

On the night of the kidnap, Mark was away in San Francisco with his maternal grandparents, and Aileen was off with friends, leaving Gail with Ariadne and Tara at La Fuserna. But that Sunday morning, something made her feel uneasy and she decided, on the spur of the moment, to drive back to Rome. When she rang Paul, one of his flatmates told her he had not returned.

This worried her, but there was no further news of him until that evening, when the phone rang and someone with a southern Italian accent asked politely if she were the Signora Getty.

When she said, 'Yes', he answered, like someone from the cleaners telling her her clothes were ready, 'We have your son, Paul Getty.'

'What do you mean?' she said impatiently. 'He's here in Rome.'

'No, *signora*. He is with us. We are kidnapers and have him captive. He is safe, but we will require much money to release him.'

She stammered that she had no money.

'Then please prepare to ask for it from your father-in-law. He has all the money in the world.'

It was then she understood her caller wasn't joking.

'Where is my son?' she asked angrily.

'I tell you he is with us. He is in good health and he'll stay that way as long as you do as you are told and arrange about the money. But don't go to the police. Just wait to hear from us.'

With which the man rang off – and Gail collapsed. When she recovered, it was as if her world had suddenly collapsed as well. She had never felt thoroughly frightened before, but she now experienced real terror, blanking out all other feelings, and leaving her weak and shaking. All her thoughts of Paul were suddenly of the vulnerable child she remembered, with his private weaknesses and fears. He had been a shy, extremely loving child, and she could not stop thinking how frightened he must be and how easy it would be for his kidnapers to hurt him.

She had always felt at ease with people, particularly Italians, and she loved Italy. But Italy was suddenly a foreign land.

'I felt utterly alone, and I had to find out what in God's name I should do.'

Her first reaction was to ring her parents in America, who did their best to reassure her and said she must certainly contact the police, which she did, telephoning the Carabinieri station in the nearby Piazza Euclide. Then she called her ex-husband, Paul, in London.

They had recently been drawing closer to each other. Paul was on his own but seemed more in charge of his life than at any time since Talitha's death. Gail had spent part of May with him at Cheyne Walk – since when few days had passed without them speaking to each other on the telephone.

So when she broke the news of what had happened, they shared the sense of shock and horror for their child. Both were in tears, and since Paul seemed even more upset than her, Gail found herself trying to console him. It was only when she said he must contact his father to raise money for the ransom that he seemed to move away.

'I can't,' he said. 'We never speak to one another.'

'Then I'll have to speak to him myself,' she said. But before she could the Carabinieri had arrived.

The Arma dei Carabinieri pride themselves on being a tough, hard-headed *corps d'élite* who help hold Italy together in spite of the most corrupt governing class in Europe. What they lack in imagination they make up for in cynicism and knowledge of the world – and are rarely over-sympathetic to what they see as rich, indulgent foreigners living in their midst.

Three local officers were commanded by one Colonello Gallo – Colonel Cockerel – 'who looked and behaved exactly like a rooster'. They were soon joined by officers from Carabinieri headquarters who grilled her for the next five hours – chiefly about her and her son's private lives. She repeated the words of the telephone call verbatim, but they made little attempt to hide their doubts about the kidnapping – and about young Paul himself.

'We know your son, *signora*. He is probably with a girl or with his hippie friends. He will almost certainly turn up.'