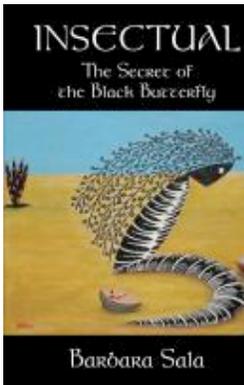


INSECTUAL

The SECRET of
the Black Butterfly



BARBARA SALA



What is the root of Maya's dysfunction in her matrimonial bedroom? Lorenzo sends her to a psychiatrist. In his office, she analyzes her marriage in Africa, and her childhood in Germany. She discovers art and spirituality. She divorces Lorenzo. But still, where did the sting of her suffering begin? To penetrate her resistances, the doctor suggests "hands-on sex therapy." INSECTUAL: Secret of the Black Butterfly contains 80 images illustrating Maya's dramatic journey through inner and outer worlds. A fast read.

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The Secret of the Black Butterfly

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The Secret of the Black Butterfly

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“My lover’s Hand.”

1. Unfulfilled Love or Foreboding

Making love. Oh making love! I really hate it. Day in, day out, always the same ritual. I don’t desire it as often as he does. Therefore, we get the passive sessions, when he “rapes” me, and the active sessions, when I play along.

I wouldn’t mind being more active, if it only took place once a week, or twice a month, or if it lasted only 10 minutes. But since I don’t respond, since I am frigid, so he says, he is getting more and more obsessive and is coming back for more again and again. “You don’t feel. So it doesn’t matter how often I make love to you.” He is trying to master something over which he has absolutely no control. I too have no control over all this, just as a lame person cannot walk or a black cat cannot be a white cat. I am a sexual cripple.

To me, making love is boring and a waste of time. One housewife once confided to me that eating a steak was much more pleasurable than making love. At that time I was young and I thought she was crazy. Today? I agree with her, not about the steak – I prefer reading a book. But in those days, had I dared to refuse Lorenzo, the tension at home would have been unbearable. So I would think about tomorrow, while parting my legs for the day’s session.

Sooner or later our marriage would roll into the garbage bin. To be a submissive, compassionate and docile housewife, I used the trick of sexual fantasies. But now, after 10 years of marriage and

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plenty of adventures, I have run out of fantasies. Therefore, the more Lorenzo wants it, the less I want it. It's a vicious circle.

Do I feel some pleasure? Only during the very last seconds of this tedious exercise. But if I don't find a release, I am nervous, angry and always screaming at the kids. So once we start, we have to finish.

"You are beautiful... you are beautiful..." my brain purrs, while Lorenzo tries to get me going. He is very patient. What is he actually thinking? Is he making love with the last woman he has been to bed with? This exercise brings out the blackness, the despair, the helplessness in me. I am trapped. Desperately I coax myself, "Chérie... Chérie... Chérie... come, let go." I repeat this 20, 30 times, like a mantra. My throat is dry. I am thirsty. I want a glass of apple juice.

The fantasies are exhausted. The transparent nightie I slip on in a nightclub with candles shining in the background; the see-through blue blouse that I am wearing without a bra; my sexy orange skirt that opens in front; sitting on a bar stool wearing nothing underneath a flimsy summer dress. All these fantasies have lost their appeal. They push me further into the abyss, where I can hear my small voice cry out for help.

"Hi," it says cheerfully. "I am here, look at me."

In a tiny hole in the sand of the desert I see a small, round, shaved head with one eye glistening in the sun.

"Come, Chérie, sit on me. Give yourself to me," says the little thing. It is trembling.

"Come closer... closer... kiss me..."

"Go away," I say.

"You are such a hypocrite. You do desire me, but you won't admit it. For you, I am perverse, dirty, filthy."

"You are destroying my brain."

"Come on kiss me or I will go under again."

Lorenzo and I have now been lying in our bed, face to face, his hands between my legs, for 40 minutes. I open my eyes. It is late in the evening. The children are asleep. The door to our bedroom is locked. The lights of passing cars on the street play over our bodies, continue up the wall to the ceiling and disappear. I want to cuddle up with Lorenzo, just cuddle, no sex. Just relax and be peaceful. Curl up in a fetal position, listen to him telling me fairy tales. But he is not the

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right person for this. His accent, his voice, his intonation. He is not a storyteller. Oh, all this brain activity! Can't I let go?

"Chérie... Chérie... come, let go." My fantasy lover has no face, no sex, only hands, disconnected from his body. These hands are as light as feathers. Oh, Lorenzo's touch is much too heavy. I have to guide his hand.

"Move..." says Lorenzo. "Help me."

"I can't. If I move I lose all pleasant feelings," I say.

"Come closer..." whispers the little bold thing in the desert. "Give yourself to me."

It's now 50 minutes that we have been lying next to each other. If I stop now, I won't be able to fall asleep and tomorrow will be a bad day. Lorenzo will sulk and the children will be uncontrollable.

If only he knew my thoughts, he would spend every night in another woman's bed. No, I will not pour out my secret world to him yet. No, not yet.

"Let me go. This is a total waste of time. The children's lunches are not prepared. The house has to be cleaned. I have to pick up new tires for the car and go to the dentist. Let me out of here..." I plead silently.

"Chérie... Chérie... come." The single eye on the bold little head is opening.

I arch my back. Let go... finally. It's over.

Next morning I write: sometime, someday, somebody will help me to put the puzzle of my life together. Someday I will be able to talk to somebody and everything will make sense. I date it 1972. I put this piece of paper into a box, where, next to my diaries, I am accumulating precious little scraps of wisdom that will help me retrace my life.



"I picked up from underneath my Bed."

2. The Dream

1986. The book I am reading in the doctor's waiting room falls from my hands onto the floor. A nurse tells me, "Maya, you have to go back into therapy." She picks up a pencil to inscribe my name in her agenda.

"No, I will not," I say.

"I insist: you have to start therapy."

"No, I will not."

The woman grabs my hand and pleads, "Please, you have to."

"No, never!" I cry and run out of the building.

I wake up. It is the morning of a frosty day in Montreal. Rays of blinding sun pour into my room. I scribble down the dream. Go back into analysis? Why should I? Why should I repeat another journey of unfulfilled love, a journey of constantly yearning and craving to see him, touch him, love him and experience once more the pain of separation?

I put my dream on my desk and go about my day's business. A sudden intuition makes me pick up the phone and dial the doctor's office. "We are sorry, but the number is out of service," says the soft-spoken voice.

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I dial again and once more get the same message. He is gone! Is he still in town? I grab my car keys and drive to the medical centre. I search out the janitor. Yes, indeed, the doctor left the building some months ago.

"Where did he go?"

"I cannot tell you."

This was his most brutal rejection.

Angry, I pick up from underneath my bed the 37 copybooks that I wrote during the seven years of therapy. Indeed, as the dream had told me, I am going back into therapy.



“The Agenda.”

3. The Agenda

Montreal 1978. The doctor stops taking notes and looks at me.

“And what do you expect from this therapy?”

“Cure me of the ‘devil’ and make me whole. Yes, make me whole.”

I have mentioned the “devil” on purpose a few times, at the risk of sounding ridiculous. I want to attract the psychiatrist’s attention.

“What is this problem? Can you describe it?”

No, not really. If I knew, I wouldn’t be here, I would be able to help myself. How can I describe the “devil?” I haven’t seen him. I chose this word 20 years ago to describe my relation to an unpleasant feeling. Repulsion? Guilt? Anger? Hate? What is this feeling? What does it want to say? Recently, in reading Wilhelm Reich’s book *The Function of the Orgasm*, I understand that something is really wrong with me and this has to do with sex.

“You see,” and I show the doctor a diagram of an orgasm. “It shows the curve of pleasure as it rises and increases in the sexual act. Finally, it goes up one last time to a maximum and then it shows the release. So if it is scientifically proven that I, as a woman, can

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experience these sensations, why don't I feel them when making love? Why don't I feel some pleasure spreading through my whole body, not only confined to the vaginal area? Why can I not feel?" I look at him. I am desperate. "Can you help?"

It's January, a grey day in Montreal. I am wearing a brown turtleneck and a beige woollen tight skirt. Brown goes well with my flaming red hair. To feel more cheerful, I have put a string of Congolese ivory pearls around my neck, a present from Lorenzo. He gave them to me while we were living in the former Belgian Congo.

"So you want to be whole?"

The doctor studies his agenda.

"Is Tuesday and Thursday alright with you?"

I see him fill out two spots in his agenda. Then he leans back in his comfortable office chair and explains that in the following sessions I will describe to him the highlights of my life.

"Helter, skelter, upside down, downside up?" I ask.

"Whichever way you want it."

This will take a few sessions, I think. Excluding the "devil", I do like my life. It has been full of ups and downs and adventure. While speaking about my life, I will get used to him.

Suddenly he snaps his fingers.

"What is your earliest memory?"

"A grey house with crescent-shaped basement windows and a door with iron bars. Mother is walking me to kindergarten."

"How old are you?"

"Maybe five."

When we passed this house on my way to kindergarten, Mother explained that in ancient times red-haired women called witches were burnt here. I had red hair. Did she mean that I was a witch?

I was born at home, in Darmstadt, a quiet city in the German Rhineland, in June shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. Mother's labour started on a Saturday evening. She was moaning and groaning in the bedroom, while the gynecologist and my father were drinking and playing cards in the adjacent living room. As she tried to relieve her pain by pushing the furniture around, the two men fell asleep and only her shrieks after sunrise woke them up, just in time for the doctor to stretch out his hands to catch me. It was 6 a.m. When Mother looked at me in her arms, she was so upset that I had red hair and that I was not a boy that she

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wanted to bury me right then and there in the sand of the garden. Throughout childhood, whenever I was naughty, she made sure to remind me of her first intention.

From the doctor's hands, I fell into the well-padded nest of a comfortable life on the third floor of an elegant wood-frame townhouse that belonged to my maternal grandparents. Father was an enthusiastic aviator who chose this profession because of the adventure and challenge. He was tall, slim, blond and blue-eyed. Mother had no specific profession, but she was an excellent seamstress with great taste. She was slim too and had short chestnut hair. It was brushed behind her ear on one side, while on the other it fell over the side of her face. She had an interesting and uncommon beauty. The Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda reproduced a photo of Mother in a poster all over prewar Germany showing her as "the ideal Slavic peasant girl."

Grandfather, a much-loved and gentle physician, had his office on the first floor and my grandparents' residence was on the second floor. Grandmother was a very educated and well-read socialite, at one time the head of a women's club. She played the piano and was interested in mysticism. She came from a distinguished family. Her father, Adolph, was a scientist. He and his wife, Adolphina, were promised to each other when they were still in diapers. They were first cousins.

I was christened Magdalena after Father's mother, who had been a talented musician, photographer and beekeeper. Would I be called Magda or Lena? I called myself Maya.

At first I was a sweet baby who slept most of the time, ate and slept some more. Then I grew into a rebellious little girl who threw fits of anger. I banged doors and kicked chairs. I don't know when my quarrels with mother started, but they never stopped until a few years before her death – and she lived to the ripe old age of 96.

My sister Emma too argued with Mother. She was shy and sly and short-sighted and wore glasses at an early age. She developed into a shrewd detective digging up possible secrets she could use to get her way. We, too, fought constantly.

In 1938, my grandfather fell into the arms of a patient he was examining and died. Only 12 months later, grandmother had a fall and broke her hip on the first night of the war in September 1939. All street lights had been switched off. Her entry into the hospital coincided with the arrival of the first wounded soldiers from the front.

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She received little proper care in the hospital. Her leg was set in a stretcher. Since her hip didn't heal, the hospital sent her home. In the beginning, she walked with a cane, in constant pain.

Father was recruited by the German Air Force as a flight instructor at different locations in Germany and at the front. He was absent from home for long periods. Mother, assisted by a nanny and a maid, kept the household going. My younger brother was born during the war.

Then, in 1944, Father, worried about our safety, moved the family into the Alps, the region of the Allgaeu, the southern most part of Germany. He foresaw a temporary stay of six months in the chalet of his choice and then we would return to Grandmother's house in Darmstadt. But things turned out differently.

Soon after my parents' departure to the security of the Alps, a bomb crashed through all three floors of Grandmother's house in the Rhineland. The flames spread slowly, giving Grandmother time to limp out into her garden. She saved all her jewellery, which she had carried day and night in a pouch underneath her blouse. Neighbours and people from the street helped her rescue some chairs and carpets. My grandfather's precious pewter collection melted in the flames.

Grandmother joined us in the mountains. She moved into the room on the second floor of the wooden chalet, while we, the family of five, slept in the other bedroom. Downstairs was a kitchen, living room and a small guest room off the kitchen, which was always occupied by some friend who found shelter with us. This eventually became my room. There was also a barn and an outhouse.

I had developed a stutter and at the end of my first year at the village school, the teacher confided to my parents, "I cannot issue a report card for your daughter, this child cannot talk." But I could sing. Grandmother coaxed me to speak to her while I was singing and that's how I overcame my stutter.

Satisfied with my first session with the doctor, in the elevator going downstairs, I sigh with relief. "Congratulations! You passed the test. Now your name is written in the agenda of this psychiatrist."

Apparently I am sick enough to be taken seriously. Lorenzo, my tall extrovert Italian husband, after 14 years of marriage, had been nagging me again recently, with increasing urgency.

"Maya, you either get some help or our marriage is finished."

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“What do you mean? What’s wrong now?”

“Your aversion to sex. You don’t refuse, but you rarely encourage me. You have no enthusiasm for lovemaking. I am fed up with dragging you along. You never smile anymore.”

I don’t want a divorce. We just moved into this house. The children are still so young, 11 and 12 years old. We don’t have enough money for two households. Everybody thinks we are a perfect, happy couple. I cannot live without him. I cannot return to the lonely and suicidal period I went through before I got married.

It isn’t the first time that Lorenzo has begged me to get some help. Help for what? To help me, or to help him? He is angry at my sexual inadequacy, this I know. He tells his friends, “Maya is a good cook, a good housewife, but lousy in bed!” Haven’t we just participated in the hospital’s sexual awareness sessions for couples in difficulties and haven’t I grudgingly endured another genital examination to show that anatomically I am normal? Do I have to go on catering more and more to Lorenzo’s insatiable sexual appetite? Oh how I hate this “bodily function,” as the textbooks call it.

“What about you, Lorenzo?” I say. “Maybe you’re the one with the problem. Why don’t you go and check yourself out?”

We are lying on the floor, our heads resting on a long foam-rubber cushion covered in faded red and orange checkers, something the former house owner had left behind in the basement. Our living room is barely furnished, as we cannot agree on the type of furniture we should buy.

The other day Lorenzo comes home, holding a brown plastic box swinging from his outstretched hand.

“Here, I brought you a present.”

“What is it?” I inspect this piece of junk.

“It’s a sewing kit.”

“A sewing kit?” I repeat sarcastically, thinking “With whom have you been sleeping?” Only guilt could cause him to bring such a hastily bought ugly thing home. Generally, Lorenzo has excellent taste. But I keep this thought to myself, as I do not trust my intuition.

“Okay, Lorenzo! You want me to get some help? I’ll go and get it.”

In contrast to other days, I am suddenly curious about what needs changing in my behaviour. I make an appointment with our family physician. I no longer recall what I told him. Perhaps I asked,

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"Doctor, what do you think my husband is complaining about?" I mention the sexual awareness sessions at the hospital.

"Did they help?" asks my family physician.

"No. Lorenzo and this doctor talked and I just listened, not knowing what I was there for."

"Has this problem existed for a long time?"

"Forever. I never liked our lovemaking."

Perhaps that's the reason Lorenzo has often been with other women, even the week before our marriage.

"Lorenzo worked as a community development worker for the United Nations in the Congolese bush, and slept around with the women the chiefs of the villages offered him. He always came home exhausted and sick from his adventures."

"Any sexually transmitted diseases?"

"No. Now that we live in Montreal, he is constantly buying sex magazines. He gets aroused reading this stuff and then he turns to me and I get the brunt of it. I am very sick of it and very angry. As if his normal urge wasn't enough!"

"And now?" asks the family physician.

"I want to save the marriage. What can I do?"

"Go and see this psychiatrist. I know him to be serious, and he is successful with his patients."

Twice a week, I come for my sessions with the psychiatrist. His big, brown desk stands between us, thus limiting my field of vision to the upper half of his body. I have a neurotic compulsion to throw a quick glance at men's pants. The room is rather dark, as the only window faces the brick wall of an adjacent building. A standard fluorescent ceiling light accentuates the room's feeling of anonymity. The carpet, rust colour, is worn, especially just in front of my chair. There are faint dirt marks around the light switches and the door knob.

Except perhaps for the two abstract oil paintings, notable for their coarse brush strokes, there is nothing revealing about the doctor in this office. One painting, to me, suggests the fiery explosion of the mind; the other hints at a path leading into the Unknown. I am pleased that he likes contemporary art.

I am relieved, too, that there is no couch in his office. This would have been very frightening to me.

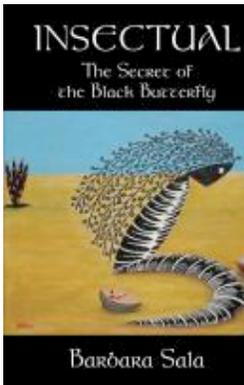
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He seems gentle, detached, not much older than I, and, I can't help thinking, really ugly. He is totally unattractive to me, but that's all right. At least there won't be any danger of falling in love with him.

"Which school of therapy are you following?" I ask.

"No one system: I am eclectic," he answers.

I presume that he means he chooses any system of therapy that best suits the patient and the situation.



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