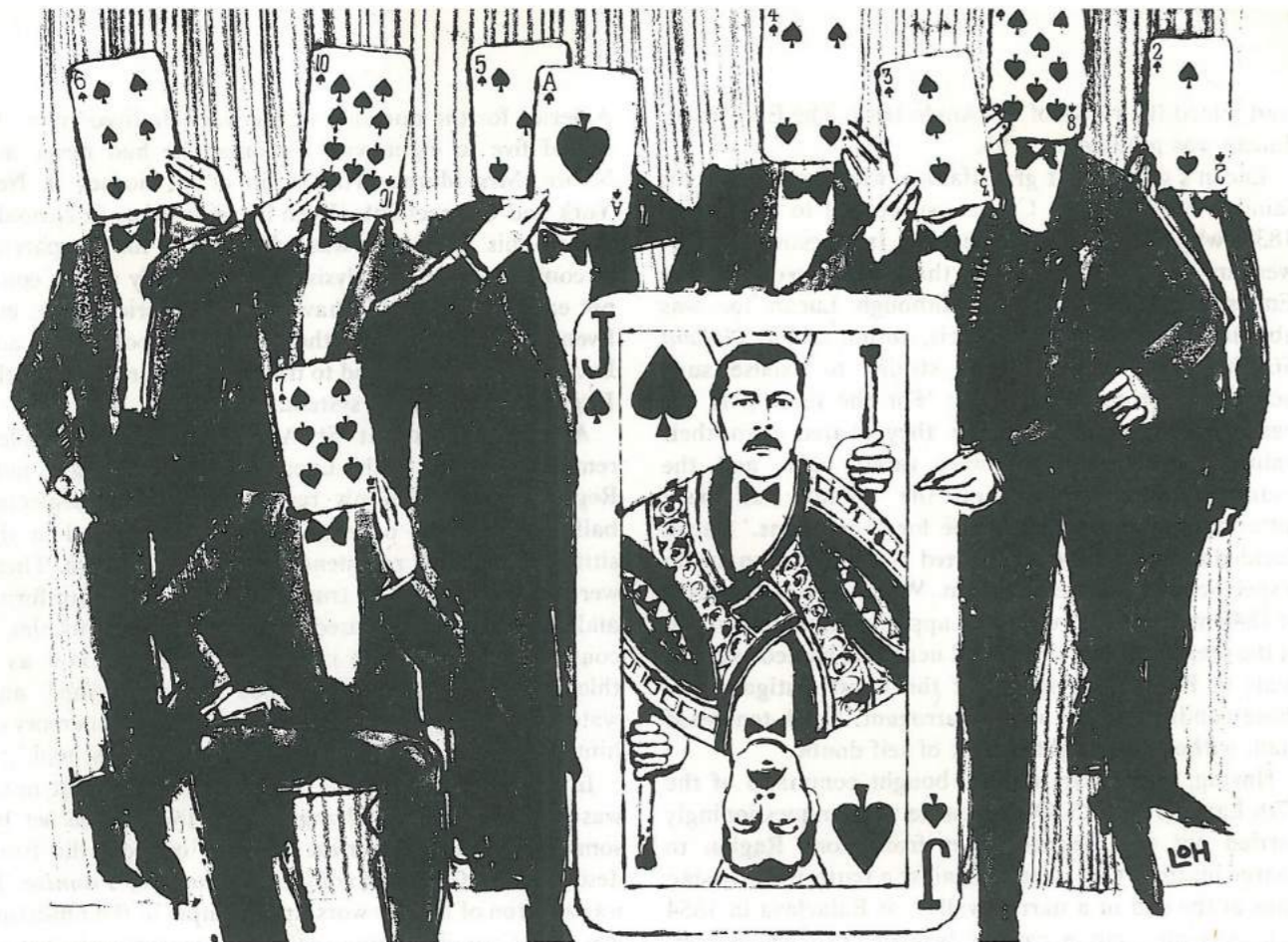


the new review

VOLUME 3 NUMBER 26 90p/USA & CANADA \$2

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A BAD DAY FOR ETON

James Fox on *The Lucan Saga*, Chapter Two

Richard John Bingham, 7th Earl of Lucan, has been missing since 7th November 1974. The Metropolitan Police have a warrant out for his arrest on a double charge of murder and attempted murder. A London inquest in June last year named him as the man who had killed his children's nanny. His estranged wife, Veronica, gave a vivid description of his attempts that night to murder her as well.

Since the 39 year old peer vanished into the night from Belgrave Square, the search has moved from the UK, through the USA, South America, Swaziland, Mozambique, South Africa, the Caribbean, France, Germany and Portugal. Fresh 'sightings' are still reported to Scotland Yard every week, and followed up in vain. In the first 48 hours after the incident, Lucan escaped the police traps despite two telephone calls to his mother who was sitting with police officers. Then there are two hotly contested theories whose interest, as in all great unsolved mysteries, will never wane: is he alive, or is he dead and if so was his suicide so exceptional as to leave no trace of his corpse?

The Lucan murder, however, has an extra fascination which puts it beyond the range of British suburban wife slaying. In the case of Lucan, the light was thrown on the English upper class, and therefore on the whole water-logged English class system itself. It showed them with their backs to the wall, ultra sensitive to exposure, with

James Fox covered the Lucan murder for The Sunday Times Magazine. Parts of his Sunday Times piece (June 8, 1975) have been incorporated into the early section of this article.

political views far to the right. When the police began questioning the several hundred people in Lucan's three address books, and came up against that world united on foundations of class, privilege and wealth, they were oddly unfamiliar with it, and were taken by surprise. So were readers of the *Sunday Times Magazine* — where their utterances were quoted at length, much to their irritation.

I wrote the story in question. I took weeks to collect the information, and in the end became involved as a piece of the drama which unfolded throughout 1975—one of the longest-running topics of obsessive gossip in the last decade.

The proof of the role that class played in the tragedy itself is to be found in the awesome probability that given their different backgrounds, and the secret damage it did them both, 'Lucky' Lucan and his wife Veronica were embarked on a course of tragedy from the moment they met. When it happened, Lady Lucan, the victim of an attempted murder, was subjected to an almost hysterical degree of misogynistic abuse, from men and women alike.

Veronica Lucan had married into a family that commanded, if nothing else, a certain genealogical respect. The Bingham were an old West of England family. Robert de Bingham became Bishop of Salisbury in 1229, and the tomb of Richard Bingham, a distinguished Elizabethan soldier, is in Westminster Abbey. In the eighteenth century they bought vast estates in Ireland

and joined the ranks of the Anglo Irish. The Earldom of Lucan was granted in 1795.

Lucan's great great grandfather, who first sullied the family's reputation at Crimea, succeeded to the title in 1839, while he was managing the Irish estates. These were in even worse condition than those owned by the English absentee landlords, although Lucan too was absent a great deal. John Harris, author of *The Gallant Six Hundred*, a writer who strains to excuse such behaviour, wrote nevertheless: 'For the most part the peasants lived in huts which they shared with their animals and their rents were rarely paid, and the country, dependent only on the potato, had been tottering on the edge of famine for generations.' Lucan decided to consolidate and evicted hundreds of tenants in a spectacularly ruthless fashion. When the crop failures of 1845 and 1846 led up to the appalling human disaster of the great famine in Ireland, Lucan was hauled over the coals in Parliament as one of the worst instigators of those conditions. He was an arrogant, quick-tempered man, without the slightest hint of self doubt.

Having, some years earlier, bought command of the 17th Lancers for £25,000, it was he who unquestioningly carried out the illegible order from Lord Raglan to charge insanely with cavalry against a battery of Russian guns at the end of a narrow valley, at Balaclava in 1854—thus wiping out a cavalry brigade, two whole regiments, in twenty minutes.

Lucan survived the Charge—he was bringing up reinforcements—and lived to the age of 89. Sir William Fraser in a book published in 1893 wrote: 'Lord Lucan was pleasant enough as a companion; but not one whom I should like to have served under: in argument his temper seemed to get the better of him: I should say it was a naturally violent one.'

The family traditions of 'military expertise' lasted until the Second World War, when the present Lord Lucan's father, Pat Lucan, brother of Lady Alexander of Tunis, commanded the Coldstream Guards from 1942 to 1945.

After the war he became a socialist, which was viewed by some members of the family as a tragedy almost on a par with the Light Brigade fiasco. Indeed he became Labour Chief Whip in the House of Lords. Asked once why he had become a socialist, he replied that after the war it had struck him, on his visits to London, that a few people—notably his fellow officers—'seem to have all the champagne and the girls—and others don't have anything'.

The Dowager Countess of Lucan, who survives him, is still Secretary of the St John's Wood Labour Party—a grey-haired, bony lady, typical of Hampstead between the wars, well-supplied with para-medical knowledge and a fondness for the sciences. Her allegiance to the Labour party prompted one of Lucan's right-wing friends to say that she is 'to all intents and purposes a communist', and another to say that he believes she was 'trained in Moscow'.

Like the rest of his class, however, Lucan's education, despite socialist parents, was very classical. But before he had even reached his preparatory school, he had been sent, as were many children of his background, to

America for the duration of the war. He lived from the age of five to eight with a woman he had never met before, Mrs Marcia Tucker, in grand houses in New York and Connecticut. When he returned to St Arnold's School, his behaviour was odd enough for his parents to consider psycho-analysis. He was totally silent, could not eat his food, would have fits of hysterical rage, etc. Eventually analysis was thought to be too drastic and Lucan submitted instead to the varying repressions of the English public-school system.

A contemporary at St Arnold's, Jonathan Miller, remembers going to the Lucan's house in London, near Regent's Park. 'I dimly remember a huge neglected ballroom, and his parents sitting stiffly around in the sitting room, with regimental drums everywhere. There were lots of dressing-up trunks with sabres and uniforms and so on. I am fascinated by what happened to him. I could never equate the photographs you see now as a thickened, sullen, moustachioed figure, flushed and water-logged, joylessly playing cards, with my memory of him as a rather wiry and mischievous boy at school.'

In the early fifties Eton, where Lucan was sent next, was fundamentally unchanged from the pattern set by some of its great Victorian teachers, or from the Eton described by Cyril Connolly in *Enemies of Promise*. It was an Eton of athlete worship, a temple to the philistinism that Connolly, among others, repeatedly pointed to as characteristic of the English upper class. Boys who had large fortunes and prospects of secure futures made it 'hot' for those who did not. It was divided into scholars—those boys who had gained scholarships into the school and lived in cloisters and wore different clothes—and the 'oppidans' who sneered at them and who lived in houses outside the old buildings. The harsh discipline meted out was still largely in the hands of senior boys, who as a reward for conformity had enormous powers and privileges which they never forgot in later life—unless strength of character saved them. The headmaster in Lucan's time, Robert Birley, was known as 'red Robert', for the sole reason that he had once spoken against apartheid.

Lucan, who was of medium intelligence and no great athlete, moved through the school like hundreds of other rich and unambitious boys—doing little work and concentrating all their efforts on the richly ornamented social life of the school.

His housemaster, Fred Coleridge, now the Vice Provost of Eton, and descendant of the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, said: 'He took an average middle of the road course and ended up as Captain of the House over about 47 other boys in his last half ('half' in Eton parlance means term). He did quite well and went off to the Army for his National Service. I always expected him to end up as something in the City.'

In February 1953, as Lord Bingham, he joined the Army, and passed out of officer training school as a second lieutenant in October 1953. Michael Langley, a fellow officer, says of Bingham: 'He was neither painfully stupid nor brilliantly resourceful, fitting into that no-man's land of mediocrity from which no sensible cadet obtruded. I do not recall that he was an outstanding

leader of men, except that he may, by virtue of birth, have appeared so to awestruck guardsmen.'

He was commissioned as an officer in his father's regiment, the Coldstream Guards. 'We served in London and Germany', a brother officer told the *Daily Express*. 'John was just like all other officers, played bridge quite well and enjoyed the odd drink.'

London in the fifties was a drab period, stagnating in the cold war and under the real fear of the bomb. Nothing was changing for the upper class. Lacking any fresh impetus they made the fifties into a decadent and more corrupt version of the thirties. Gossip ruled the space in the newspapers. The 'Princess Margaret set' was chic. Below that you dropped through to the more or less fashionable drinking clubs of Soho—the Gargoyle, the Mandrake, the Blue Angel, and, still, the 400 club. The sixties, when they came, caused nothing but resentment in Lucan's world—whose style was rigidly backward looking. The permissive society was no longer the prerogative of the ruling classes.

There was also in the fifties a big industry in gambling, which was illegal off the racecourse. The London scene revolved around one man, John Aspinall, who set up private games at private addresses in London. Under the watchful eye of his mother, Lady Osborne, known as 'Al Capone with a shopping bag', the young heirs would be softened up and drawn into the big games. Aspinall finally bought the Clermont Club in Berkeley Square, and made it the most fashionable of the London gambling houses. Aspinall, who likes to be called 'Aspers', was a curious mixture, for a casino proprietor. With his 'bruiser's' face, he used to hang around the fringes of the literary world, at Oxford, his intellectual pretensions, say contemporaries, getting the better of his tact. He left with a fund of literary quotations which he plays to death, feudal views and romantic obsessions, especially with Saxon lore, and above all, genetics.

When he met Lucan in 1955 or thereabouts, Aspinall responded immediately. For Lucan, Aspinall always remained a central figure in his life. 'I saw in him', said Aspinall, 'a figure like myself, born out of his own time. Lucan was a model that would have been better exposed in the early nineteenth century. That of course applies to myself. Such a remark should of course be taken more as an indictment of the times we live in than of Lucan. His qualities, as they appeared to me, were the old-fashioned qualities, like loyalty, honesty, reliability. Lucan had the *dignitas* of an aristocrat without any of the impertinences that go with a great name or possessions. He was really a leader of men . . . in fact he wasn't, but in more rigorous times Lucan could have found a better role in life. In other words in a state of war Lucan would have been a valuable acquisition to a country. He wouldn't have had any difficulty getting loyalty from his men. He was a warrior, a Roman. He was genetically endowed as a warrior and, you see, there's not much upside in being an army officer today—there's nobody to fight except the Ulstermen, or whatever it is, the IRA.'

Since he left the Army Lucan had been racing bobsleighs on the Cresta Run, with a friend from the Coldstream Guards, William Shand Kydd, an eligible

heir to a wallpaper fortune. He had also been racing power boats, and, almost incidentally, working for William Brandt's, a merchant bank in the City of London. He joined as a management trainee, earning £500 a year. A colleague in that bank remembers Lucan well: 'His intelligence may not have been too bad but as far as education was concerned he was a very limited fellow. He had no economic training whatsoever. But then, of course, there was some pretty low grade thinking in the City. Even in those days his horizons stopped at Jules Bar (a smart bar in Jermyn Street). He was a bar fascist—which is something above a saloon bar fascist. And he believed that through eugenics he must somehow naturally be a success. In fact he was rather a failure.'

Lucan also owned a greyhound and used to go to the dog track dressed in a dinner jacket. Later he bought a racehorse called, rather appropriately, 'Stress Signal'. He played in the bank's bridge team.

In 1966, he was noticed at the Casino in Deauville by the Italian director, Vittorio de Sica, who was impressed by his good looks. He asked Lucan to do a screen test for a part opposite Shirley Maclaine. Someone in the film company said, 'Lord Lucan was great when he wasn't doing the test, but when the cameras started rolling he became rather self-conscious and didn't seem to be able to smile. He laughed about not getting the part—just the kind of laugh and expression de Sica was looking for. The trouble was that before the cameras he just froze up.'

All the while he had been gambling. One day he had a spectacular win of £20,000 at chemin de fer. He quit the bank and in about 1960 took up gambling as a profession.

Two years later Lucan's friend Bill Shand Kydd met and married a young girl called Christina Duncan—a blonde, slightly flashy, product of English country boarding schools for girls and the apartments in Chelsea and South Kensington—crowded, often sordid, hatcheries from which debs and ex-debs set out to look for husbands. Christina shared the flat in Melbury Road, Kensington, with her elder sister Veronica.

Their background was middle class and provincial, and for Veronica unhappy and disturbed. Their father was an Army major, who fought in the First World War and died in a car crash in 1939, when Veronica was two years old and her mother only twenty-one. Veronica showed signs of worry early on. Her younger sister grew up taller and more attractive and Veronica remembers her mother saying 'Christina wears clothes so well and people like her so much'. Veronica was comforted for her early traumas with presents: new teddy bears, and occasional, troubled visits to the doctor. In the family, smallness was considered a sign of bad breeding—something with which Veronica became obsessed. She had to try harder. Her mother returned to Bournemouth after the war, then went to South Africa to marry her second husband, an ex-RAF navigator and prisoner of war, James Margrie. Veronica remembers that when she was growing up in South Africa the girls in her school used to ask her to dance during school break. She worked so hard at it that she ended up with her legs in splints. At

the age of eight she began to receive psychiatric treatment.

Their stepfather came back to England to manage the Wheatsheaf Hotel, North Waltham, near Basingstoke, a mock-Tudor inn on the main road from London to Winchester. Someone in the Clermont Club described this as a 'pub on the way back from Ascot.' Both girls went to St Swithin's girls' school, near Winchester. Veronica hated it, left at 17 and enrolled at an art college in Bournemouth. One year later she was in London, picking up the underpaid jobs provided for girls of her class who were desperate to 'do something'. She found a job as a house model with a coats and suits fashion firm, near Cavendish Square. Later she started evening classes, became a temporary secretary, worked for the backers of a West End flop called *Little Mary Sunshine*. Finally she went into business herself with three friends, printing scripts. In the flat in Melbury Road, Christina was the star and therefore occupied the double bed. When Christina married Bill Shand Kydd, Veronica wore a red bridesmaid's dress to her wedding at the Church of Holy Trinity, Brompton Road.

Then came the fatal meeting. For one weekend organised by Shand Kydd at his house at Leighton Buzzard, Christina invited Veronica and Veronica met John Bingham, as he then was. 'We had all gone off to a drinks party after a golf match', said Veronica. 'You know the sort of thing—the men are out all day on the course and the women are hauled along for some light relief later in the day.' This was a hint of Veronica Lucan's astringency, for which she was later to become so unpopular.

That was Spring 1963. In August that year Lucan asked her for another weekend with the Shand Kydds, and in London the next week Veronica remembered how Lucan had rung all his men friends one evening and in a voice thick with embarrassment and confusion had told them that he would not be joining them. Instead he seduced Veronica Duncan.

But Lucan didn't tell his parents of the engagement plans until they were sealed. There was a meeting in the House of Lords between the in-laws—Veronica Duncan's parents turned up in a battered old car. Veronica's mother thought Lucan's mother 'excitable'.

Night after night after that they went out for dinner together. Lucan talked about his powerboat endlessly. Veronica listened attentively. 'I was looking for a God', she said, 'and he was a dream figure.'

Indeed Veronica must have wondered whether she was sleepwalking down the same aisle at Holy Trinity Brompton where her sister had been married earlier in the year. 'The bride wore a gown of white silk with a train cut in one with the apricot tinted skirt. Her long tulle veil was held in place by a diamond tiara and she carried a bouquet of gardenias, lilies of the valley and freesias.' The four children who attended her wore emerald green satin coronets. The reception was at the Carlton Tower hotel.

Barely two months later, Lucan's father died and he succeeded to the title and £250,000. Veronica was now a Countess and on a par with her sister.

Lucan had given her lectures on gambling, books to read on the subject. He reassured her by saying that he would stick to the games of skill—poker, bridge and backgammon, and avoid the games of chance, baccarat, chemin de fer, roulette.

'He was rather a wild and reckless gambler in those days', says Aspinall, 'and he suffered quite a lot of pain from his losses. But then he went through a metamorphosis in the years that followed. He realised that he couldn't afford to go on being a mug. His mentor in this was Stephen Raphael, a hardened old habitué of the bridge and poker rooms. He told him that if he wanted to go on gambling he would have to learn to survive. And in five or six years he became a shrewd gambler.' Raphael, now 62, is also a broker who managed whatever stocks Lucan had.

But Lucan was already an earl in decline, buoyed up by an introverted, almost exclusively male world of smart professional gamblers. Many of Lucan's Eton friends, unable to integrate themselves into the world, had sought refuge in what one of them referred to as 'the boys' clubs'. The cause of being 'a man's man', which is how Lucan's friends always describe him, is a cause institutionalised in some of London's finest buildings, where he could always insulate himself: the St James's Club, White's Club, the Portland Club. 'He preferred the company of men.'

This need for exclusivity was of course defensive. In the Clermont especially there is a womb-like unreality. A few years ago Aspinall placed dwarfs, real live ones, in the alcoves—a fact noted by one reporter and splashed the next day over a popular daily newspaper. The atmosphere at the Clermont, as at the less cosmopolitan clubs like the Turf Club and White's, breeds alarming, truculent, right-wing talk of dictators and union bashing.

Dominic Elwes, son of the royal portrait painter Simon Elwes, and a witty and well-preserved playboy of the fifties, who became a close friend of Lucan, described it all as a 'hypercivilised, patrician kind of life'. Its ethos was concerned with 'power and success and to a certain degree survival. Anybody who has fallen by the wayside is dismissed. And there's the knowledge of course that in the end you are always prepared to go to work or marry a rich woman.'

The Clermont set shared a common belief in this ethos. Jimmy Goldsmith, old Etonian cousin of the French Rothschilds, made a fortune in food, and with some of his £52 million, bought an estate in Suffolk, a house 'jammed with marvellous French furniture', and took up the life of an English gentleman, hunting with the Quorn and Pytchley, and sending his own sons to Eton.

There was Charles Benson, who was in Lucan's house at Eton and who is 'Scout'—the racing correspondent of the *Daily Express*; Daniel Meinertzhagen, son of a merchant banker, old Etonian, heavyweight boxing champion of the school and a gambler since he left.

There was the Earl of Warwick, Lucan's cousin of his own age, with whom the couple spent many weekends; Michael Stoop, a top-class backgammon player, who volunteered immediately when in 1974 the first army of

vigilantes was organised by Colonel Bill Stirling, former commander of Britain's Special Air Services; Ian Maxwell Scott, gambler and racing man who was once secretary of the Clermont Club and who played golf for high stakes with Lucan at weekends; Nicholas Soames, young and prematurely middle-aged son of Sir Christopher Soames, Britain's Minister to the EEC; Mark Birley, who ran Annabel's, London's most expensive night club, in the basement of the Clermont and whose wife, Annabel, had become Goldsmith's mistress and mother of his children. And there was Aspinall, Stephen Raphael, and Bill Shand Kydd.

All were united in a primitive view of English (and international) politics. Dominic Elwes's girlfriend at the time came from a surprisingly radical background and had earned the nickname the 'champagne pinkie'. Goldsmith liked to sit up talking to her, convincing himself of his faith in capitalism. She thought that Lucan's friends had never heard anyone putting forward anything approaching socialism within the same four walls. 'It was an unpleasant atmosphere, especially for women, who were treated with great suspicion. They all genuinely believed that the upper classes were racially superior. Goldsmith, for example, believed that we were living in a truly revolutionary situation; he believed in the right of anyone to make a fortune without any restrictions. While the threat was on, they were constructing walls of concrete around them but they thought that eventually they would be the masters again. Their arrogance was enormous.'

Lucan himself seemed almost a throwback, with his strange Crimean face, and views which appeared to be degenerating, under pressure, from paternalistic feudalism to the extreme right wing—views which are echoed by many of his friends. In the hearty ribbing that went on in the Clermont, Lucan would be teased for being a 'fossil', or because Irish peerages were dubious. One standard joke was that when the tenants on the Lucan estates in Ireland couldn't pay their rents during a hard winter, the roofs had been removed from their houses. Lucan, say his friends, had a great sense of humour.

But his politics were inclined to be rigid. His friend Charles Benson says: 'He was very right wing and never compromised in front of people. He never watered it down in front of liberals. He would talk about hanging and flogging and foreigners and niggers—equally to shock and to get a reaction.'

Although he never directly involved himself in politics, and only went to the House of Lords on State occasions, he was, according to Aspinall, 'very worried about the country'. As another acquaintance put it: 'His basic attitude was that wogs begin at Calais. He hated "abroad".'

In fact Lucan's own social world was narrow—it had no real links with power, or with the political or cultural life of London.

For elegance, the Clermont is perhaps the most impressive setting in Europe in which to win or lose the fortunes the high stakes provide for. It was designed by Thomas Kent, eighteenth-century genius, famous among other things for the Treasury building in White-

hall. The Clermont is the last Thomas Kent private house in London, with a ceiling painted by Kent himself; the great salon is hung with red silk drapes woven in Bruges. The decor is grand English country house style, standardised by interior decorator John Fowler.

Lucan became what is known in the Clermont as 'the good furniture'. His good looks and his title were used to attract big money, and Aspinall would double his hand. But after March 1972, when Aspinall sold the Clermont to Hugh Hefner and the Playboy empire, Lucan no longer had this protection.

Like many of his friends he resented the fact that any member of the Playboy Club could now come to the Clermont and dilute the exclusivity. One of them, describing the invasion said, 'They're hideous, they don't gamble, they're noisy and they're skint. They just take up space and are unpleasant for people to sit with.'

Lucan, said Dominic Elwes, was not pleased that Hefner didn't lower the flags on the Playboy Club at night, and thus didn't know how to behave. Nor would he talk to people who did not have 'proper shoelaces'. He was dismayed at younger members of the upper class. He couldn't understand why they had to speak in 'red brick university accents'. 'He didn't really like women, or sex. He regarded it as almost disgusting', said Elwes. 'I think he saw women as an inferior race. He was often embarrassed in their company. If anything, I would say that he would perform only the occasional *boff de politesse*. 'Boffing' was the euphemism for sex in Lucan circles.'

He was usually generous, loyal, fastidiously polite to his men friends. But under the stiff exterior, and the heavy, emotionless face, which one person who played backgammon with him described as showing 'not so much control as blankness', Lucan's warrior blood would occasionally burst forth.

Charles Benson said: 'Very occasionally one did see a flash of temper, and then it was quite unpleasant. He would get very tensed up and shake, the classic bellicose effect. He would get angry with golf caddies who wouldn't listen and so on.'

From the vantage point of the St James's Club or the Clermont, where Lucan would start up with a vodka martini around midday, the outlook was bleak. Complacency had gripped the land. Stern measures were required. (He had for years been disturbed by the possibility of a Russian-style class revolution and had bought jewellery because it was 'portable'. He had half-baked plans for leaving the country when the revolution came.)

Lucan's routine was almost unvaried. After the mid-day drinks he would lunch at the Clermont—usually with the same, mostly male, friends. 'In the decent days', as one member describes pre-Hefner Clermont, there was a regular backgammon game after lunch. Lucan always ordered the same meal: smoked salmon and lamb cutlets in the winter; smoked salmon and lamb cutlets *en gelée* in the summer. Sometimes he would come home to bath and change around six, then back to the Clermont for the card games after dinner. Later on, he might go down to Annabel's for a drink and then, depending on the state of

his insomnia, he would go home at two or three in the morning. There were some fixtures. On Mondays and Thursdays he would play bridge in the evening at the Portland Club and on Fridays he would invariably dine at the Mirabelle.

Veronica Lucan fitted uneasily into this routine. For a time she was occupied with the problems of the Belgravia young marrieds. Lord Lucan had received a marriage settlement from his parents of £25,000 with which he bought the house in Lower Belgrave Street, and Veronica Lucan had done it up in thick satin drapes. 'I wanted to make a miniature castle in Belgravia', she said later. She had herself photographed by Lenare with her new born children. She stuck the usual photographs in the leather bound albums: dinner at El Moroccos, weekends with the Fürstenbergs, Venice, Rome, the Cresta Run, yachting in Sardinia, pistol practice in Berkshire—even one with Lucan's face, flushed and roaring at his stag party before his wedding with a nervous-looking hostess by his side. He also took risqué pictures of Veronica, looking like a hooker in a short skirt and black stockings. At first Veronica Lucan imagined giving dinner parties, having a circle of friends. This, because of Lucan's routine, soon seemed a pointless ambition and the dining table became a storage area. She realised that the only way she could be with her husband and take part in his social life was to go herself to the Clermont. She would get dressed and arrive there around 9 o'clock to meet her husband for dinner. There would always be a large table, and she would sit, usually in silence, while the men held forth. Her husband ignored her, as he ignored most women.

The male world of the Clermont, however, was not geared to wives. ('Most of the men there were either unhappily married or not married at all.') Lady Lucan had the added disadvantage of having a mind that was far more perceptive and intelligent than that of her husband, and a tongue which could cut to the heart when her exasperation got the better of her. Michael Stoop, Lucan's backgammon partner, said: 'She was clever, astute and subtle—but aggressive and unbalanced. It made her an extremely dangerous type of woman.'

One of Lucan's few female friends, a great weekender who knew the rules about women, said that 'just walking through the front door of the Clermont Club for a girl is enough to give you a nervous breakdown. You've had dinner, and everything's fine. Then you know that you're just not going to talk or be talked to for the rest of the evening.'

As the evenings, and the years, wore on, Lady Lucan's manner became increasingly tense, her mood became brittle and she sat there night after night, occasionally dabbling in blackjack. Yes, that existence put pressure on her, said Lucan's friends, but her mistake was to have come at all, to have invaded her husband's world.

'He expected her to stay at home and reproduce', said Elwes's girlfriend, 'but felt it was only fair to invite her out to dinner occasionally. He was very embarrassed when she was pregnant. He really hated it. He thought that she shouldn't be seen. She was very jittery when people spoke to her.'

'She would sit down on the banquette', said John

Aspinall, 'night after night and hardly speak to anyone. And she had a rotten life in that sense. But she had no business to come there.'

Michael Stoop also concedes that the 'situation was very difficult for her with John forming up at the Clermont night after night and having dinner with bores like myself'. Stephen Raphael, too, thought it would have been wise for her to stay at home. 'I think she made two mistakes', he said, 'first she used to come gambling and see that he didn't get off with other girls, and secondly she didn't create a life of her own.'

The often cited climax to Lady Lucan's career as a Clermont wife—at least in terms of a spectacle—came when she threw a wine glass at another woman in an argument about sex discrimination. A woman who was watching the television said: 'It's amazing how we women continue to love men despite what they do to us.' That struck a chord in Veronica Lucan, who said that 'some little tart was making a terrible noise near the backgammon table. I said "Shh . . ." and she lifted her wine glass, so I flung mine. We were in a common gaming house after all; whether it's started up or not makes no difference.'

Lady Osborne, John Aspinall's mother, once chided Veronica Lucan for such remarks. She told her that it was 'very bad taste' to refer to the Clermont as a 'common gaming house'. She predicted that never again in her life was Veronica likely to witness such 'grand, sumptuous and gay parties'.

Lucan's friends now say that Veronica turned her verbal guns on him incessantly, made deeply wounding remarks, taunted him and contradicted him. 'Lucan began to be eaten away', said a close friend, 'by a long, bleeding attrition. But he was very long-suffering. She did him extra damage, you see, because Lucan was an interesting young man and if he had had a half way presentable wife, he would have been asked out more.'

According to Charles Benson, Veronica Lucan simply became more lonely and 'more twisted' as time went on. 'Lucky was always having to apologise for acts of near lunacy on Veronica's part. She had the cunning of a lunatic. She would say wild inaccurate things with appalling venom.'

'Right from the beginning she was shrewish', said Aspinall, 'and impossible. Lucan was a family man. He wasn't like Lord Rosebery, who said, "If a woman leaves you, there's always another on the next bus." She came down a couple of times to Howletts (Aspinall's zoo), and on every occasion would make the kind of remark that would reduce him in your eyes. There's nothing more embarrassing. Ah, you can't imagine. You know women . . . if they know you well enough they can always pick on the most wounding things to say. That's their business. She would taunt him, "you're not a gambler, you're a house player", and this would hurt him . . . a man trying to keep his end up with other people. It got to the stage where she would throw things at him, a glass of wine or a *crème de menthe*. But—you just didn't have them in the end, it was too embarrassing a thing to happen to a host. Because the atmosphere at a dinner party or a weekend is a very

delicate thing and it can be easily ruined. So you have her once; if you're heroic you have her twice and then you say Lucan, yes, Veronica, no.'

The English country weekends were the worst time for Veronica Lucan. One of her hosts, Dicky Temple Muir, owner of a smart London restaurant, recalls her behaviour with a certain relish: 'A usual weekend. A bit of tennis, a rubber of bridge. A walk. She stayed in her room the whole weekend, wouldn't move. It wasn't that she didn't know how to behave. She just didn't behave in any way.'

But Veronica remembers these weekends, as other events, slightly differently. She remembers 'wretched weekends where you are a captive of the local horrors, who make you as miserable as possible'. She remembers dreading the mealtimes, her husband not waiting for her and going down first, she going down in trepidation, and groups of people standing around with drinks. She remembers one of them saying, 'It's not saying much tonight.'

After a while, she found herself, she said, 'under the sentence of death', gradually being ostracised and alienated from any form of social life, a feeling corroborated by Aspinall who said: 'The board went down on her, with everybody, stage by stage, and Lucan's long attachment to her began to curdle into hatred.'

There were always people to criticise her behaviour—and always those to praise that of Lucan, who was seen as the model husband, the perfect gentleman, whose patience in the face of his wife had bled him dry.



But what was happening at home in Lower Belgrave Street, and what was happening to Veronica?

Like a character in a fairy-tale tragedy, Veronica Lucan seemed to have forgotten her middle-class background. Perhaps her husband had fired her snobbery, or perhaps it was her only chance. She began to see her title as something of supreme importance, viewed with jealousy from all sides. At one weekend dinner she left the table when her sister was given pride of place to herself. She became obsessed by precedence—as sensitive to it as the declining aristocrats of Proust. She learned *Debrett* (known as the 'stud book') almost by heart, and once said she did it because no Honourable could then put her down. Her talk was interlaced with old snob words: vulgar, common. 'Common, vulgar, nouveau riche, stockbroker—a ghastly social climber, and a Jew.' Girls were usually 'scrubbers', or 'tarts' and she despised their behaviour. 'Women are loathsome. They can't rise above what's between their legs. That's their misfortune too.'

She became convinced that her sister hated her even more when she produced an heir, George Bingham. She considered herself a 'threat' to most of the people she met. She and Lucan wanted their children to reconstitute the family. 'After the tragedies of the Light Brigade and a socialist mother', she said, 'it was his life's work.' She hoped for a 'killing' for her daughters.

And the pressure was telling on her. She felt she was

branded as a social embarrassment but once remarked that it was her husband and his friends who were the real social embarrassments. 'That's why they had to stay at the Clermont all the time.'

But what his friends ignored was that, with the impending breakup of their marriage, Lucan's behaviour was taking a dangerous turn. Veronica Lucan began to suffer from depression. Lucan told his friends that she was going mad. In 1967, after the birth of George, Lady Lucan was told by her husband one day that they were 'going for a drive' in the country. They ended up at the Priory, a private psychiatric nursing home in South London. Lucan had contacted the doctors beforehand.

Veronica Lucan refused to be admitted and Lucan drove her home. She was prescribed injections of Moditen, a powerful drug with the unpleasant side effect of Parkinsons Disease, given for anxiety and depression. She spent the next three years doing the rounds of psychiatrists, and taking antidepressant drugs—an ordeal that, characteristically, she survived. But in 1971 Lucan drove her to another psychiatric hospital, Greenway, in Hampstead. This time she knew where she was going, but when she saw the green paint on the walls and the 'filthy' furniture, she ran out into the road, jumped on a bus; changed to a taxi and walked around Regent's Park for several hours before returning home.

By this time she had persuaded Lucan to come home to Lower Belgrave Street for dinner. Before he left again, around 10 p.m. for the Clermont, he would make her swallow four barbiturate sleeping pills. The effect of this, in her run-down state, was to induce hallucinations and fears as she overcame the sleeping effect of the drug.

Lucan then became obsessed, himself, with the bringing up of his children, a fact corroborated by his mother. He would tell his friends how Veronica was mistreating them, and that she was unfit to look after them.

One day in January 1973, Lucan walked out, convinced that he would be able to get custody of his children. 'He pinned all his hopes on a deterioration of her condition', said a close friend, 'and he was also watching for any signs of unhappiness in his children which he could use.'

At the end of 1972, Lucan bought a small tape recorder that fitted into his breast pocket and began to record conversations with his wife. He also recorded the nannies, whom he asked to his flat in Elizabeth Street and fed on whisky. He recorded his children, and even on one occasion their school choir singing a Christmas carol.

Lucan would play these recordings back to his friends. His manner, on the tapes, is cool and rational. But then he would slowly provoke Veronica, winding up the argument, picking on old wounds, until she would lose her temper and insult him violently. There was an argument about a memorial service, in particular, to which Veronica had gone without reminding her husband. 'I can only think it's the action of an irrational person', he says. 'Please note my extreme displeasure. I don't want to talk about it any more, you behaved disgracefully. Finish. Nobody is interested in you.' Veronica replies at one stage, almost in triumph: 'I have borne Bingham's

out of my body', and 'Why should I feed you with my intelligence, which I've been doing for years?'

Lucan now seemed to set out to drive his wife into madness or suicide. But there he made a serious underestimation of her resilience. She had survived as a Clermont gambler's wife for nine years—which was already a record. She barricaded herself into the house in Lower Belgrave Street, friendless and isolated, but determined not to lose her children.

She began to receive threatening telephone calls through an ex-directory telephone line that was linked to the safe in Lower Belgrave Street; only Lucan knew the number. He planted private detectives around the house and they followed Lady Lucan down the street on the rare occasions when she went out.

At night Veronica sometimes saw him drive slowly past the house, always wearing dark glasses. Then in May 1973, armed with a High Court order, Lucan and two private sleuths cornered the children and the nanny in Green Park, bundled them into a taxi and took them to Lucan's flat in Elizabeth Street. Lady Lucan spent another week in a psychiatric hospital.

It wasn't until the custody proceedings opened in May that Lady Lucan realised not only that her husband had been taping her for some months, but just what the rest of her family thought of her. Among the mass of affidavits that Lucan's lawyers had marshalled to show what a bad mother his wife had been, was one from her sister Christina and one from Lucan's mother. Lucan, say his friends, thought the case was cut and dried.

It was held *in camera* and thus never reported, but Lucan talked about it afterwards. The Judge was apparently not impressed by his arrogance, nor by the fact that he had lied about his treatment of Veronica. One of the nannies had testified that Lucan had on occasions beaten Veronica up, pushed her down the stairs, and on one occasion tried to strangle her. He had also caned her, although more in sexual passion than anger.

Aspinall said: 'He did beat her up once or twice. Not surprising with a wife who's behaving badly. Eventually your temper frays and you give her a few blows or something. And when he was asked if he'd ever beaten her he said "no". I think some intellectual honesty would have stood him in good stead there. He said something like "I beat her up twice, you would have beaten her up thirty times".'

Lady Lucan, on the other hand, was a convincing witness—then as later. In court she appeared calm, clear and lucid. To Lucan's dismay, she won the case and the children were returned to her, and Lucan was left with a bill of £40,000—money which by that time he just did not possess. 'Judges are mostly middle class', said Dominic Elwes, 'and don't understand about not working.'

Lucan was living by this time in a furnished flat in Elizabeth Street, surrounded by a collection of Hitler's recorded speeches, many books on psychiatric illness and countless detective novels. His wardrobe contained rows of identical pin-striped suits. He also had a grand piano, had taught himself to play Bach and, latterly, Scott Joplin

rag. 'This was one of the things he disguised from the world', said Dominic Elwes, 'because people would have thought it soppy.'

Having lost the case, Lucan's personality began to change dramatically. He sat in his flat brooding for hours; his friends noticed unexplained disappearances and teased him about 'having a hooker in Paddington'. He behaved irrationally, say his friends, as if he was trying to inflict punishment on himself. 'He was fairly autocratic in those moods', said Charles Benson. 'He didn't brook arguments or slowness.' Sometimes his self-control would snap. He would shout 'Give me some money' when he started losing, and sign the cheques with a simple straight line in place of a signature.

'There is nothing worse for a gambler', said Aspinall, 'than an unstable situation on his home ground. All this wrecked his capacity to survive as a gambler. He lost his nerve and his ability.' Benson remembers his rudeness one night when he sat blowing cigar smoke into the face of his backgammon opponent and making provocative remarks. 'A sign of lowering standards.'

He had become a chain-smoker, drank a great deal of vodka, talked on and on about his children—how Veronica was mistreating them, how the nannies were always leaving, how she spent his money. He developed an exaggerated interest in the latest bugging devices.

Dominic Elwes said: 'The last links with reality had gone by the board. He had lost his children, his estates, his money. There was a change. We began to see the dark side of the moon. The custody case had removed his faith in human nature and the law.'

Lucan had been hit, like many others, by the stockmarket crash of 1974. He had run up debts and overdrafts of £85,000 before he disappeared. He had put the family silver up for sale at Christie's auction rooms (it made £17,000) and in the last month before his disappearance he had borrowed £3,000 at the staggering interest rate of 48%.

And at Lower Belgrave Street the nannies came and, for one reason or another, went. Lady Lucan had become completely isolated. The children never went to parties. She never went out. The only calls she received were obscene and anonymous. Hazel Drobbins stayed four days in the house. Mrs Murphy, who was always incapacitated by alcohol by 9 p.m. and has since died, stayed two months. Two Spanish girls, Tina and Teresa, stayed from August until November 1973. Veronica Lucan remembers them saying: 'You have everything and we have nothing.'

Then came a girl from Veronica Lucan's own background—Christobel Martin—who became a confidante. 'When I first went there', she said, 'Lady Lucan looked terrible. She seemed a completely beaten person. She was terribly thin, her hair was straggly, she was very nervous.' And in fact Lady Lucan looked like someone in the advanced stages of anorexia. Her veins were sticking out, her eyes looked haunted and she was frightened. Money was short. Lucan had cancelled her account at Harrods. 'Her only personal expense was cigarettes', said Christobel Martin. 'When I got there the milk bill had been stopped at £48.'

Christobel Martin left—she had been a temporary. Then came Pierrette Goletto, then Nadia Broome, a teacher, and then, for the last four weeks of her life, Sandra Rivett.

Veronica Lucan had always had trouble with the nannies—that was one of the accusations made by Lucan and his friends against her: 'She couldn't keep staff.' In most cases it was not her fault, and often she would have to suffer the tension of Lucan waylaying them and questioning them about the children. The two nannies I spoke to were, in retrospect, very fond of Veronica Lucan, and sympathised with her. Sandra Rivett, however, was special.

Her mother and her father, Mr Albert Hensby, a 60 year old factory worker, live in Coulsden, Surrey, where Sandra was born. Her husband had left her, and she had been taking odd domestic jobs around London. When she met Veronica she had just left a job looking after an old couple in Paddington. She and Veronica got on well and the children grew fond of her during the six weeks she stayed at Lower Belgrave Street. The moment of commitment, on both sides, came when Sandra went back to Coulsden to get her black cat. Since they were the same height Veronica offered her some of her dresses to try on, but Sandra had a rounder figure and couldn't wear them. The two had one bond in common—their husbands had both left them. They often talked about it.

Sandra liked good times, drinking, boyfriends—but she never brought them to the house. She would often go to the Plumbers Arms in Lower Belgrave Street and chat with the other customers. One day she picked up a

married man with three children—a milkman—and had a brief affair. 'The milkman couldn't believe his luck had changed', said one of Sandra's friends, 'and he couldn't believe it had changed again when she dropped him like a stone.'

Sandra's day off was Thursday and she would usually stay out with boyfriends until the early hours. But on Thursday, November 7 1974, she had a cold and decided to stay in.

That evening, an hour or so before she was killed, she rang her mother to discuss her Christmas plans. Mrs Eunice Hensby told the *Daily Express*: 'She sounded so happy about everything. She told me she was really enjoying looking after Lady Lucan's children. She felt she was being treated like one of the family.'

Lucan's movements in those last two days were not noticeably different from his usual routine. Not, at least, for someone who was intending to commit a perfect murder.

On Wednesday at noon he visited his old friend and his piano teacher, Caroline Hill, in Old Church Street, Kensington. In the afternoon he went to Heywood Hill's bookshop in Curzon Street where he bought a book about the Greek shipping millionaires. That evening he went to a supper party, played bridge with John Aspinall, Charles Benson, and Aspinall's wife, Sally. He went on to the Clermont Club to play backgammon and met Andrina Colquhoun, a young ex-debutante with whom he had become distantly friendly in recent weeks.

He left late. He was drinking heavily.

The next morning, Thursday, Lucan rose early—

which was unusual. At 9.50 he telephoned his lawyers. At 10.30 he was telephoned by Andy Colquhoun, who asked him about his dinner plans. She found them 'rather a muddle'. She looked for him at lunchtime in the usual haunts and when she couldn't find him, she packed her pair of 20 bore shotguns into her car and drove to the country.

Then there is a gap until 4 p.m. when Lucan called in at his chemists asking them to identify a pill belonging to his wife. The chemist told him it was a Limbitrol, a strong tranquilliser.

Later that afternoon Lucan visited an Old Etonian friend, Michael Hicks Beach, a literary agent, to discuss an article on golf which Lucan said he was writing for an Oxford magazine. Hicks Beach said Lucan was behaving normally, that he was relaxed, but Michael Stoop who also saw him that afternoon said Lucan was 'definitely uptight'.

Lucan drove Hicks Beach home to his flat in Fulham in Michael Stoop's Corsair, leaving his own Mercedes outside his flat. A few drinks in Fulham, then Lucan returned to his own flat and changed out of his pinstriped suit and into a pullover and a pair of cavalry twill trousers—not the kind of clothes that Lucan would like to be seen in at the Clermont. Nevertheless Lucan now seems to be trying to establish an alibi, however full of loopholes it later appeared.

He got into his Mercedes about 8.15 and drove past the Clermont Club, wound down the window and asked Billy the doorman whether any of his friends had arrived. (Lucan had booked a table for four at the Clermont earlier in the evening—a party of four of his friends were going to see *Cole* at the Mermaid theatre. He would meet them afterwards, he said, making, of course, a table for five.)

The Inquest, seven months after the murder, was to go into some detail about the events of that night. But the bare bones of the information are quite enough to fill the gap: Lucan then went back to Elizabeth Street, switched back to the Corsair and drove over to Lower Belgrave Street.

Looking through the basement kitchen window and seeing that the place was dark, he let himself in with his own latchkey, walked through the hall and went down the short flight of carpeted stairs into the basement kitchen.

He had already checked that Thursday was the nanny's day out. From his frequent trips past the house on other occasions, when he looked to 'see whether the children's lights were off', he knew that Veronica still kept to her habit of going downstairs around 9 o'clock to make a cup of tea.

Lucan was carrying a US Mail bag and a piece of lead piping, carefully wrapped in medical sticking plaster. He took the light bulb in the basement from its socket, positioned himself in the dark alongside the end of the staircase and waited.

Just before 9 o'clock he heard the expected noise of footsteps coming down the main staircase towards the entrance to the basement.

As the short female form rounded the entrance to the

small staircase and began the last flight downstairs, Lucan had no reason to doubt that it was his wife. He raised the cudgel and brought ferocious blows raining down, so hard that blood and pieces of skull went flying up towards the ceiling. On the first blow the figure fell forward with the tea tray, scattering cups. As she lay on the ground he hit her again and again, although his victim probably died from the very first stroke.

There were large amounts of blood on the floor. In the dim light from the street Lucan performed the awkward manoeuvre of putting the body into the US Mail bag.

When did Lucan realise that he had made a catastrophic mistake? Did he recognise Sandra Rivett from her weight, or from what remained of her face as he stacked her in, or was it when he heard Veronica, his wife, shouting down the stairs, 'Sandra, Sandra'?

For a second time, and presumably now in some state of panic and confusion, Lucan again waited and this time walked up two or three steps before hitting Veronica with the cudgel. She suggested later that 'good breeding' was the only reason why her skull had withstood that first blow—which, from the photographs, looks as bad as the marks on Sandra's own head. She screamed. Lucan told her to 'shut up'. He managed to get two or three more blows to her forehead, but Veronica by this time was fighting for her life, twisting herself down onto the stairs between Lucan's legs. She grabbed his balls. The adrenalin was already running out of Lucan and his violence subsided.

Then, as only an Etonian could, he *apologised*. Veronica Lucan, through her tears and fear, began talking, saying that she would help her husband out of the mess. They went upstairs to the bedroom. Lucan went into the adjoining bathroom. When she heard the taps running Lady Lucan jumped up and fled down the stairs and through the door.

A few seconds later, Mr Derrick Whitehouse, the head barman of the Plumbers Arms further down Lower Belgrave Street, and his clientele witnessed an extraordinary scene. The door burst open and a figure covered in blood stood in the doorway. For several seconds, nobody moved—they sat on the bar stools and stared. 'She was bleeding badly', said Whitehouse, 'and the blood was pouring down her face. She had deep cuts around her head. She was shouting and screaming and saying, "I've just got away from being murdered. He's murdered my nanny, he's in the house." She went on screaming about her children.' Lady Lucan then collapsed on the floor.

The police from Gerald Road station arrived at the house within a few minutes. Lucan's mother, the Dowager Countess Lucan, arrived soon afterwards. They found, at the bottom of the stairs leading to the basement, the teacups that Sandra Rivett had dropped when her attacker struck. They found the light bulb, removed, lying on a chair. And they found the body of Sandra Rivett in a US Mail bag, hideously beaten. They also found the murder weapon. A welded iron banister had been prised away by Lady Lucan as she struggled with her attacker. There was blood everywhere.

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Lucan, by now, was driving, apparently at great speed, to Uckfield in Sussex, 44 miles away, in Michael Stoop's Corsair. At some point on the journey he made two telephone calls to his mother in St John's Wood. Mysteriously the calls came neither from a call box—in which case his mother would have heard the familiar pips—nor through an operator.

'My son said, "There's been a terrible catastrophe at No. 46. Veronica is hurt and I want you to collect the children." He said to ring Bill Shand Kydd and went on to say Nannie had been hurt. I said, "Badly?" and he said "Yes, I think so." He mumbled about "blood and mess".'

The only evidence of Lucan's movements after he left London comes from Susan Maxwell Scott, wife of Lucan's golf partner Ian Maxwell Scott (who gave her story to the *News of the World* after the event). Lucan, she said, looked dishevelled, his hair was rumpled. She gave him a large Scotch and water and listened to her version of the events. Lucan told her: 'I've been through the most nightmarish, most awful experience.' He then said that he had seen an 'intruder' struggling with his wife as he drove past Lower Belgrave Street, went in using his own key, the killer ran off, Lucan "slipped in a pool of blood". Veronica then, he said, accused him of having hired a man to try and kill her. When Veronica ran out of the house he panicked.

Before he left he wrote two letters, which give a confusing picture of his state of mind, but could also be seen as a careful attempt to support the 'intruder' theory.

The first, to Michael Stoop, said that he had had a 'traumatic night of unbelievable coincidences'. 'I won't bore you, except when you come across my children, please tell them you knew me and all I care about is them. The fact that a crooked solicitor and a rotten psychiatrist destroyed me between them will be of no importance to the children. I gave Bill Shand Kydd an account of what really happened but judging by my last efforts in court, no one, let alone a 67-year-old Judge would believe—and I no longer care except that my children should be protected. Yours ever, John.'

The second, to Bill Shand Kydd, read: 'Dear Bill, The most ghastly circumstances arose tonight which I have briefly described to my mother when I interrupted the fight at Lower Belgrave Street and the man left.

'V. accused me of having hired him. I took her upstairs and sent Frances up to bed and tried to clean her up. She lay doggo for a bit. I went into the bathroom and she left the house.

'The circumstantial evidence against me is strong in that V. will say it was all my doing and I will lie doggo for a while but I am only concerned about the children. If you can manage it I would like them to live with you. V. has demonstrated her hatred for me in the past and would do anything to see me accused. For George and Frances to go through life knowing their father had been in the dock accused of attempted murder would be too much for them. When they are old enough to understand explain to them the dream of paranoia and look after them.'

Then at midnight he telephoned his mother again. She

told Lucan that she had the children. He said, 'That's all right.' She asked what he was planning to do 'but got nowhere'. Did he want to speak to the police? 'No', he said. 'I'll ring in the morning and also talk to you.' Lucan's mother said: 'He sounded more on all fours, more solid than when he phoned earlier. On that occasion he sounded in a highly shocked condition.'

Mrs Maxwell Scott said that Lucan left the house around 1.30, intending, she thought, to drive to London. He told her: 'I must get back. I must find out what that bitch has done to me.'

In fact Lucan's car was found the next morning at Newhaven, the South coast port 14 miles from Uckfield. It had been parked near the harbour between 5 a.m. and 8 a.m. How it got there is not known—did Lucan drive it, or an accomplice of Lucan trying to plant a false trail? Whatever trail there was went cold at this point and Lucan vanished into thin air.

Lady Lucan had been taken to hospital with wounds that, superficially, looked as bad as those which had killed Sandra Rivett. On Friday, while she was lying in hospital, John Aspinall held a lunch for some of Lucan's friends to discuss how to deal with the situation. Goldsmith was not among them. Their telephones had been jammed since the early morning—instructions were given for everyone to make themselves scarce, not to answer their telephones until the friends had been able to establish what kind of protection Lucan might need. It was the beginning of a deep mutual dislike between the police, the press and the Lucan inner circle.

'People were worried', said John Aspinall, 'about what to do if he turned up. He might have turned up at Howletts, he might have telephoned from Brazil, so every contingency was looked at.'

Nobody seemed to have the least sympathy for Lady Lucan, although at some point during the day Dominic Elwes was sent to the hospital to find out what was her version of the events. He went with Christina, Veronica's sister, and Hugh Bingham, Lucan's younger brother. They got to Veronica's bedside with some difficulty. When Veronica told Elwes what had happened—that Lucan had tried to kill her—Elwes burst into tears. He was the only one of Lucan's friends who believed, early on, that Lucan had in fact done the deed.

The detectives assigned to the case, Detective Chief Superintendent Roy Ranson, and Detective Inspector David Gerring, began piecing together the bare events of the previous night. Lucan had visited the house in Lower Belgrave Street, had left in a hurry. He had telephoned a friend, Mrs Floorman in neighbouring Chester Square, before leaving London. Mrs Floorman says she does not remember much of the call. She does remember that the doorbell rang for a very long time, but she was 'too frightened' to answer. She went back to sleep. Then she answered the telephone and she, also, is certain that it didn't come from a call box.

'I'm quite sure it was him', she said, 'although he didn't give his name. He just said, "Madeleine, Madeleine, I know you, I know you . . ." perhaps in a slightly different expression. Then a lot of words that didn't make sense.' Some days later, she 'found' blood-

stains on her doorstep which proved remarkably difficult to obliterate; she rang Dominic Elwes in consternation later the next week and persuaded him to scrub the stains from the Portland stone.

The police had broken in to Lucan's Elizabeth Street flat an hour or so after discovering the body, but found no traces that Lucan had been there since the murder. A suit was lying on the bed, an empty glass and a book beside it. They took away Lucan's copious address books and began to work their way through them.

On Saturday November 9, the newspapers began the year's longest running story: 'Police Seek Earl after Nanny is Murdered; Lucan Car Found at Newhaven; Dawn search by Frogmen for Lucan's body', and only three days after Lucan's disappearance, 'Murder warrant for Lord Lucan'. The charges were murder (of Sandra Rivett) and attempted murder of Veronica Lucan. For seven months the English libel laws prevented anyone suggesting that Lucan had done the deed.

David Gerring spent 11 days at Newhaven, following the discovery of the Corsair. He discovered how easy it was to get out of the country unnoticed on a 60-hour passport. (The document is in three sections. The French authorities tear off one of these, and should send it back to the issuing authority, where it is matched up. But this they rarely do. Nothing has been done to tighten up this procedure.)

In the gale force 8 wind of that November night only the *Valençay*, the cross channel ferry, and one other boat which went around to St Catherine's Dock left Newhaven. If Lucan had jumped off, the police speculated, several things might have happened. If the body had been caught up in a trawl net, as bodies frequently are, the trawlermen might have spiked it with a boat hook and sent it to the bottom, rather than risk confiscation of their catch and hours in court.

When police searched a five-mile radius of Newhaven, which included the Downs, with their impenetrable brambles, they came across human bones, and a corpse hanging in a copse. It was not Lord Lucan's.

A few weeks later, on the river Ouse which runs out between Seaford and Newhaven, a skull, rib cage, leg and thigh bones were discovered—which at first were thought to be Lucan's. They turned out to be the remains of a judge who had died in 1965. His car had been found only a few hundred yards away, and the search at that time had revealed nothing. But even if remains of Lucan are found, identification, which is often done through teeth impressions, may be impossible. For some unexplained reason, his medical files are missing from the Guards records office.

It was Lucan's three address books which gave the police their greatest problem. Not only did they have to work through what looks like the guest-list for a gigantic charity ball, Lucan had filled them up with names of almost everyone he had ever met. Some people had no idea why they should have been recorded. A young monocled soldier of fortune gave the police enough trouble for them to look into his background. Within a few days he was being taken back on a train to Marseilles

by a military policeman from the Foreign Legion, from which he had deserted.

The 'nob squad' came in for criticism themselves. 'They became very chippy', said one of Lucan's friends, 'they were looking for things that weren't there.' Stories of their social discomfort became social currency. They were reported as saying 'We are specialists in upper class crime'; to have raided the St James's Club in full force after a bogus tip off. They were treated with a certain arrogance, portrayed as 'Mr Plods', who 'panted' about like retrievers in raincoats and hobnailed boots, and then had to be dragged out of Annabel's at 3 a.m. 'We came up against the attitude', said Ranson, 'of some of these people trying to take one over us, to take us on and beat us.'

And indeed Lucan's friends treated the police with contempt. The newspapers caught on to this early on. The *Guardian* said that the police 'have to delve into the peculiar society which made up Lord Lucan's world—a snobbish aristocratic clique devoted to high finance and gambling in a closed circle in which an ordinary policeman is, to put it mildly, not exactly at home'. The police could not depend on the usual underworld informants and local knowledge. In Gerald Road police station they began to talk about the 'Eton mafia'. As they travelled around the countryside searching stately homes, like Holkham Hall, belonging to Lord Leicester, and Warwick Castle, belonging to Lucan's cousin, the Earl of Warwick, their tempers began to fray. They could not understand such apparent approval among Lucan's friends for the act of murder. They told of how one of them had said that Sandra Rivett's death was such a pity 'because nannies are so hard to come by nowadays'.

The hardened crime reporters from the *Daily Express* began to complain that they could get nothing from the Lucan crowd. 'To try to talk to this tightly knit circle of friends is like finding a traitor in Colditz. They shrink from interview . . . for fear of breaking that masonic style bond which links that certain breed of men whose 'stud book' lines mostly lead back to the same stables—privileged prep schools, Eton, Oxford, the Household Brigade. The honour code binds their silence.'

John Aspinall was annoyed with the police when they asked him whether he was proud to be the friend of a man who had tried to bash his wife to death. 'I said if she'd been my wife I'd have bashed her to death five years before and so would you. I said don't come that line with me because who knows into what red hell one's slightly soul will stray under the pressure of a long dripping attrition of a woman who's always out to reduce you, to whom you are stuck and from whom you've had children.'

Aspinall himself was widely rumoured to have harboured Lucan, or to have helped him. Many believed that he had, at Lucan's request, fed him to his tigers at his country zoo, so that no trace would have been left and the family honour would have been saved. 'Aspinall's tigers eat the bones as well', was the conventional wisdom at the time.

'If a close friend of yours came in covered with blood',

said Aspinall, 'having done some frightful deed the last thing that would have occurred to you is to turn him in. It goes against every last instinct of human loyalties, and to hell with the law or the common norms of civic behaviour or something. If he had begged asylum he would have had it. I would have helped him.' Did you help him? 'Oh no. But if he had turned up at Howletts I would have taken him aside and had a long talk and looked at the problem. It may have involved him giving himself up or getting him funds to go to Costa Rica. He could certainly have had a lot of money. I had many people calling me and saying if Lucan wants money he can have it.'

'I think he is probably alive, because he must have made some provision of some description if things went wrong. He had a lot of friends in America. And—crucial in a situation of pressure like this—he is the sort of person one would tend to trust.'

Most of Lucan's friends, however, believed that he was innocent of the murder. In *The Observer*, Peter Deeley made a telling point: 'There appears to be a certain code of honour among Lucky Lucan's friends. The police do not find anyone who will speak ill of him, but many who will pass on unsupported gossip about Lady Lucan.'

That was perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the enormous rumour industry that grew up as the story gathered momentum. I remember that the Lucan affair was discussed everywhere you went all through Christmas and into the Spring. Evidence was pieced together, with rumour built upon rumour, until it became almost a national obsession.

One thing was taken for granted: that Lord Lucan was a man of great charm, a dashing but modest family man, who had been tricked into some terrible situation by a wife who was not only vicious, but 'mad'.

Lucan indeed became a popular hero, a man to be sympathised with. The problem for Lady Lucan, who was by now totally alone, without a single member of her own family, including her own mother, or of Lucan's family to help her, was that her detractors had the monopoly of the gossip.

At one cocktail party, after I had been myself assigned to the story, the daughter of a former Tory Minister said that Lady Lucan was 'the most disliked woman in London'. The girl had never met her, and added: 'You know how it is—when you hear that someone is so disliked, you think she must be awful.'

But more than that were the rumours. First the 'cat story' which related how Lady Lucan had received from her husband a black cat as a present for the children. She had torn the cat apart and pushed the pieces through the letterbox of Lucan's flat. They all suggested a morbid popular imagination. There was the story of Lady Lucan excreting on the dinner plates at Lower Belgrave Street; of her making her children mould sculptures of genitals out of plasticine; of her lesbian affair with Sandra Rivett. All the rumours seemed to strain to find Lucan innocent of the crime.

The rumours were fired by the fact that the information available was sketchy. Until the Coroner's Inquest into Sandra Rivett's death, which was delayed in the

hope that Lucan would appear and be tried for murder—which would have dispensed with a lengthy inquest altogether—laws of contempt prevented journalists from writing whatever hard evidence they had gleaned in the endless days of drinking and talking with the police and the witnesses.

The real tragedy—the fact that Sandra Rivett, the factory worker's daughter from Coulsden, had been murdered because of someone else's paranoid hatred for his wife, and in this case her employer—was largely forgotten in the reporting of a society scandal. 'Of course, out of politeness, one says it's very hard on the nanny', said Aspinall, 'although I don't, of course, feel a personal sense of loss.' Shand Kydd hired private detectives, determined that Sandra Rivett had been killed by a jealous boyfriend.

She was buried at Croydon cemetery on December 18. Apart from those of her family, the only floral wreath was placed there by the police.



I began to get close to the story in February. There was one angle that had been ignored and which fired my interest—the question of whether Lady Lucan had, in fact, been driven from mild depression to the edge of a breakdown directly as a result of Lucan's character and behaviour. I had time, unlike the daily reporters, and I moved for some weeks through the cocktails and expensive lunches.

I also met Dominic Elwes, who wanted to put across a favourable view of Lucan, and who had become a close friend in the previous two years. Elwes was a remarkable and very distinctive person to discover in that rather mindless world of the Clermont.

His life had been a failure—with some strange interludes. He was sent by his father to Downside, the Catholic public school, went into the army at sixteen, and was dismissed before he even reached the rank of officer. He became a playboy, and something of an upper-class con man in the fifties, ran away to Cuba with an heiress whom he had illegally married. All Elwes's energies were devoted to talk—he was a brilliantly funny raconteur, quick witted, highly intelligent. He had become something of an entertainer to the Clermont world.

One day Elwes made a strange request. He asked me to destroy his cuttings in the library of the *Sunday Times*. I asked him why, and he replied that he wanted to stand as a Tory candidate in the next election and felt there were episodes from the past that would work against him.

When I refused, point blank, he threatened to withdraw his cooperation with the article. I went to the files and found some interesting items. Elwes had gone to Hungary to fight against the Russian invasion of 1956. More interesting was an episode where an RAF officer had been court martialled for giving Elwes secrets during the Yemen civil war in 1965. Elwes's role in the war was vague, but he was connected through friends with Colonel Bill Stirling, who was helping the Royalist forces

with arms and men, despite Britain's 'neutral' attitude to the struggle. (It was Colonel Stirling who emerged again in 1974 calling on all patriotic Britons to join his private army—an army that would have crossed picket lines and helped to 'run the country' in the event of a national strike.) After that Elwes never mentioned the subject again.

Then one day I knocked on the door of 46 Lower Belgrave Street. Lady Lucan opened the door on a short chain, peered cautiously out, unhooked the chain and let me in. We talked in the hall. One of my reasons for writing the story, I said, was to discover her version of the events. There were rumours about cats . . .

Lady Lucan was dressed in a little black velvet two-piece suit. Without a word, she pointed down the hall where two black cats were strolling towards us. One was the cat that should have been dismembered and put through Lucan's letterbox. The other belonged to Sandra Rivett—who had been buried some weeks before.

The house was freezing cold, the furniture in a state of dilapidation. Lady Lucan was hard up—unable to afford to keep a drink for visitors. She talked fast and lucidly, and was very polite. At our second meeting, she re-enacted the scene of that traumatic night—the fight on the stairs, the US Mail bag in the basement—as if her mind had shut out the horrors.

She described the worst moments of her isolation when under the influence of the strong drugs prescribed for her she had begun to hallucinate in her insomnia, and had begun to hear voices telling her that she should kill herself. She said that if she had allowed herself to have a breakdown she would have lost everything. She described the weeks of pacing about the house, trying to contain her energy, going over and over again the details of her life, the breakdown of her marriage and the events of the night when Sandra Rivett was killed. She also raged against Lucan's friends. She had a line of rampant snobbery I could hardly believe still existed as she cut and hacked her way through her own detractors.

Later, I had to check some passages with her for reasons of libel. She objected to being described as 'pretty'. 'Pretty?' she said, 'Pretty? I am ravishly beautiful. You mustn't use that word. I want people to think that he did have a good looking wife, even if she was a bitch.'

The article appeared the day before the Coroner's Inquest in June. By the time we assembled in court for the five-day hearing, there was a marked shift of feeling towards Lady Lucan by the reporters present, as a result of the facts in the article, which injected a fresh impetus into the gossip columns. She was now the lonely, hard-done-by martyr and mother.

The courtroom bristled with the hostilities of Lady Lucan's relatives towards her. Christina Shand Kydd, deeply tanned and dressed to the eyes in black velvet and a silk roll-neck blouse, sat directly in front of her sister, her bouffant hair blocking her view of the proceedings and a huge ruby clasp which held her pearls together staring straight back into Veronica's face. Next to her was her husband Bill Shand Kydd, dressed in Gucci and St Laurent. And next to him, the Dowager Countess.

Right in the back of the court were Sandra Rivett's relatives, scrubbed and polished in their Sunday best.

The purpose of the Inquest was to determine the cause of death of Sandra Rivett. But because of the unique situation—in which the cause, i.e. possibly Lord Lucan, was not there to give evidence—the Inquest took on the form of a criminal trial. An Inquest can name the murderer, if murder was committed, and the Dowager Countess had hired a top attorney, Michael Eastham QC, to protect her son's name. His brief was to prove that Veronica Lucan was lying when she said that Lucan was her attacker. The question was—would the Coroner allow such evidence purely for an Inquest?

In the end the Dowager and Shand Kydd were not allowed to produce evidence of Veronica's madness. But the proceedings left no doubt about Lucan's responsibility and they added some gory details. Lucan could not have seen an intruder fight with Sandra Rivett (or his wife) in that particular part of the basement through the Venetian blinds as he drove by. There were no signs of an intruder breaking into the house. Lucan never gave a description of the man he said had attacked his wife except to say that he was 'large'. The blood, which was splashed all over the walls and ceiling with the upswing of the violent blows from the murder weapon, was a mixture of groups A and B—which fitted Sandra Rivett and Lady Lucan.

And then a winning piece of evidence for the police. An exactly similar weapon—lead piping wrapped in bandaid—was found in the boot of Lucan's car at Newhaven. The car was also covered in blood groups A and B. If Lucan had pushed Sandra Rivett's body into the sack, he would have been covered in blood. Mrs Maxwell Scott noticed a 'dark stain' on his trousers—and the letters he wrote were also covered in blood.

Lady Lucan gave her own description of what had happened that night. She said that she and her ten-year-old daughter Frances were in her bedroom watching television. Sandra Rivett had gone downstairs to make a cup of tea. When she failed to appear, Lady Lucan went downstairs to investigate. She called out 'Sandra, Sandra?' Then she heard a noise.

The Coroner: 'And what happened then?'

Lady Lucan: 'Somebody rushed out and hit me on the head.'

Coroner: 'Was there more than one blow?'

Lady Lucan: 'About four.'

Coroner: 'Did you hear anybody speak at that time?'

Lady Lucan: 'No, not then. But later I screamed and the person said "shut up".'

Coroner: 'Did you recognise the voice?'

Lady Lucan: 'Yes.'

Coroner: 'Who was it?'

Lady Lucan: 'My husband.'

She then told how Lucan had thrust two gloved fingers down her throat and that they had started to fight. Lucan tried to strangle her, but Lady Lucan got between his legs on the ground, grabbed hold of his 'private parts', and Lucan stopped. She asked him if she could have a drink of water. (He repeated the phrase, 'I must make a decision, I must decide what to do.')

'Together we looked at my injuries', said Lady Lucan, 'I think I said, "I don't feel very well", and he laid a towel on the bed and I got onto the bed. My daughter was sent to her bedroom as soon as we went upstairs and the television was switched off.'

Lucan then said he would get a towel to clean up her face. As soon as she heard the taps running she ran out of the house.

But the most moving and poignant account came from Frances Bingham who had made a statement to the police. It began with the revelation that on a recent access weekend Lucan had asked his daughter which day of the week was the nanny's day off.

After tea, she said, she played in the nursery and then watched television with her mother on her bed. Sandra went downstairs to make the tea. 'After a while Mummy said she wondered why Sandra was so long. It was before the news came on at 9 p.m. I said I would go downstairs to see what was keeping her but Mummy said she would go down. I offered to go with her but she said no.'

'Mummy left the room to go downstairs. She left the bedroom door open, but there was no light in the hall. Just after Mummy left the room I heard a scream. It sounded as though it came from a long way away. I thought perhaps the cat had scratched Mummy and she had screamed. I was not frightened. I went to the door and called, "Mummy", but there was no answer.'

'But about 9.05 p.m. when the news was on the television, Daddy and Mummy appeared in the room. Mummy had blood over her face and was crying.'

Her mother told her to go to her bedroom, but Lucan did not say anything to her. 'I didn't say anything to either of them, I only caught a glimpse of her.'

'As far as I can remember Daddy was wearing a pair of dark trousers and an overcoat. I did not hear any conversation between Mummy and Daddy.'

She said she went to her bedroom and went to bed. After a while she heard her father calling for her mother. She got up and 'saw Daddy coming from the bedroom on the floor below. He went downstairs. That was the last I saw of him. He never came up to the top of the house, either to look for Mummy or to say goodnight to me.'

In fact when the police arrived, they found Frances standing by her bed, and the other two children, Camilla and George, lying in bed, both awake. The television had been switched up to maximum volume.

The Coroner's jury's verdict was murder by Lord Lucan.

There was one witness conspicuously absent from the Inquest. That was Greville Howard, Lucan's friend who had made an affidavit to the police saying that two weeks before the murder Lucan had told him that he would kill his wife and drop her body in the Solent. Howard was, in fact, in hospital while the proceedings were going on, certified as being medically unfit to appear.

The search for Lucan went on all through the summer. There were 'sightings' all over the world, and there was one white Mozambiquan who impersonated Lucan in order to get help from another Englishman to escape the country. Clairvoyants and ESP practitioners sent in bundles of letters. Lost for an initiative, there was an

enormous press and police expedition to the Brittany Coast in June. Whether it was the press or the police that initiated the binge is not clear, but the intake of alcohol made it all look more like a wine tasting expedition which had gone madly out of control than a serious search for Lucan. It is still a mystery to those newsmen present how a single line of copy was filed. But filed it was. One headline even read, 'Lucan Traced to Cherbourg.' On closer examination, it seemed that a Monsieur and Madame Guilpain, proprietors of the Grand Hotel in Cherbourg, had simply seen the main chance and come up with the goods. They said they never checked Lucan's identification on the occasions he had visited the hotel, because he spoke such perfect French. Lucan's French, of course, was almost non-existent.



But then a more sinister tale directly connected with the Lucan affair was brewing inside the Lucan circle, which ended in a tragedy almost on a parallel with the death of Sandra Rivett.

The article I had written for the *Sunday Times Magazine* appeared on June 8. Not only were the contents unpopular with the Lucan crowd, their sympathisers or the Lucan experts whose theories had been undermined—the pictures were worse.

I had obtained the pictures of the Lucan family album from Lady Lucan herself. But the cover showed a photograph of Lucan, dressed in a blue open-necked shirt with a coral necklace, and Annabel Birley, wife of Mark Birley and mother of Jimmy Goldsmith's children, looking at him in a longing and affectionate way, her arm around his neck.

The inside showed several other photographs of a house-party in Acapulco in March 1973, made up of Lucan, Annabel Birley, Jimmy Goldsmith, Dominic Elwes, and their friends.

By extraordinary chance I happened to find myself sitting opposite Annabel Birley's sixteen-year-old son Robin Birley, at an Eton housemaster's lunch the day after publication of the story. I had been sent by *Die Zeit*, the German newspaper, to write a story about Eton. Robin Birley courageously attacked me in front of the housemaster and the boys for the photograph on the cover which showed his mother, and demanded to know who was responsible for it.

That week it was obvious just how angry Birley and Goldsmith were about the picture. Their world had been penetrated and pictures of their lunch parties splashed over one and half million copies of a British magazine.

They did not like it at all. Great efforts were made to find the origin of the pictures. To this day I never revealed the source, but I made it clear that, whoever the source was, it was not Dominic Elwes.

On June 17, the beginning of the week of the Royal Ascot Races, Elwes received a letter from young Robin Birley, blaming him for selling the photographs to the *Sunday Times*. Elwes sat up all night writing a reply, denying any responsibility.

Then Mark Birley wrote to Elwes, excommunicating

him from the clubs Birley owned — Annabel's, and Mark's Club in Charles Street. To make it more humiliating, the waiters had been instructed not to serve him. The *Daily Express* wrote of my article: 'While several of Lucan's friends assisted the author with background material, Elwes is considered by some others to have been a little too forthcoming.' Birley admitted writing the letter and said that it was, indeed, because of the article. (Elwes in fact helped no more than anyone else and less, perhaps, than John Aspinall.)

On Friday, June 20, the columnist Nigel Dempster met Elwes at Heathrow airport on their way to Nice. Elwes had been sent to Lord Compton's house at Cap Ferrat by his friend Daniel Meinertzhagen because he thought he was cracking up under the pressure of the blame.

Dempster found Elwes in tears. He told Dempster that all his friends had turned on him—that Goldsmith was blaming him for selling the pictures to the *Sunday Times*. Dempster, with a certain panache, immediately telephoned Goldsmith, described Elwes's state via a secretary (Goldsmith would not take the call directly), and assured him that Elwes had nothing to do with the pictures. Goldsmith sounded as if he didn't want to hear the denial.

At that point things were going badly wrong for Elwes in other directions. He wrote to his former girlfriend, in a handwriting that scrawled all over the page: 'Please ring. Not at all well. Feeling rotten. Need cheering up but don't want to go on.' His mother had been taken into psychiatric care by nuns, his father was dying, he had lost what little money he had left due to a bad investment by a close relation. Trying to joke about it Elwes used the upper-class cliché, 'Is life worth living on these terms?'

Dempster told him that, at least, nothing could get worse. In fact he was wrong. On July 1, Elwes went to the property development he had been working on as a designer for some years at Cuarton, behind Algeciras. He fell down a cliff, broke his painting hand and his foot. Finally, he told Dempster that he thought that his former wife, Tessa Elwes, had a serious illness.

When he came back to England in late August, Elwes was obviously suffering from severe depression. In early September, he was found dead in his small flat off the Kings Road by his closest friend, Melissa Wyndham, a 26-year-old interior decorator.

Elwes, who was sprawled across the bed, half dressed, had taken a large overdose of barbiturates and alcohol. He had written two notes. In one of them he blamed Goldsmith and Birley for his misery. 'I curse Mark and Jimmy from the grave', it read. 'I hope they are happy now.' There were many religious passages, some lines distributing his possessions to his girlfriends, and instructions for his memorial service. He asked his friend Kenneth Tynan to deliver an 'apologia'.

The service was held on November 25 at the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception in Farm Street, Mayfair.

'His laughter, which still rings in my ears, was a triumphant yelp of victory—a cackle of conquest—over drabness and pretension. People of quite remarkable ordinariness are permanently lodged in my mind because

of the skill with which they were sketched by this superb verbal cartoonist', said Tynan.

'As a raconteur and mimic, he had the most ebullient and imaginative flair I have ever encountered. Nobody has ever made me rejoice more. Even Peter Ustinov, a superlative talker, is reputed to have said that Dominic was the only person to whom he would defer in conversation. He loved the world of wealth and ceremony far more than it deserved, and his politics were those of a romantic monarchist. For him, England's king over the water was the Duke of Windsor. Certain rich people elected him their court jester, and he happily embraced the role, but they never really accepted him, because in the final analysis he did not have quite enough money. It may be that he set too much store by the favourable opinions of people many of whom were manifestly his inferiors. Towards the end of his life he said to me, with a grin of self-deprecation: "I thought I was a hermit, and I found I was a pariah."'

Aspinall spoke after Tynan. He mentioned the word genetics four times, quoted Beowulf in an Anglo-Saxon accent ('He unlocked the word hoard'), and lectured the attendant family on how emotionally ill-suited Elwes was to modern life. He then read out a poem which he had composed. Its first lines:

Why did you leave us Dominic?
Why did you die?

After the service a distant cousin of Elwes walked up and delivered Aspinall a solid right hook to the jaw. Aspinall slumped onto a parked Mercedes and said: 'I'm used to dealing with animals.' The punch, said the *Daily Mail*, 'summed up the bitterness, acrimony and resentment that has festered beneath the surface of the privileged and once tightly knit group of Lord Lucan's friends.'

Tynan remarked that it was sad that his friend had been laid to rest, quoting Evelyn Waugh, 'to the sound of the English country families baying for broken glass'. In fact the incident deserved the same epithet used by a Brigadier in White's Club when the news of the Lucan murder broke some months before: 'A bad day for Eton', he said.

Nigel Dempster, the *Mail* columnist, was uncharacteristically incensed by the behaviour of Goldsmith and Birley after this affair—and suddenly saw the Clermont crowd as something more than simply fodder for his column. I was so surprised by his torrent of words that I wrote it down: 'They have become an embattled race . . . the curtain, they know, is half-way down on them but they don't know when the final drop is coming so they've occupied the high ground. They think the scum are baying for their blood so they form clubs to keep the scum out, secure in the knowledge that they can behave boisterously and badly. When one of their class, like Dominic Elwes, seems to have been talking to the enemy—which is you and me—he is last seen heading down the hill into the enemy camp like a prairie dog, holding a white flag in his teeth.'

'Whenever I get fed up with this job, I just think of those people and I'm at it again, waiting for someone to slump over a table in an exclusive Mayfair club.'