

Inside

You've got a tattoo where?

I heard this surprised query in the booth next to mine. I was deep within the sticky embrace of a high-sided, fluffy shell chair at Incognita, the best nightclub in town. My television had broken down and for the last few days I'd been going there and observing my fellow humans, gathering material for a story or two. I retell this story more or less verbatim. My only contribution is to fill in the parts that I couldn't hear clearly because of the occasionally loud music or some passing hilarity.

My chair and I lurked in the Den, a dark, comparatively mute and licentious corner of the three floors of cacophony, prancing, intoxicants and hormones. I'd been wiling away an hour or so when I heard the plaintive question about the tattoo. The two of them must have been just behind me, possibly unaware of me, possibly indifferent. This is what they said...

You've got a tattoo where?

On my heart

Show me.

You can't see it.

What's it of?

It's inside.

?

It's inside. It's on the heart itself.

?

She opened me up and made it.

What's it of?

It's your name.

No picture?

No. You can't use ink. It's more like scarification.

Isn't that dangerous?

Yes.

Why not a normal tattoo? When did you have it done?

Three months ago, the day after we first met. I knew I would love you forever.

So you went to some tattoo parlour...?

No, of course not, Silly. My Mother did it, she's a surgeon. She did it at The Prince Rupert. I stayed there for four days. There were no complications.

Your Mother?

After that night we met I explained to my parents that you were The One and Mother readily agreed to perform the procedure. They also decided they would alter their will to include you.

?

There are three children in our family. Timmy, the eldest, is a disappointment. So they were keen to leave his third to you. Between us we will have no financial worries.

There was a lengthy pause, then ...

We met at a stupid party. I was the worse for wear. We got a room in some dingy motel. I vomited several times through the night. The next day I went to Zambia for two months. You are telling me that you did all that will-changing and surgery after one night?

Yes.

But the impression I gave you could not have been favourable.

I saw beneath.

Show me the scar from your surgery.

It's almost completely healed. I'll show you later.

I want to see the will.

Why?

I want to see it for myself. Do you know my full name?

My parents keep it in their combination safe. No-one is permitted to open it.

Do you know the number?

I know some of the old number.

?

Each of the three children knew a part of the number, but when Mother and Father changed their will they also changed the combination. Now Hannah, you and I will know the number.

Your three digits are in this envelope. Don't open it yet, they'll let you know when you can.

So we can look inside the safe?

Not until both Mother and Father have passed on or become deranged.

So you love me?

Yes indeed.

Doesn't Timmy mind being written out of the will?

He minds very much. He is very upset and he is very, very angry. But what's done is done.

Here, I got you this.

It is quite charming. I would like to give you these.

They are all to me? From you.

Yes. I wrote one, sometimes two, every day, but I didn't have an address to send them to.

Thanks. I guess I should read them. There are so many. I've never been much of a letter writer.

You don't have to open them. I just wanted you to have them.

They went silent for several minutes after that. I soon got bored and I felt a little peckish so I set off home. As I passed them I saw they were both looking down at the pile of large white envelopes that lay on their table like a thick blanket of snow.

