

(i) It seems that I've lost all the things that used to be nice about me — TERRY

'Terry speaking,' I said.

The receiver cleared its throat.

'Oh hello, Miranda,' I went on. 'How are you? No, Gregory isn't here at the moment. Ring a bit later. Okay. Bye.'

Gregory was in fact sitting next door at the kitchen table, his hands palm-upwards on its grained surface. 'Success?' he asked. I nodded and he sighed.

'She's started sending me obscene poems now,' he said.

There seemed no point in not humouring him. 'Really? What sort of obscene poems?'

'Has a girl ever sent you an obscene poem?'

'I don't think so.'

'I can't cope with this. Things to do with my "proud beam". And stuff about her "amber jewel". Or perhaps it's *my* amber jewel — I'm not sure.'

'Sounds as though it's her amber jewel. I mean, she wouldn't have a proud beam, would she?'

'*She* might. I wouldn't put anything past her. She might have *two*.'

'What has she got to say about your proud beam? In this obscene poem.'

'She just goes on and on about it. I could hardly bear to read the thing. I can't cope with it. I don't need this.'

'How disgusting,' I said with enthusiasm. 'Well, what are you going to do about it, Greg?'

'That's just it. What *can* I do? Say, "Look, let's have no more obscene poems, okay? Cut out the obscene poems"? Scarcely. I could always call the police, I suppose ... let the police clear up the matter. And the horrible things she makes me do in bed ...'

'Why don't you just tell her to go away?'

Gregory looked up at me with puppyish awe. 'Can one do that sort of thing? Is that — is that what you'd do?'

'Christ, no. I'd make her make me do horrible things in bed. I'd even let her write me obscene poems. I'd even write her obscene poems back.'

'Would you really?'

'You bet. I'm desperate. I'm tortured by need. Hardly anybody seems to want to fuck me any more. I don't know why. Gita won't fuck me any more.'

'The tiny one with huge ears? Why won't she?'

'How the hell should I know? She says she doesn't want to. She doesn't know why she doesn't want to. But she knows she doesn't want to.'