind the reception desk. CORSO goes over and reps on the desk. The JUNIOR DESK CLERK springs to his feet like a jack-in-a-box. CORSO jerks his chin at the door behind him.

CORSO
Do you have a photocopier back
there?

JUNIOR DESK CLERK
Er, yes, monsieur.

CORSO
May I use it?

JUNIOR DESK CLERK
Are you a guest, monsieur?

CORSO
You mean I don't look like one?

JUNIOR DESK CLERK
Of course, monsieur. This way,
monsieur.

He lifts a flap and shows CORSO into the back office.

CORSO
Room 35. And get them to send up
breakfast for two.

70 INT. PARIS HOTEL - OFFICE - DAWN 70

CORSO has deposited his bag beside the photocopier and taken out Balkan's 'Nine Gates'. He opens it at the first engraving - THE KNIGHT WITH A FINGER TO HIS LIPS - and inverts it. Positioning it on the photocopier, he shuts the flap and presses the start button. The photocopy glides out into the tray.

71 INT. PARIS HOTEL - CORSO'S ROOM - DAWN 71

CORSO enters, quietly closing the door behind him. THE GIRL is lying sprawled among the rumpled sheets, fast asleep. Her clothes are draped over a chair with her backpack alongside.

(CONTINUED)

71 CONTINUED:

71

Stealthily, CORSO takes Balkan's 'Nine Gates' from his bag and secretes it behind the minibar, then goes into the bathroom.

72 INT. PARIS HOTEL - BATHROOM/BEDROOM/CORRIDOR - DAY

72

CORSO, with his hair damp from the shower and a towel around his waist, is halfway through shaving when there's a knock on the bathroom door. One cheek daubed with foam, he opens it to find himself confronted by a FLOOR WAITER, check pad and ballpoint in hand.

FLOOR WAITER

Bonjour, monsieur. Votre petit d,jeuner.

CORSO

Oh. Sure.

Taking the pad, he emerges into the bedroom and scribbles his signature, then stops short: there's a breakfast cart in the middle of the room, but the bed is empty and The Girl's clothes and backpack have disappeared.

CORSO (CONT'D)

Where is she?

WAITER

Pardon?

CORSO

Madame, ou elle est?

FLOOR WAITER

Je ne sais pas, m'sieur.

He makes for the door and exits. CORSO catches hold of the door just as it's closing, puts his head out into the corridor, looks right and left. No one in sight but the FLOOR WAITER, who casts a puzzled glance over his shoulder as he walks off.

CORSO steps back into the bedroom and shuts the door. He stands there for a moment, frowning at the empty bed. Then, abruptly galvanized, he dashes over to the minibar and looks behind it. His fears are groundless: 'The Nine Gates' is still there. Just then the phone rings. He picks up the receiver and puts it to his ear on the clean-shaven side of his face.

CORSO

Yes?

BALKAN (V.O.)

Come down. I'm in the cafe across the street.

73

EXT/INT. PARIS HOTEL/CAFE. DAY

73

CORSO, wearing his crumpled overcoat and carrying his bag, emerges from the hotel and crosses the street to a cafe opposite.

He enters and looks around, catches sight of BALKAN's sleek gray head at a table in the corner. He goes over to him.

CORSO

You sure as hell get around.

He sits down with the shoulder bag between his feet. A WAITER appears at his elbow.

CORSO (CONT'D)

(to the WAITER)

Un caf, noir, s'il vous plait.

The WAITER nods and withdraws. BALKAN studies CORSO's face through his horn-rims, notes the glasses with the cracked lens.

BALKAN

Problems?

CORSO

Yeah, like someone tried to total me a couple times. Aside from that, three people have died on me since I took this job.

(thinks for a moment)

Well, two. Telfer was dead already.

BALKAN

I don't follow you.

CORSO

It's simple enough. You give me 'The Nine Gates' and they start dropping like flies. I'm thinking of giving it back.

BALKAN

Who are you talking about?

CORSO

My pal Bernie Feldman, for one.

BALKAN

The book dealer? He's dead?

CORSO

Murdered. He was holding your book for me. Someone was after it. He wouldn't give it to them.

(CONTINUED)

A moment is silence. Then BALKAN emits a wholly incongruous chuckle. The chuckle becomes a guffaw, the guffaw gives way to peal after peal of uproarious laughter. He slaps his thighs and rocks back and forth, his face turns puce, his eyes fill with tears. His hilarity is so deafening that the cafe's other CUSTOMERS turn to stare.

CORSO, too, stares at BALKAN as if he's gone crazy. BALKAN's mirth gradually subsides.

He removes his horn-rims and mops his eyes. Eventually, still chuckling:

BALKAN

Poor fellow. Very creditable of him.

CORSO refrains from commenting on this outburst.

CORSO

Then there's Fargas.

The WAITER brings CORSO'S coffee. BALKAN waits for him to put it on the table and retire.

BALKAN

What about Fargas?

CORSO

Dead too.

BALKAN

How do you know?

CORSO

I saw him - and his copy, or what was left of it. Someone had snatched the engravings and tried to burn the rest.

BALKAN stares at him for a moment. Then:

BALKAN

How tragic. What about the Kessler copy?

CORSO

The old woman says it's authentic, but I didn't get a chance to look at it closely. As soon as she guessed you were behind my visit she threw me out. You aren't her flavor of the month.

BALKAN

You must see her again. You must
get me that copy - or examine it,
at least.

CORSO

(derisively)

Are you kidding? I'd have to be the
Invisible Man.

BALKAN reaches into his black briefcase and produces a big
manilla envelope.

BALKAN

Try this.

CORSO takes the envelope and looks at it. It's addressed to
'Baroness Friede Kessler'.

INT. KESSLER BUILDING - LOBBY - DAY

CORSO, canvas bag on shoulder, hands the envelope to the
SECRETARY, who takes it and walks off down the corridor.

INT. KESSLER BUILDING - OFFICE - DAY

A black and white photo fills the screen: it shows a young
and beautiful BARONESS KESSLER flanked by two men in SS
uniform. One of them is Heinrich Himmler. BARONESS KESSLER is
scowling down at a wartime number of 'Signal', the Nazi
propaganda magazine. It's lying open on her desk with
Balkan's envelope beside it. The SECRETARY shows CORSO in.
The BARONESS addresses her crisply.

BARONESS KESSLER

Merci, Simone.

The SECRETARY nods and exits. Fixing CORSO with a cold,
challenging stare, BARONESS KESSLER feeds the magazine into a
shredder beside her desk. She no longer looks such a dear
little old lady.

INT. KESSLER BUILDING - LIBRARY/OFFICE - DAY

CORSO is seated at a library table on which reposes the
Kessler copy of 'The Nine Gates'. Beside it lies his notebook
and the photocopies of Balkan's engravings. His shoulder bag
is hanging on the chair-back, his overcoat draped over it. He
reaches into his pocket and produces a Lucky, takes out his
lighter.

BARONESS KESSLER (CONT'D)

Blackmail doesn't entitle you to
smoke in my library, Mr. Corso.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO stops short and looks back through the double doors into her office: she's seated behind her desk like a graven image, watching him intently. He reinserts the Lucky in its pack and pockets his lighter. Getting down to work, he opens 'The Nine Gates' and extracts one of the Baroness's handwritten slips, reads it to himself in a low voice.

CORSO

'I will recognize your servants, my brethren, by the sign that adorns some part of their body, a scar or mark of your making...'

He replaces the slip. BARONESS KESSLER cranes her body largely obscures her view of the table. CORSO turns some pages and comes to the engraving of THE KNIGHT WITH A FINGER TO HIS LIPS. He compares it with the photocopy: the castle has three towers instead of four. He examines the margin of the engraving through his magnifying glass to ascertain the presence of something he already knows will be there: an 'L.F.' He turns to the chart in his notebook, which has already acquired a third row of nine boxes. He writes 'Kessler' beside it and enters an 'L.F.' in the first box. The second engraving - THE HERMIT WITH THE KEYS - appears to be identical and the signature is 'A.T.' An 'A.T.' goes down in the second box. The third engraving is different: THE ANGELIC ARCHER has an arrow in his quiver, whereas the photocopy of Balkan's counterpart does not. This one, too, is signed 'L.F.' CORSO enters an 'L.F.' in the third box. We MOVE IN until the chart FILLS THE SCREEN.

LONG SHOT of CORSO from behind. He leans back and stretches, glances in the direction of the office: Baroness Kessler is no longer at her desk. Absolute silence reigns. He resumes work, turns to the ninth engraving: THE NAKED WOMAN RIDING THE DRAGON WITH A CASTLE ABLAZE IN THE BACKGROUND.

There's a loud thud, and the engraving sways and blurs. THE SCREEN GOES BLACK.

FADE IN:

An electrical hum, punctuated by a strange, rhythmical series of clicks and thuds: click-thud, click-thud, click-thud... CORSO, sitting slumped over the table, comes to. He groans and laboriously straightens up, feels his head and winces. The strange sound impinges on his consciousness: he looks around vaguely for its source and discovers it: BARONESS KESSLER's wheelchair has been left in forward gear. Complete with occupant, it's colliding again and again with the wall beneath a window on the other side of the room.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO, who can just glimpse the top of the old lady's head from behind, sees it jerk forward at each impact. He struggles to his feet.

CORSO

Baroness?

No answer. Unsteadily, he makes his way over to the wheelchair and swivels it around, starts back with a muffled exclamation. BARONESS KESSLER has been strangled with her Hermes scarf: her cheeks are blue, her eyes and tongue are protruding. Unobstructed, the laden wheelchair takes off across the library and heads for the double doors, which are now closed. It runs into them full tilt, bursts them open, and continues on its way. Instantly, smoke comes billowing into the library, accompanied by a crackle of flames. The wheelchair disappears into the murk.

CORSO wildly scans the table for Baroness Kessler's 'Nine Gates', but it's gone. Snatching up his notebook and abandoning his shoulder bag and overcoat, he makes for the office at a run. The office is thick with smoke and illumined by a fiery glow.

CORSO pauses in the doorway, shielding his face from the heat with one hand, and surveys the scene. BARONESS KESSLER and her wheelchair have come to rest in the midst of a bonfire of books and papers. CORSO can just make out her copy of 'The Nine Gates' on top. The flames are already engulfing it. CORSO takes a last look, then dashes through the smoke to the door and exits.

76 INT. KESSLER BUILDING - CORRIDOR/LOBBY/LANDING - DAY 76

With smoke billowing after him, CORSO dashes along the corridor, through the lobby, which is deserted, and out onto the landing.

77 INT. KESSLER BUILDING - LANDING/STAIRS/HALLWAY - DAY 77

On the landing CORSO bumps into the SECRETARY, who has just emerged from the elevator. She gives a little shriek and drops a paper bag. Half a dozen oranges go bouncing ahead of CORSO as he races down the stairs. In the hallway he almost upends the CONCIERGE, who's wielding a broom in her curlers. Leaping aside with a startled yell, she speeds him on his way with some choice imprecations, then peers up the stairwell: the upper stories are already wreathed in smoke, and sundry TENANTS have debauched onto the landings. The SECRETARY comes pelting down the stairs, screaming at the top of her lungs.

78 EXT. SMALL PARIS SQUARE - DAY 78

CORSO douses his head in the basin of a fountain, shakes off the drips and massages his face. Then he leans against the basin and looks around. He's all alone in the little square.

(CONTINUED)

78 CONTINUED:

78

He takes out a crumpled cigarette and inserts it between his lips with dripping fingers, gropes for his lighter, and vainly tries to light it. Wearily, he removes the cigarette from his lips and tosses it away. All at once, he spots a huge Great Dane watching him from the mouth of an alleyway. CORSO and the Great Dane stare at each other. Then the silence is broken by a fire engine's siren, faint at first but growing louder.

79 EXT. RIVERSIDE STREET CORNER - DAY

79

CORSO reaches an intersection and looks around the corner. The Kessler building is ablaze. Tongues of flame and clouds of smoke are issuing from the windows of the upper stories. Fire engines and squad cars are drawn up outside, FIREMEN are directing their hoses onto the flames, GENDARMES cordoning off the street and keeping curious SPECTATORS at bay.

80 EXT/INT. PARIS STREET/HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

80

CORSO, looking wrung out, crosses the street and makes for the hotel entrance. He's just going through the revolving doors into the lobby when THE GIRL appears on the inside. Hooking her arm through his, she steers him around and back outside again in one continuous movement. As she does so:

THE GIRL

(mutters)

Just keep going.

Still firmly gripping his arm, she Propels him out onto the sidewalk.

CORSO

(baffled)

What are you playing at?

THE GIRL

See those men talking with your friend Gruber?

CORSO turns to look. Inside the lobby, TWO MEN IN TRENCHCOATS are standing at the reception desk in conversation with GRUBER.

THE GIRL (CONT'D)

Police.

At that moment, GRUBER looks past them at CORSO. He briefly locks eyes with him but shows no sign of recognition.

CORSO

Shit!

He turns and walks off with THE GIRL at his side.

81 EXT/INT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

81

CORSO is in the act of entering a glass phone booth.

THE GIRL

You look better without that old
bag and coat of yours. They didn't
do anything for you.

CORSO shuts the door in her face. He picks up the receiver,
inserts a coin, punches out a number. THE GIRL pulls a funny
face at him through the glass. CORSO's only response is to
turn away and cup his hand around the receiver.

CORSO

(into phone)

Gruber? it's me, Corso. Can you
talk?

GRUBER (V.O.)

No, sir.

CORSO

But you can listen?

GRUBER (V.O.)

Certainly, sir.

CORSO

I'd like you to do something for
me.

From outside we see. THE GIRL, arms folded, casually watching
him.

82 PARIS BRASSERIE INT/DAY

82

GRUBER enters a brasserie crowded with lunchtime CUSTOMERS.
He's looking distinctly Prussian in spite of the civilian
overcoat over his uniform. He spots CORSO at the far end of
the bar with THE GIRL beside him. She's sucking up some
colorful beverage through a straw. GRUBER acknowledges her
presence with a formal nod.

CORSO

You don't have it?

GRUBER

There was nothing in the place you
described, sir. I'm sorry.

CORSO

Goddamit!

He turns to THE GIRL.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO (CONT'D)

I suppose you didn't take it?

THE GIRL

You still don't trust me, do you?

GRUBER clears his throat.

GRUBER

I think I may have the answer, sir. Someone visited your room earlier on, while my young colleague was on duty: your wife.

CORSO

My wife? I don't have any wife.

GRUBER

That's what I told him.

CORSO

Could he describe her?

GRUBER

(nods)

Thirty-ish, blond, dishy.

CORSO

Liana...

GRUBER

Which reminds me, sir: the lady and gentleman you mentioned - they're staying at the Hotel Crillon, Suite 236-238.

CORSO

Good for you, Gruber. Thanks a lot.

GRUBER

Always glad to be of service, Mr. Corso.

CORSO

I owe you one for those cops, too.

GRUBER

Ah yes, sir. Interpol.

CORSO

Interpol! What exactly did they want?

GRUBER

They expressed an interest in your whereabouts.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO

And? What did you tell them?

GRUBER

That you were out.

CORSO

Anything else?

GRUBER

They asked if I knew whether you had recently visited Portugal.

CORSO

And?

GRUBER

I said that our guests do not make a habit of providing us with their itineraries.

CORSO extracts a 500 franc bill from his billfold and slips it into GRUBER's hand. GRUBER acknowledges this largesse with a gracious inclination of the head.

CORSO

For what it's worth, Gruber: I don't know what they think I've done, but I'm innocent.

GRUBER

(impassively)

Naturally, Mr. Corso. All our guests are.

We OPEN on the luxury hotel's facade, which bears the inscription 'HOTEL DE CRILLON', then PAN DOWN to the entrance and the forecourt, which is accessible from the main road but separated from it by a long, narrow island with a cab rank at one end. A hive of activity: HOTEL GUESTS come and go, the DOORMAN, a majestic figure in his gold-braided uniform, deferentially closes the door of a departing Rolls, a BELLHOP backs a guest's car into a gap in the already overcrowded forecourt. A cab drives up to the entrance. The DOORMAN opens the door, CORSO and THE GIRL get out. CORSO turns to pay the CABBY, the DOORMAN twitches an eyebrow at THE GIRL's jeans and sneakers. CORSO and THE GIRL enter.

Visible beyond the outer lobby, which has elevators on one side and stairs on the other., Is the palatial main lobby, with its floor and walls of honey-colored marble. That, too, is buzzing with activity.

(CONTINUED)

84 CONTINUED:

84

CORSO and THE GIRL stand aside as an elevator door opens and some camera-toting JAPANESE TOURISTS emerge. Meantime:

THE GIRL

What'll you do when you see them?

CORSO

(dryly)

Hide behind you, probably.

They enter the elevator. The doors glide shut.

85 INT. HOTEL CRILLON - CORRIDOR - DAY

85

CORSO and THE GIRL walk down the corridor, checking numbers as they go. They've almost reached the door of Suite 236-238 when it opens abruptly. They jump back in alarm. A BELLHOP emerges backside first, towing a baggage cart laden with smart Vuitton suitcases. CORSO and THE GIRL take refuge in a lateral passage a few feet to their rear as the BELLHOP sets off down the corridor in the opposite direction, leaving the door open. CORSO pads silently up to the door and enters with THE GIRL at his heels.

86 INT. HOTEL CRILLON - SUITE - DAY

86

A deserted sitting room with an old 'Herald Tribune' lying abandoned on the floor and two dirty coffee cups on the table. No sound, no signs of recent occupation aside from a thin wisp of smoke rising from the inefficiently stubbed-out remains of a small cigar. The bedroom door is ajar. THE GIRL stands watching as CORSO tiptoes over pushes it open. The room is empty, the bed unmade.

CORSO

Downstairs, quick!

87 INT. HOTEL CRILLON - LOBBY - DAY

87

CORSO and THE GIRL have used the stairs for speed's sake. Panting, they halt at the foot of the last flight and scan the spacious but crowded lobby. It's a moment before they catch sight of their quarry. The MUSTACHE is standing at the cashier's desk with LIANA beside him.

CORSO

C'mon. Better grab a cab or we'll lose them.

Heads averted, they thread their way across the lobby and make for the exit unobserved.

88 EXT. HOTEL CRILLON - CAB RANK - DAY

88

CORSO and THE GIRL have stationed themselves at the cab rank on the island.

(CONTINUED)

88 CONTINUED:

88

CORSO sees a cab approaching amid the stream of traffic and tries to flag it down, but it's taken. CORSO: Damn!

89 EXT. HOTEL CRILLON - FORECOURT - DAY

89

Meantime, in the forecourt, the DOORMAN hands LIANA into the passenger seat of the Mercedes sedan while the MUSTACHE supervises the BELLHOP as he stows their baggage in the trunk. A Rolls pulls up behind the Mercedes, closely followed by a yellow Lamborghini driven by a smartly dressed, mustachioed ARAB with a BLONDE BIMBO beside him. The ARAB gets out, leaving his keys in the ignition. Nonchalantly signaling to the DOORMAN to park his car, he disappears into the hotel with the BIMBO in tow. The DOORMAN acknowledges his gesture before smilingly accepting a tip from the MUSTACHE, who gets in behind the wheel. THE GIRL (O.S.): They're going!

90 EXT. HOTEL CRILLON - CAB RANK/FORECOURT - DAY

90

CORSO sights another cab approaching and cavorts into the roadway, waving his arms like a madman. The cab honks and swerves to avoid him, obstructing some other vehicles, which honk in their turn. It's empty. CORSO: Bastard! Frustrated yet again, he retreats to the island. Beyond his agitated figure in the forecourt, we see the Mercedes drive off.

91 EXT. HOTEL CRILLON - FORECOURT/CAB RANK - DAY

91

With a screech of tires, the yellow Lamborghini takes off fast in reverse. Skirting the island, it backs out into the oncoming traffic. Then, slammed into first, it skids to a halt beside the curb at CORSO's elbow. The passenger door opens, THE GIRL cranes over and looks up at him from behind the wheel. THE GIRL: Coming? CORSO stares at her for an instant, then jumps in. The Lamborghini sets off after the Mercedes, which is not far ahead. it threads its way into the stream of traffic, pursued for a few yards along the sidewalk by the wildly gesticulating DOORMAN.

92 INT./EXT. LAMBORGHINI/PARIS STREETS - DAY

92

THE GIRL is expertly piloting the Lamborghini through heavy traffic. The Mercedes can be seen a few cars ahead. CORSO: Couldn't you have pinched something a bit less conspicuous? THE GIRL: Don't be so picky. Most people would give their eyeteeth for a ride in this. CORSO surveys the car's luxurious interior, opens the glove compartment, removes the contents and inspects them: some CDs, the car papers, a pair of expensive wrap-around sunglasses, an Arab keffiyeh.

93 INT./EXT. LAMBORGHINI/FREEWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

93

Visible through the windshield, the Mercedes is cruising along several hundred yards ahead of the Lamborghini.

(CONTINUED)

93 CONTINUED:

CORSO

We can't sit on their tall forever.
They're bound to smell a rat.

94 EXT. FREEWAY - DUSK 94

LONG SHOT of the Lamborghini accelerating to draw level with the Mercedes.

95 EXT. MERCEDES/FREEWAY - DUSK 95

The MUSTACHE, with LIANA at his elbow, glances sideways.

96 EXT. LAMBORGHINI/FREEWAY - DUSK 96

The MUSTACHE's POV: the Lamborghini overtaking with a figure in shades and a keffiyeh at the wheel. It's THE GIRL. She looks straight ahead as she passes. No sign of

97 CORSO. 97

98 EXT. LAMBORGHINI/FREEWAY - DUSK 98

CORSO, who has been hiding below door level, sits up. After a cursory glance over his shoulder, he settles back in his seat and lights a Lucky, covertly eyeing THE GIRL.

THE GIRL

How do I look?

CORSO

You look a million. A million
barrels of oil.

99 EXT. LAMBORGHINI/FREEWAY - DUSK 99

The Lamborghini passes an exit. THE GIRL, who has discarded the keffiyeh and shades, is driving with one eye on the rearview mirror.

100 EXT. FREEWAY - DUSK 100

The Mercedes indicates right, slows, and turns off at the exit.

THE GIRL (O.S.)

Sit tight!

101 EXT. LAMBORGHINI/FREEWAY - DUSK 101

THE GIRL pulls over onto the shoulder and stands on the brakes. Throwing the car into reverse almost before it's stationary, she hurtles backward along the shoulder. A couple of cars flash their headlights and blare as the Lamborghini reaches the exit and skids to a halt, narrowly missing a large truck that has beaten it to the exit.

102 EXT. LAMBORGHINI/EXIT ROAD - DUSK

102

The Lamborghini crawls along behind the truck as it grinds up the single-lane exit road.

CORSO
(impatiently)
C'mon, c'mon!

THE GIRL blasts the truck with her horn and flashes her headlights. The truck's only response is to slow still further before pulling up at a T junction.

CORSO (CONT'D)
What in hell's the matter with him?

Clearly visible in the glare of the Lamborghini's headlights, an arm emerges from the truck's cab window and gives a prolonged, one-fingered salute. The arm disappears, the truck moves off at last and turns left across the bridge spanning the freeway. The Mercedes is nowhere in sight. The Lamborghini moves up to the T junction and stands there, engine purring.

THE GIRL
Take your pick.

CORSO
No, you. You know everything.

THE GIRL
If you say so.

She turns off right.

103 EXT. LAMBORGHINI/COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

103

It's dark now, and the Lamborghini is speeding along an avenue of poplars. No sign of the Mercedes.

THE GIRL
We lost them.

CORSO
Not at this speed. They must have gone the other way.

THE GIRL
You mean I don't know everything after all?

CORSO
Turn around.

(CONTINUED)

103 CONTINUED:

103

They pass a small intersection on the right. THE GIRL backs into it but doesn't complete the manoeuvre: something catches her eye.

THE GIRL
Thirty-ish, blond, dishy - what was
her name again?

CORSO
Telfer. Liana Telfer.

THE GIRL
No, her maiden name.

CORSO
Saint-Damien.

THE GIRL
Look.

CORSO's POV: the Lamborghini's headlights have illuminated a signpost. One of the signs reads: 'ST.-DAMIEN 2 Km.' It points the way they were going. THE GIRL turns out into the road and drives on in the original direction.

104 EXT. LAMBORGHINI/VILLAGE - NIGHT

104

THE GIRL slows as they pass the 'ST.-DAMIEN' sign at the entrance to the village itself. THE GIRL: Should we drive straight in?

CORSO
In this thing? We might as well
hang a bell around our necks. Park
here.

105 EXT. ST. DAMIEN VILLAGE - NIGHT

105

CORSO and THE GIRL walk gingerly down the old village street. A faint glow emanates from a few windows in the time-worn houses, but the street itself is utterly deserted.

106 EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

106

They pause at the mouth of a small, equally deserted square: church at one end, Mairie across the way, village stores shuttered and in darkness, two or three parked cars, none of them the Mercedes.

THE GIRL
So?

CORSO looks around irresolutely, sees light coming from the basement window of a baker's shop.

107 EXT/INT. VILLAGE BAKERY - NIGHT

107

Side by side, CORSO and THE GIRL look down through the open transom of the basement window.

Inside, a flour-smearred BAKER is deftly preparing a tray of croissants for the oven.

CORSO

Monsieur?

The BAKER looks up, wipes his hands on his smock, and walks over to the window.

BAKER

M'sieur?

CORSO

Nous cherchons la maison de Madame de Saint-Damien.

BAKER

Le chateau, vous voulez dire.

CORSO

(to THE GIRL)

Chateau! That's it - got to be.

(to the BAKER)

Ou il est, le chateau?

BAKER

(gestures)

La route apres '', glisse, m'sieur.

108 EXT. LAMBORGHINI/MINOR ROAD - NIGHT

108

THE GIRL is driving slowly along a country road flanked on one side by woods. A pair of ornate wrought-iron gates and a gatehouse loom up on the left.

CORSO

Keep going.

There's a light on in the gatehouse. They glimpse the gatekeeper leaning against his door, smoking, as they cruise past.

109 EXT. LAMBORGHINI/MINOR ROAD - NIGHT

109

The Lamborghini backs into the mouth of a farm track. THE GIRL and CORSO get out, cross the road, and strike off into the woods.

110 EXT. CHATEAU DRIVEWAY - NIGHT 110

Hugging the trees that border it on one side, CORSO and THE GIRL are making their way up a long, straight, graveled driveway. The lighted gatehouse is to their rear, the lights of the chateau can be seen ahead. Hearing the sound of a car behind them, they turn to see its headlights swing in through the gates. They quickly take cover in the trees and watch the car - a big limo - glide past, then emerge and walk on.

111 EXT. CHATEAU ST. DAMIEN - NIGHT 111

CORSO and THE GIRL observe the chateau, a substantial 17th century mansion, from the edge of the trees. The forecourt, in which come 20 expensive-looking cars are parked, one of them the Mercedes, is illuminated by the flambeaux on either side of the portico and the lights inside the building. The limo has pulled up at the foot of the steps, and the occupants, a smartly dressed ELDERLY COUPLE, are being greeted by a tuxedoed BUTLER while their suitcases are removed from the trunk and carried in after them by a MANSERVANT.

EXT/INT. CHATEAU/GREAT HALL - NIGHT

CORSO and THE GIRL have worked their way around to the side of the chateau. One of the lighted windows gives them a view of the upper reaches of the chateau's great hall, with its balustraded minstrel gallery and lofty, vaulted ceiling. They climb on a stone bench for a better look.

Inside, overlooked by an array of ancestral portraits, some 50 GUESTS are inaudibly conversing in groups. Men and women alike are attired in long black robes resembling monks' habits, and all have silver pentacles suspended from their necks on silver chains. Their cowls are thrown back to reveal the heads and faces beneath. A motley assortment of people, most of them middle- or late middle-aged, one or two of oriental origin. No sign of Liana or the Mustache.

THE GIRL
See them anywhere?

CORSO
No.

THE GIRL
They aren't there.

112 EXT/INT. CHATEAU/KITCHEN - NIGHT 112

CORSO and THE GIRL continue to make their cautious way around the house. Peering through a semi-basement window, they see TWO CHEFS chopping vegetables at a big kitchen table. They pause, at a loss, and look up at the house.

(CONTINUED)

112 CONTINUED:

112

Several of the second-floor windows are illuminated, and one of them has some creeper-covered trelliswork running up to its balcony.

113 EXT/INT. CHATEAU- BALCONY/LIANA'S BOUDOIR - NIGHT

113

THE GIRL, with CORSO close behind her, has just reached the top of the trelliswork. She clambers over onto the balcony. CORSO scales the last few feet, reaches for the balustrade, straddles it and joins her.

Together, they peer through the French windows. With them, we see a bedroom decorated in a very feminine style all frills, flounces, and elegant Louis Quinze furniture. Two of Liana's Vuitton suitcases are on the floor near the dainty four-poster. A third, with her discarded clothes beside it, is lying open on the bed itself. LIANA has stripped to her panties. CORSO and THE GIRL watch as she slips them off, goes to a wardrobe, and takes out a black robe and silver pentacle like the ones we saw downstairs. Pulling the robe over her head, she smooths it down, dons the pentacle, and inspects herself in a cheval mirror in the corner of the room.

CORSO takes advantage of her preoccupation to try the French windows. They won't budge. He turns to THE GIRL and shrugs, then raises his foot and kicks the glass in. LIANA spins around with a terrified cry and stands there transfixed. CORSO reaches inside, turns the knob, opens the French windows and steps into the room. THE GIRL follows.

LIANA

You!

CORSO

Where is it?

LIANA

How dare you!

CORSO

That book isn't yours, Madame. I need it.

LIANA

Get out of here, both of you!

CORSO goes over to the bed and empties the suitcase onto the floor. Among its contents is 'The Nine Gates'. LIANA instinctively lunges for it, but THE GIRL blocks her.

CORSO

(to THE GIRL)

Careful, she bites!

He's stooping to retrieve the book when the door opens and the MUSTACHE, robed and barefooted, stands framed in the doorway.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO turns quickly with the book in his hand, THE GIRL stiffens. LIANA makes a dive for the bedside table and produces a chrome-plated automatic from the drawer, flips the safety catch.

LIANA
(to CORSO and THE GIRL)
Don't move, either of you.
(to the MUSTACHE)
Get the book, Bruno.

CORSO takes a tentative step backward as the MUSTACHE approaches him with his left hand extended. He reluctantly surrenders the book. The MUSTACHE rewards him for his co-operation with a vicious right hook to the jaw. CORSO goes down, losing his glasses yet again. Groggily, he crawls around in search of them. The MUSTACHE joins LIANA, steering well clear of THE GIRL. He hands her 'The Nine Gates' and carefully transfers the automatic from her hand to his.

LIANA (CONT'D)
Take them downstairs and lock them
up. We'll deal with them later,
there's no time now.

MUSTACHE
to CORSO, Italian accent

Turn around. CORSO, who has scrambled to his feet, complies. The MUSTACHE applies the muzzle of the automatic to the nape of his neck.

MUSTACHE (CONT'D)
(to THE GIRL)
You. Go first. Any trouble, I blow
his brains.

THE GIRL makes for the door. The MUSTACHE prods CORSO into motion. They exit. LIANA stares after them for a moment, clasping 'The Nine Gates' to her bosom.

A long passage lined with more ancestral portraits. The ancient floorboards creek as THE GIRL obediently walks ahead of CORSO and the MUSTACHE, whose automatic is levelled at CORSO's back. They reach the end of the passage.

MUSTACHE
Go left. Down the stairs.

They descend a staircase to ground level. Another long passage confronts them, much like the first but floored with marble.

MUSTACHE
Avanti, avanti!

A door at the end leads into a stone-flagged passage with whitewashed walls. They make their way along it until they reach a heavy oak door.

MUSTACHE (CONT'D)
(to THE GIRL)
Open it!

THE GIRL does so to reveal a small landing and a flight of stone steps leading downward. She stops short: the steps have no guard rail and the cellar beneath is shrouded in darkness.

116 INT. CHATEAU - WINE CELLAR - NIGHT

116

The MUSTACHE prods CORSO through the doorway until ALL THREE are on the landing, then throws a light switch. Bare bulbs shed little light on the steps but illuminate a large vaulted chamber below. It's the chateau's wine cellar: oak barrels and racks of bottles thick with dust and cobwebs are housed behind an iron grille with a door in it. The door is ajar, the key in the lock.

MUSTACHE
(to THE GIRL)
Move!

THE GIRL sets off down the steps. CORSO follows with the MUSTACHE at his heels. Halfway down, CORSO pretends to stumble: he crouches and turns in a single movement. The MUSTACHE, following close behind, trips over him. CORSO seizes his robe and yanks at it, helping him on his way. Simultaneously:

CORSO
(to THE GIRL)
Watch out!

THE GIRL plasters herself against the wall to avoid the MUSTACHE's somersaulting body. The automatic escapes from his hand and slithers across the flagstones as he comes to rest, with a sickening thud, at the foot of the steps. THE GIRL follows him down and picks it up. CORSO reaches the foot of the steps and rolls the MUSTACHE over on his back. He's out cold, with blood oozing from a broken nose.

THE GIRL
(faintly admiring)
I didn't know you had it in you.

CORSO
Another thing you didn't know?

(CONTINUED)

116 CONTINUED:

116

He takes hold of the MUSTACHE's ankles and, with THE GIRL's assistance, hauls him through the grille into the inner cellar. He stares down at the man for a moment.

CORSO (CONT'D)

Hey, give me a hand. I want his gear.

He starts to peel of the MUSTACHE's robe from the feet up, revealing a pair of exceptionally hairy legs.

117 INT. CHATEAU - WINE CELLAR - NIGHT 117

CORSO shuts the grille door, locks it, and tosses the key into a corner. The MUSTACHE's naked, motionless body can be vaguely discerned through the bars.

118 INT. CHATEAU - PASSAGE - NIGHT 118

CORSO and THE GIRL cautiously retrace their steps along the marble-floored passage. CORSO is wearing the Mustache's robe and pentacle over his clothes with his shoes and trouser bottoms incongruously visible below the hem. They pass the stairs they descended and continue on their way.

They turn a corner. As they do so, they hear a faint, intermittent hum. They pause to listen, then walk on. The sound grows louder and more distinct: somewhere in the chateau, voices are chanting in unison.

Turning another corner, they find themselves in an anteroom that terminates in two massive double doors. The chanting is coming from beyond them. CORSO walks over to the doors with THE GIRL at his heels. He grasps the handle.

THE GIRL

(hisses)

No! Up to the gallery.

119 INT. CHATEAU - BACK STAIRS/GALLERY - NIGHT 119

The chanting is even louder now. CORSO and THE GIRL reach the top of some un-carpeted stairs and cautiously open a small door. A wave of sound hits them.

120 INT. CHATEAU - GALLERY/GREAT HALL - NIGHT 120

They steal through the doorway into the shadowy gallery, which runs around three sides of the Great Hall, and peer over the balustrade.

They've emerged near the top of a spiral staircase leading down from the gallery to a point near the double doors at the rear of the hall.

(CONTINUED)

At the far end of the huge room in a dais draped in black with some shallow steps leading up to it. On the wall above the dais hangs an inverted silver crucifix; on the dais itself, which is flanked by a pair of outsize black candles in three-foot silver candlesticks, LIANA stands facing the hall from behind a silver lectern on which reposes 'The Nine Gates'.

Arrayed in the body of the hall are the 50 GUESTS, now cowed, each holding a lighted black candle. The flickering candle flames bathe the whole scene in tremulous chiaroscuro. LIANA and the GUESTS are taking it in turns, like priest and congregation, to intone passages from the Latin text of 'The Nine Gates'.

CORSO

(quietly, to THE GIRL)

You stay here and cover me. I'm going down.

Pulling the cowl over his head, he sneaks down the spiral staircase, secretes himself in the rear rank of GUESTS, and concentrates on LIANA and the book as the litany continues. All at once, unseen by us, the doors swing open with a crash and BALKAN's deep bass voice punctures the air on a derisive note.

BALKAN (O.S.)

Mumbo-jumbo-mumbo-jumbo-mumbo-jumbo ...

The GUESTS stop chanting, and fifty cowed heads turn to look for the source of this unseemly interruption. Up on the dais, LIANA freezes.

BALKAN (CONT'D)

Mumbo-jumbo-mumbo-jumbo-mumbo-jumbo...

Looking over-life-size in his dark and elegant double-breasted suit, he strides toward the dais. Any GUESTS who fail to get out of his way in time are brusquely elbowed aside. LIANA watches him, transfixed, as he climbs the steps and turns to face the bemused GUESTS.

BALKAN (CONT'D)

Look around you - yes, all of you. What do you see?

The GUESTS involuntarily turn to look at each other.

BALKAN (CONT'D)

I'll tell you: a bunch of buffoons in fancy dress. What are you expecting, an apparition? I'm the only apparition you'll see tonight.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BALKAN (CONT'D)

You really think the Prince of Darkness would deign to manifest himself to the likes of you? He never has and he never will - never!

He closes 'The Nine Gates' with a snap and holds it up.

BALKAN (CONT'D)

You read from his book, yes, but you have no conception of its true power. I alone have grasped its secret. I alone have fathomed the Master's grand design. I alone am worthy to enjoy the fruits of that discovery: absolute power to determine my own destiny.

LIANA finds her voice at last.

LIANA

You're insane, Boris.
(puts out her hand)
Give it back at once.

BALKAN rounds on her.

BALKAN

As for you, Liana de Saint-Damien, you're even guiltier than the rest of this pathetic rabble. You have at least some idea of what this book can do in the right hands, yet you lend yourself to these farcical proceedings, these orgies of ageing flesh conducted in the Master's name. You're a charlatan!

LIANA tries to grab the book, but BALKAN holds it above his head. LIANA claws his cheeks in desperation. BALKAN clasps his face, dropping the book. LIANA makes a dive for it, but BALKAN pounces on her. They roll over in a clinch, struggling fiercely. BALKAN grabs LIANA by the throat. She tries to break his grip, but he redoubles it.

Halfway down the dais steps with BALKAN on top of her, she fights for breath. Her suffocated, agonized face is turned toward the hall. The GUESTS shrink back in horror, some of them dropping their candles. Hysterical screams rend the air. CORSO comes to life.

Hampered by his robe, he makes for dais as fast as he can, scattering frightened GUESTS in the process. He takes hold of BALKAN's shoulders and tries to haul him off LIANA. BALKAN, still throttling her, turns to look. He glares at CORSO through his heavy horn-rims, his features contorted with rage and stupefaction. Then, removing one hand from LIANA's

(CONTINUED)

throat, he deals CORSO a backhanded blow that sends him reeling. LIANA seizes the chance to break free. She crawls away and almost regains her fact, but BALKAN is too quick for her: grabbing her pentacle chain from behind, he proceeds to garrotte her with it. LIANA, now on her knees, scrabbles unavailingly at the chain that is biting into her neck. Her face turns purple, her tongue begins to protrude. CORSO looks around wildly for a weapon. He seizes one of the three-foot candlesticks and raises it over his head. Suddenly:

THE GIRL (O.S.)

Don't, Corso!

Startled, he lowers the candlestick and looks up: THE GIRL is perched on the gallery balustrade just above him. Too preoccupied with Balkan and Liana to wonder what her game is, CORSO raises the candlestick once more. THE GIRL lands on top of CORSO, bearing him to the ground, and immobilizes him with a hammerlock.

CORSO

Get off me! He'll kill her!

THE GIRL

Leave them.

BALKAN completes his grisly work: LIANA's purple face is all too reminiscent of Baroness Kessler's. With a final tug at the chain, he plants one foot in the small of LIANA's back and sends her limp body sprawling across the floor of the hall. Screams and cries of horror go up from the GUESTS, who have recoiled still further. BALKAN straightens up, a somewhat dishevelled but still imposing figure despite the scratches on his cheeks. Even his horn-rims are still in place. He leans forward, eyes narrowed in a mock menacing way, and stamps his foot.

BALKAN

(in a voice like thunder)

Boooh!

With more hysterical screams and cries of dismay, the GUESTS turn tall and flee the hall like a herd of panic-stricken cattle, jostling each other in their eagerness to get out the door. Calmly, without so much as a glance at THE GIRL, CORSO, or LIANA's corpse, BALKAN smooths his hair down, picks up 'The Nine Gates', and strides majestically after them. Silence falls. THE GIRL releases her grip on CORSO's arm, gets off him and rises to her knees. He sits up, nursing his elbow and staring at her with blank incomprehension.

CORSO

Why did you do it?

THE GIRL

Some things are meant to happen.
That was one of them.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO

Don't give me that crap again! You were working for him all along!

THE GIRL

Funny, I thought you were.

CORSO

You played me for a sucker, the two of you. I don't intend to take the rap for that maniac.

THE GIRL

He just murdered someone with a roomful of witnesses. That lets you off the hook for the other killings. You should be grateful.

CORSO

I'm ecstatic.

He gets to his feet. We hear the sound of cars starting up and driving off in a hurry. THE GIRL rises too, starts to pat the dust of his robe. CORSO impatiently evades her hand.

CORSO (CONT'D)

Where's he off to?

THE GIRL

What do you care? Your job is done. This is as far as you need to go.

CORSO

The hell it is! The sonofabitch owes me the other half of my fee.

THE GIRL

(ironically)

Of course, it's just business. I thought your curiosity had gotten the better of you.

CORSO

Okay, so what's meant to happen next?

THE GIRL

You really want to know?

THE GIRL, with CORSO red-eyed and unshaven beside her, is driving along a country road bordered by rolling fields wreathed in gray mist. They've appropriated Liana's Mercedes sedan.

122 EXT. MERCEDES/FREEWAY - DAY 122

CORSO has taken over the wheel. THE GIRL is fast asleep with her head on his shoulder. The deserted freeway runs across a viaduct that spans a valley hundreds of feet below. The hazy blue shapes of mountains can be glimpsed in the distance.

123 EXT. MERCEDES/MOUNTAIN ROAD - SUNSET 123

THE GIRL is back behind the wheel, CORSO smoking. Dazzled by the setting sun, THE GIRL lowers the visor. The landscape has become bleaker and more mountainous. Switchbacks are visible ahead.

124 EXT. MERCEDES/MOUNTAIN ROAD - DUSK 124

The Mercedes rounds a bend. Visible in the distance, crisply silhouetted against the afterglow, is a castle. It's the one of which we saw a backlighted photograph on Balkan's wall.

125 EXT. CASTLE - DUSK 125

THE GIRL pulls up some distance from the archway that was once the castle gate. A dark green Range Rover is already parked beside it. CORSO and THE GIRL get out and briefly survey the derelict building. A glimmer of light is issuing from the arrow slits in one of the turrets.

126 EXT. CASTLE COURTYARD - DUSK 126

CORSO and THE GIRL cross the deserted courtyard, which is littered with fallen masonry.

127 EXT. CASTLE STEPS/BATTLEMENTS - DUSK 127

CORSO and THE GIRL climb a dilapidated flight of stone steps to the battlements and walk along them to the tower. They pause outside the moldering old door and listen. A man's voice is faintly audible. CORSO puts his hand on the handle. THE GIRL gropes in the pocket of her duffel coat and produces the chromium-plated automatic, holds it out. CORSO hesitates briefly, then stuffs it in his jacket pocket. He opens the door and enters, followed by THE GIRL.

128 INT. TURRET CHAMBER - NIGHT 128

CORSO and THE GIRL are looking down into the interior of the turret, which forms a cylindrical chamber. They're on a small landing from which a steep flight of unprotected stone steps curves down and around the inner wall to the floor of the chamber. The floor, littered with debris including worm-eaten beams that have fallen from the ceiling far above, consists of massive, age-old planks.

A large circle has been chalked in the middle of the floor, and within it a square divided into nine boxes numbered 1-9.

(CONTINUED)

Each box contains some unrelated object: a rusty knife, a piece of cord, a stone, a gold ring, a serpentine bracelet, a glass vial, a small pile of earth, a quill pen, an hourglass.

The chamber is illuminated by half a dozen kerosene lamps located around the circle but outside it. Also near the circle is a camper's collapsible table with various objects on it: a black briefcase, 'The Nine Gates', a magnifying glass, a vacuum flask and mug. On the floor beside the table are a large Jerrican and an open suitcase with more books spilling out of it. The voice we heard from outside is that of BALKAN, but a BALKAN unlike any we have seen before: no jacket or necktie, shirt sleeves rolled ' up, vest half unbuttoned, strands of gray hair falling over his scratched and sweating face, cheeks flushed, eyes ablaze with excitement. He's kneeling in front of the numbered boxes and gabbling to himself in an expressionless monotone:

BALKAN

... eight doors come before the
Serpent that guards the word, Teth,
Enea, Novem, Oded, the number nine,
which holds the final secret, the
mystery of mysteries. The Serpent
is the beast that always sleeps
with one eye open and is reflected
in the Mirror of Knowledge.

(giggles triumphantly)

Eight engravings plus one, or one
plus eight, which coincides with
the number that St. John of Patmos
attributed to the Beast: 666...

CORSO

(to THE GIRL)

He needs therapy...

Feverishly, BALKAN proceeds to scrawl some numerals on the floor with a piece of chalk, muttering as he does so.

BALKAN

Six plus six plus six equals
eighteen. One and eight.

(even more triumphantly)

One plus eight equals nine!

CORSO starts to descend the steps. THE GIRL stays behind, sits down on the top step, props her chin on her hand, and watches the proceedings. BALKAN rises with chalk dust all over the knees of his pants. He goes to his briefcase and takes out a sheaf of torn engravings. CORSO has reached the foot of the steps. BALKAN, turning to resume his place in the circle, catches sight of him. He freezes in disbelief, and a long moment passes before he speaks.

BALKAN (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

(CONTINUED)

CORSO

I thought I'd drop in before they
put you behind bars.

BALKAN

Go away!

CORSO

We had a deal, remember?

BALKAN

A deal?! What impertinence! You
bungled it, damn you! You failed me
all along the line! Thanks to your
lack of initiative, I was compelled
to do my own dirty work. And I did
it! I got these myself! See, here
they are!

(brandishes the
engravings, speaks with
mounting vehemence)

Nine engravings or nine doors, and
only an initiate can open them.
Each door has two keys, each
engraving discloses a number, a
secret element and keyword to be
interpreted in the light of reason
and the Cabbala, the one true
philosophy!

CORSO

I want my money.

BALKAN

Don't you understand what's going
on here?

He returns to the circle, kneels down again, and deals out
the engravings like playing cards, one to a box, leaving
three boxes empty. Meantime:

BALKAN (CONT'D)

You have before you the mystery of
which men have dreamed throughout
the centuries. Thousands have died
an agonizing death in hopes of just
a glimpse of what you're about to
see!

CORSO

Yeah? What's that, Old Nick in
person?

(CONTINUED)

BALKAN

Don't be ridiculous! He has never appeared to anyone, never! He's a spirit - the spirit of pure evil. He manifests himself through his servants, of whom I'm proud to be one!

He rises, walks quickly over to the little table, and opens 'The Nine Gates'. Turning over several pages, he tears out an engraving. His voice betrays rising excitement, his face assumes a look of insane fervour.

BALKAN (CONT'D)

Three copies, but only nine of their twenty-seven engravings hold the key, and I have them all!

(tears out two more engravings in quick succession)

I have only to complete the sequence. Then the Serpent will enter the seal of Saturn, and I - I shall enter the Ninth Gate!

CORSO

Cut the crap and write me a cheque.

BALKAN returns to the circle, kneels down once more and neatly positions the three engravings in the empty boxes. Then he rises, goes to the table, and pours himself a drink from the vacuum flask. He gargles with it, swallows, and shakes himself like a wet dog. Whatever the flask contained, it seems to have invigorated him. Seizing the Jerrican, he removes the cap and dribbles gasoline around the circle, then picks up one of the kerosene lamps and hurls it at the floor. The lamp smashes and ignites the gasoline. Instantly, he's ringed with fire. He draws himself up and stands erect in the center of the circle with flames dancing all around him.

BALKAN

I give you my allegiance, Master. I surrender myself unto you body and soul. Let me fear neither noose, nor sword, nor poison. Let me walk unscathed among lepers and the plague-ridden. Erase me from the Book of Life and inscribe me in the black Book of Death. Let it be no! Let it be so now!

(CONTINUED)

His fervent voice and the wild-eyed, demented look on his face are such that not even CORSO is tempted to break the momentary silence that ensues.

BALKAN (CONT'D)
(ecstatically)
Yes, master, yes! Oh, thank you,
thank you! I can feel the power
flowing through me like an electric
current, rendering me capable of
any achievement, mental or
physical! I could float on air,
walk on water.

He stoops and dabbles his hands in the ring of fire.

BALKAN (CONT'D)
See? I plunge my hands in fire and
feel no heat!

He picks up the Jerrican and inverts it over his head,
dousing himself in the contents, then hurls it aside.

CORSO
Hey, don't be stupid!

But BALKAN is deaf to reason.

BALKAN
(in a mounting frenzy)
Admay, Eloy, Agla, Zatel, Gebal,
Elimi, Ashtoreth, Moloch, Shamash,
Dagon...

With a whoosh, he himself catches fire. Flames play over his
ecstatic figure.

BALKAN (CONT'D)
It's miraculous! I feel nothing,
nothing at all!

He emits another triumphant laugh that soars up the scale
until it becomes a high-pitched scream of agony. He starts to
caper around, slapping at his clothes, his face, his hair.
CORSO has regained his feet. He takes the automatic from his
pocket and sends it slithering across the floor and through
the ring of flames.

CORSO
Here, you idiot!

He retreats up the steps with horror written on his face. THE
GIRL has risen to her feet. He takes her hand and, with a
last backward glance, hustles her outside.

129 EXT. CASTLE COURTYARD - NIGHT 129

Balkan's wild screams reverberate around the walls as CORSO and THE GIRL hurry across the courtyard.

130 EXT. CASTLE - NIGHT 130

CORSO and THE GIRL are standing beside the Mercedes. Smoke and tongues of flame are issuing from the arrow slits of Balkan's tower. His screams rise in a crescendo. Then a gunshot cuts them off like a knife.

CORSO

He really thought it would work.

THE GIRL

He wasn't to know it wouldn't.

CORSO stares at her, momentarily puzzled, then at the blazing castle, then back at her.

CORSO

You didn't do anything to help him,
Greeneyes, not this time.

THE GIRL

I'm your guardian angel, remember?

She lays her palm against his cheek, then crooks her hand around the nape of his neck and draws his face toward hers, kisses him tenderly on the lips. CORSO returns her kiss. He folds her in his arms and holds her close. The fiery glow dances over their entwined figures.

131 EXT. CASTLE - NIGHT 131

LONG SHOT of the castle ablaze. The flames have spread from Balkan's tower to the rest of the building. Smoke and flames are now belching from it. The sky overhead is tinged with crimson.

132 INT. PARIS HOTEL - BATHROOM/BEDROOM/CORRIDOR - EARLY MORNING 132

CORSO, his hair damp from the shower and a towel around his waist, is halfway through shaving when there's a knock on the bathroom door. One cheek daubed with foam, he opens it to find himself confronted by the FLOOR WAITER, check pad and ballpoint in hand.

FLOOR WAITER

Bonjour, m'sieur. Votre petit
dejeuner.

CORSO

Oh. Sure.

(CONTINUED)

Taking the pad, he emerges into the bedroom and scribbles his signature, then stops short: there's a breakfast cart in the middle of the room, but the bed is empty. No sign of The Girl or her clothes.

CORSO (CONT'D)

Where is she?

WAITER

Pardon?

CORSO

Madame, ou elle est?

FLOOR WAITER

Je ne 'ai pas vue, m'sieur.

He makes for the door and exits. CORSO catches hold of the door just as it's closing, puts his head out into the corridor, looks right and left. No one in sight but the FLOOR WAITER, who casts a puzzled glance over his shoulder as he walks off.

CORSO, now dressed but unshaven, hurries over to the reception desk, where GRUBER is on duty. GRUBER greets him with an almost imperceptible inclination of the head.

GRUBER

Good morning, Mr. Corso.

CORSO

Morning, Gruber. The young lady I came with, have you seen her?

GRUBER

Yea, sir. She went out not long ago.

He reaches behind him and produces a folded message slip from one of the pigeonholes.

GRUBER (CONT'D)

She asked me to give you this.

He hands the slip to CORSO, who opens it. With him, we read:

'See you around, maybe.'

And below:

'PS. The 9th Engraving was a forgery.'

134 EXT. TOLEDO STREET/ALLEY - DAY

134

CORSO's footsteps echo as he walks along one of Toledo's narrow medieval streets. The steel-framed glasses with the cracked lens have been replaced by a new pair with gold frames. He's wearing a smart new overcoat and has a new leather bag slung from his shoulder. He rounds a corner and heads down the deserted alleyway we saw in Scene 27. No scaffolding, just sandblasted walls and freshly painted window frames and grilles. He reaches the doorway leading to the inner courtyard, hears a woman's strident cries, bumps into THE BOY, who comes running out as before.

135 EXT. TOLEDO - COURTYARD/CENIZA BROS/WORKSHOP - DAY

135

CORSO crosses the courtyard to the steps that led down to the Cenizas' workshop. He stops short and stares. The old door - 'HERMANOS CENIZA - RESTAURACION DE LIBROS' - has been taken off its hinges and propped on its side against the basement wall. The display window is just a gaping hole: the window frame has been ripped out, exposing the masonry surrounding it. The whirr of a power tool can be heard. CORSO, looking puzzled, descends the steps.

136 INT. TOLEDO - CENIZA BROS - WORKSHOP - DAY

136

CORSO pauses in the doorway and surveys the interior. The hand press has disappeared and the floor is littered with debris. Pale rectangular patches on the grey walls indicate where counters and cabinets have been ripped out. TWO SPANISH WORKMEN are busy detaching an old cabinet from the wall with an electric screwdriver.

CORSO

Oiga!

He has to repeat himself before they interrupt their activities.

WORKMAN

Seftor?

CORSO

Los Hermanos Ceniza?

WORKMAN

Los Ceniza?

(glances at the 2ND
WORKMAN)

Estan muertos.

CORSO

Como muertos? Quando?

WORKMAN

Oh, hace anos, anos.

(CONTINUED)

CORSO

ANOS?

The 2ND WORKMAN comes over, wiping his hands on his apron.

WORKMAN

Ingles?

CORSO

Americana.

(WORKMAN)

(as if that explained
everything)

Ah... They dead, many years.

CORSO (CONT'D)

(more and more puzzled)

But they were here not long ago - I
spoke with them.

The 2ND WORKMAN looks at his colleague, shrugs and chuckles
as if to convey that Corso is crazy, like most foreigners.

WORKMAN

Disculpe.

He indicates that CORSO is in the way. Utterly disconcerted,
CORSO backs up as they manhandle the cabinet away from the
wall and tilt it forward prior to laying it face down on the
floor. As they do so, a dusty piece of paper slides off the
top of the cabinet and seesaws to the floor like a falling
leaf. Instinctively, CORSO stoops and picks it up. He looks
at it idly, then more closely. His eyes widen. It's the Ninth
Engraving: THE WOMAN RIDING A SEVEN-HEADED DRAGON WITH A
CASTLE ABLAZE IN THE BACKGROUND. The woman's face bears a
strong resemblance to that of The Girl.

CORSO walks back along the alleyway with the engraving in his
hand. His receding figure dwindles to a speck.

THE END