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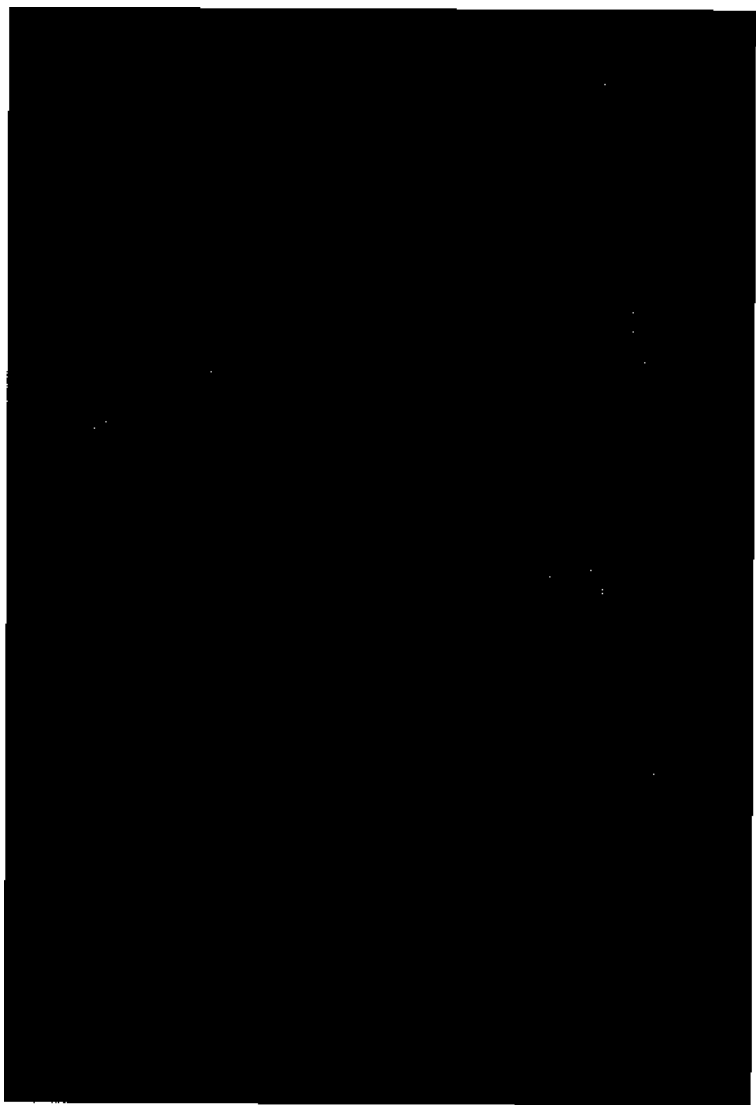
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"INSPECTOR MAIGRET"
(As portrayed by the French actor, Harry Baur)

Georges Simenon

MAINLY MAIGRET

The Lodger
A Crime in Holland
The Sailors' Rendezvous



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*

A NOTE FOR THE READER

THE discoverer of Simenon enjoys a rich gift, for he experiences in this broken-up world of ours the intact and frank view of life yielded by the great French writers of the nineteenth century. The line is unbroken: the best work of this Belgian-born crime writer of our time contains the penetration of Flaubert and Maupassant, the breadth and realism of Balzac. To him the human situation, or the section he deals with, is seen minutely and through a clear lens, and—as in the Maigret stories—with a steady acceptance and understanding. His point of interest is a crime—the finding of a body—but in laying bare the reason for it he re-creates its entire setting, both physically and psychologically, and in doing so the crime is seen as it really is: the coming to the surface in a single act of violence of a great number of unsuspected but complicated forces. This happens in life. His material he uses as an artist, for he creates his own world, taking as territory a microcosm of this one and getting it to yield everything it can—for instance: the boarding-house on the outskirts of Brussels in *A Lodger*. In *A Crime in Holland* his gift is especially clear: by vivid and exact description a small town on the north Dutch coast somehow conveys to us a whole people and their way of life.

But there are two Simenons, as well as the creator of two sets of stories: that of Maigret, the brusque though sympathetic giant of the Surete" who by allowing his unconscious mind to work its own way to a solution can put his finger on the instability in the placid outward scene—and the, uneasy, yet brilliant, writer who attempts to explain the oblique mechanism of the minds of those who have committed murder but who apparently feel *no* guilt. It is simple to assess the value of Maigret, and the boldness with which he is created—his background is generally a small harbour or canal wharf, among people who make their living by water—for in him Simenon is the tolerant chronicler of the human heart and the everyday world, vividly varied and rich. The writing itself is both relaxed and sure. The other Simenon is less satisfactory and less easy to measure. In these studies of unusual criminals he penetrates deeply, **but** at

times his detachment is hard and the work, though extraordinarily powerful, is without colour. *The Lodger*, however, is a fine example of this genre and one of the most compelling long-short stories of the 'thirties, for it never loses poise or intensity from first to last, and the reader is left with a sense of increased experience.

Georges Simenon is a prolific and therefore uneven writer, but the stories in this volume are three of his best and most representative.

DIANA GARDNER

THE LODGER

Translated from the French:

Le Locataire

by Stuart Gilbert

" **FOR** heaven's sake shut the window!" **groaned Elie, pulling the** blankets up to his chin. " Have you gone quite crazy? "

" But there's such a fug in here." Sylvie's form showed in white relief against the greyness of the window. " You were sweating **all** last night, and the place smells like a sickroom."

He snuffled, and let himself down lower into the bed, curling his lean limbs into a ball, while the girl stepped into the warm glow **of** the bathroom and turned on the taps. For some minutes the hiss **of** water made further talk out of the question. One eye emerging **from** the sheets, Elie contemplated now the window, now the bathroom. The light outside was cheerless, and the sight of the open window sent a shiver down his spine each time he looked towards it. That morning early risers must have been greeted by a snowstorm, **but** it was now eleven and no more flakes were falling from the fallow clouds hanging low above the housetops of Brussels. The street-lamps in the Avenue du Jardin Botanique had been left on, **and** shop-windows, too, were lighted up.

From where he lay Elie had a clear view over the black, gleaming Avenue, up and down which trams were gliding in slow, clanging files. And he could also see the Botanical Gardens, sheeted with snow, the pond frozen over but for a small black patch of open water, in which three swans sat motionless.

" Aren't you getting up? "

" Can't you see I'm ill? "

They had stayed until three in the morning at the *Merryland* cabaret, though all the evening Elie had been blowing his nose till the tears streamed from his eyes, and imploring her to return to the hotel. It was a nasty cold, the sort that easily develops into bronchitis or the 'flu. He felt naked and defenceless in **a** hostile world, sweat oozing from every pore.

" Do please shut that window, Sylvie."

After turning off the taps she walked across the room to the window. The bathroom mirror was coated with steam.

"I'll bet old Van der Boomp is sleeping late this morning. Isn't it funny he should be staying at the *Palace*, too, and in the next room to ours? "

But Elias Nagear—since coming to Belgium he had accepted, not without some secret pleasure, the abbreviation of his name to "Elie"—wasn't in a mood to find anything "funny," and he grunted surlily:

"Damn Van der Boomp! I'm certain it's on his account you kept me hanging about at that wretched bar till three in the morning."

"Don't be so absurd!"

He knew better, but it wasn't worth arguing about. When, towards midnight, they had entered the *Merryland*, the room had been practically empty but for a few professional dancers glumly eyeing their empty glasses. Under these conditions even the band seemed reluctant to strike up, and Sylvie kept on yawning. But a change had come over the scene when in the small hours a fat Dutchman rolled in, escorted by two Belgians who were evidently introducing him to the night life of the capital. Everybody seemed to wake up, and one could have sworn the lights went brighter.

The Dutchman was obviously out to enjoy himself. He had a hearty, boyish laugh. A quarter of an hour after his appearance, four girls were chattering at his table, champagne was flowing freely, the smoke of exotic cigarettes and Havana cigars mingling above their heads.

Standing beside Elie at the bar, Sylvie kept looking enviously at the group.

"If you're feeling rotten, go to bed. I'm staying here."

It wasn't jealousy, but he refused to budge—perhaps just to aggravate her.

"I suppose you're staying on account of Van der Boomp?" he suggested. "Van der Boomp" was the name Sylvie had invented for the portly Dutchman. It got on her nerves to see other girls swilling champagne while she was sipping a modest gin-fizz at the bar.

"I don't think much of his taste, anyhow," she whispered, after a long, appraising look at the four girls. Then, abruptly changing her mind, she added: "All right. Let's go."

When they were crossing the lobby of the *Palace Hotel* on their way to the lift they saw the swing-door open and Van der Boomp

roll in. So the girls hadn't been able to hold him, after all! Sylvie thought better of him **at** once, and when, in the lift, he shot obviously admiring glances at her, her opinion of him rose still higher.

But she had had to spend the night with Nagear, who was now gazing at her from the bed with puffy, red-rimmed eyes, his nose swollen, his cheeks greasy with perspiration—and had hardly any money left.

"What on earth are you going out for?" he grumbled.

"That's my business/" she replied as she drew on her stockings. "Look here! I'll need some cash."

"Nothing doing! "

So far only the bathroom had been lit up, and the air in the bedroom seemed full of greyish dust. After fastening her black suspenders Sylvie switched on the light and, while the scene outside the window blacked itself out, the objects in the room came into view.

On the dressing-table, between two small pink-shaded lamps, were strewn silver-topped bottles, scent-sprays, all the dainty paraphernalia of a woman's toilet.

He watched the whiteness of her breasts vanish beneath a gauzy, silk chemise, and heard her voice again:

"You've a few hundred francs left, surely? "

"Why don't you sell that nugget of yours? " he muttered, blowing his nose.

The touch of the handkerchief on the inflamed skin was so painful that he had to take infinite precautions.

"Don't be a fool! D'you imagine I'm going to part with *that*? "

He hadn't imagined anything. He had lost all power of imagination. All he knew was that he was perspiring freely, the bed-sheets drenched, his pyjamas sticking to his legs, and the light made his eyes smart....

They had met a fortnight before on board the *Thiophile-Gautier*. Sylvie was returning from Cairo, where she had been one of the show-girls in a cabaret. He was on his way from Istanbul to Paris, where he hoped to put through a deal in carpets—a million francs' worth, held up by the Customs, which he had undertaken to clear and to dispose of.

He was not the owner of these carpets; in fact, it might be a delicate task determining the ownership and reckoning the shares of all the parties concerned—assuming all went well. For there were quite a dozen middlemen, at Pera, Athens, and even Paris, who had

had a finger in the pie, and the negotiations had been dragging on for months. Nagear, who had business connections in Brussels, had volunteered to see the transactions through, and displayed such assurance of success that he had been given an advance.

Also, they had promised him two hundred thousand francs more once he had cleared and sold the carpets.

Sylvie had started the voyage in the second-class. From the first day out four or five men were dancing attendance on her, and she stayed on deck after dinner till two or three in the morning.

And next day she moved into a first-class cabin. Who had paid the supplement? Not Elie in any case, as at that stage he hadn't got in touch with her. He succeeded in doing so only just before the ship reached Naples, where she told him she was going to get off.

He paid her passage on to Marseilles, took her with him to Paris, and then to Brussels. They had been there for three days now, and he had already discovered that the carpet venture was quite hopeless.

To make things worse he had fallen ill, and he had barely a thousand francs left. One eye hidden by the quilt, with the other he watched Sylvie smearing red on her lips.

" Really I don't see what you can want to do out of doors at this hour of the morning," he said querulously.

" That's my business, as I told you just now."

" Unless you're going to make a pass at that Dutchman. . . ."

" Why not? "

But he was only pretending to be jealous. On board ship it had been a different matter; there was keen competition between the men, and all the other passengers had watched their tactics with amused interest. Then, he had really felt jealous of his rivals.

But now—he knew her too well. He had seen her at her worst, in bed in the early morning, when the freckles under her eyes showed like angry blotches and her features, in repose, betrayed their coarseness.

" Now then! " she said, drawing the tight skirt up over her hips, " hand over that money."

He didn't move, even when she took his wallet from his coat-pocket. He watched her counting out four, five, six hundred-franc notes and slipping them into her bag. Trams were clanging up and down the Avenue, each with its one big headlight on.

" Shall I tell them to send you up some breakfast? . . . Well, why don't you answer? What's come over you? "

No, he wouldn't answer. And the sight of that bloodshot eye

peering at her made her feel uneasy, there was something malevolent in its fixity, and she would have given much to read his thoughts.

" See you later!" she said. He made no movement, while she flung a fur coat over her shoulders. " You might at least say ' *An nvovt*' to me," she added, almost pleadingly.

After turning off the light in the bathroom, she hunted round for her gloves, then glanced out of the window at the dreary prospect.

" Have it your own way! "

He too had changed* On the *Tkfophik+Gautkr* she had been impressed by his smart appearance, and he had looked much younger than his age, which was thirty-five' He had jet-black hair and a rather prominent nose.

" Are you a Turk? " she had asked at their first meeting.

" Not really. I'm of Portuguese origin,"

She had found him good company; or, rather, he had a knack of making unexpected, cynical remarks, and seemed to have knocked about the world—and the half-world too. When she told him she was a dancer, he asked in which of the Cairo cabarets she had performed.

" At the *Tabarin*."

" Ah, yes. A thousand francs a month, *plus* a rake-off on the fizz."

That was so. Evidently he knew Cairo. He also knew Bucharest, where she had been, at *Maxims*, for two months. He had amusing tales to tell about the men with whom she'd got off.

" You're rich, aren't you? "

^{<k} I shall draw two hundred thousand francs the day I reach Brussels."

And now—all that was oven He was a sick man, on his beam ends—and ugly into the bargain! The glamour had departed.

" *Au revolt!*"

She left her luggage in the bedroom* As she passed Van der Boomp's door she threw a quick glance at it and saw the ietter-box crammed with fat Dutch newspapers.

Eife had hardly noticed when she went out. He stared at the ceiling, then at the window, then at the unlit lamps. He started to blow his nose, but the feel of the handkerchief on the raw skin made him wince* Beads of sweat were oozing from his chest and trickling along his ribs.

Sylvie was saying to the hall-porter:

" Call me a car, piease."

"A taxi?"

"Well, it's for the suburbs—Charleroi."

"Oh, in that case I'll call up a car for hire, and you can fix a price with the chauffeur."

All the lights were on in the lobby, and Sylvie whiled away the time inspecting the show-cases of local shops aligned along the walls. Presently she stepped into a car driven by a liveried chauffeur.

"Take me to the *Bon Marché* first."

It was so dark outside that one could hardly believe the hour was noon. At the *Bon Marché* all the big globes of frosted glass were lit up. Gusts of icy air kept pouring in through the revolving doors, and the girls behind the counters had woollies on under their black blouses.

Sylvie seemed uncertain what she wanted. Finally she bought a pair of blue leather slippers, a pullover, two pipes, some artificial silk stockings, and a vanity bag. In her heavy furs she cut the figure of a wealthy lady, and when the girl followed her out, carrying the parcels to the car, she explained:

"They're presents."

The snow was holding in the woods bordering the Charleroi road, and it was colder here than in the city. The windows of the car grew misted, and Sylvie wiped them with her gloved hand. When the first collieries and miners' cottages came in sight she pressed her forehead to the glass.

As the car was entering Charleroi she opened her bag, took out a mirror, and skilfully revived her make-up.

"Turn left," she said. "Now left again. Cross the bridge. Then follow the tram-lines."

A rash of snow moted the flanks of the tall black cones beside the coal-pits. The road was a long, dreary vista of mean houses, all exactly alike, their brick walls black with coal-dust. Now and then a line of skips travelling on an aerial cable rattled overhead, and sometimes a miniature train crawled*across the road, preceded by a man with a red flag.

It was neither town nor country. Here and there the rows of houses gave place to what might have been a field, but on a closer view proved to be a pit-head. The air throbbed with the noise of engines; it was like driving through an immense factory.

"Stop at Number Fifty-three."

There was nothing to distinguish it from the other houses* In the front window, between white **lace curtains**, stood a copper **pot**

in which a nondescript green plant languished. The chauffeur was about to ring when Sylvie said:

" No. Bring the parcels."

Peeping through the keyhole, she rattled the letter-box. A woman in her forties opened the door and, drying her hands on her blue apron, stared at the visitor.

" Don't you recognize me, Ma? "

Sylvie kissed her. Her mother submitted to the kiss, showing no more emotion than a mild astonishment; then gazed at the parcels in the chauffeur's arms.

"What's all them things?"

" Oh, some little presents.... Hand them over, Jacques. You can go and have your lunch now. Come back in an hour's time."

The kitchen door at the far end of the hall stood open, and a young man could be seen with his feet in the oven, a book propped on his knees.

" That's Monsieur Moise," the woman said as she and Sylvie entered the kitchen. Then, with what seemed a slight reluctance, she explained to the young man: " This is my daughter, who's just back from Egypt. ... It was Egypt, wasn't it, where you were last? "

But Moise had already edged his way past them and was hurrying upstairs.

" So you still have lodgers? " Sylvie remarked.

" How do you think we'd make both ends meet without 'em? "

A big saucepan was simmering on the range beside the coffee-pot, which was always kept full to the brim. Sylvie had dropped her coat across a chair and her mother was surreptitiously pawing the fur.

" Why did you tell the driver to come back? "

" Because I'll have to be off again presently."

" Oh, will you? "

As she always did when somebody dropped in, Madame **Baron** was pouring out a cup of coffee. She was in her working clothes; a shabby black dress, big blue apron. Sylvie unwrapped the slippers and handed them to her mother.

" Like them?"

Her mother sniffed and shook her head.

" What should I want with things like that? I'd look a proper guy in 'em."

" Where's Antoinette? "

" Doing the rooms/*

No sooner had she spoken than Antoinette came down the stairs carrying a pail and a floorcloth. For a moment she stared at her sister, then exclaimed;

"Gosh!"

" What did you say? "

" I said ' Gosh! ' You *are* dolled up I Got a job in the movies? "

They dabbed their lips to each other's cheeks. Antoinette's eyes fell on the blue slippers.

" Are they for me? "

" Well, I'd meant them for Ma, but as she doesn't want them .. . I've brought you some stockings and undies. Look! "

Sylvie opened the other parcels, but without much interest. A pipe rolled out and smashed on the floor.

" Will Pa be back soon?"

" Not till tonight. He's on the Ostend express now. You'll wait to see him, won't you? "

" Nothing doing today. But I'll be coming again."

Her mother was eyeing her shrewdly. Perched on a chair, her sister had pulled up her skirt, displaying her thin legs, and was trying on the stockings. There was a smell of soup, a sound of water boiling, the comfortable drone of a well-fed fire.

" All your rooms let? "

" Didn't you see the card in the window? The ground-floor room's empty—the dearest one, needless to say. Nowadays foreigners don't seem to have no money. You saw Monsieur Moise just now) well, he has to come and study in the kitchen as he can't afford a fire in his room. Lay the table, Antoinette. We'll have a snack before the lodgers come."

" So you still give'them board? "

" There's two come every day for lunch. If I didn't feed 'em, they'd be always plaguing me for hot water to make *coffee* and boil eggs, and messing up their rooms with riots and pans."

Madame Baron was astout, short-legged woman. Antoinette, who was shorter and thinner than her elder sister, had a quaint, bird-like little face, pale-blue, laughing eyes.

" So you've taken to using rouge? " her elder sister observed.

" Why shouldn't I? You make up all right."

" It doesn't suit you. At your age ... "

" When you were my age you did lots of other things! *"

Her mother was straining the soup on a comer of the range.

Beyond the window was a small back-yard, and big drops of melted snow were dripping from the eaves.



Shielding his mouth with his hand, the porter at the *Palace* murmured into the telephone:

" Is that you, Monsieur Van der Cruyssen? There's a gentleman here, a Monsieur Blanqui, who would like to see you. Shall I send him up? . . . Would you go up, sir? Room 413, Fourth Floor."

Elie had managed to drag himself out of the sodden bed. His throat swathed in a muffler, slippers on his feet, he was prowling round the room, at a loose end. He had heard someone talking on the 'phone in the next room. For some moments he stood at the window idly gazing at the snow-bound city, the pond in the Botanical Gardens, the three half-frozen swans. The din of trams and hooting cars jarred in his aching head.

" Come in."

The voice was in the next room. On occasion the two bedrooms formed part of a suite, and there was only a locked door between them. The voices in the adjoining room could be heard as distinctly as the clanging of the trams.

" Good morning, Monsieur Van der Cruyssen. Sorry to be so late, but I had to call in at the bank. . . ."

Elie listened with half an ear. He felt hot and cold all over. It struck him that a hot bath might do him good, but he hadn't the energy to set about it.

" So you've decided to leave tonight? " the voice went on.

" Yes, I'm taking the last train to Paris.... What will you have to drink? A glass of port? "

A voice could be heard giving an order down the telephone to the wine-waiter.

When that was done Elie followed suit: he, however, ordered a hot grog. Catching sight of his face in the looking-glass, he was appalled by its ugliness. But that might be because he hadn't shaved, and the mauve scarf emphasized the sallowness of his skin, the dark half-moons under his eyes.

" As you wished, I've taken the money in French notes."

Elie bent down and put an eye to the keyhole. He saw a small man, who looked like an accountant or a broker, laying on the table ten bundles of notes.

"¹ Count them, please."

Van der Cruysen (Elie still thought of him as "Van der Boomp") was in a black dressing-gown and scarlet slippers. He counted the notes, flicking them expertly, like one who is used to handling large sums of paper money. Then he placed them in a pigskin attache-case.

"Come in."

A waiter entered, carrying a bottle of port, another of rum, and a tumbler of hot water. These last were for Elie, who stepped back from the communicating door and, in his turn, called: "Come in."



The midday meal was beginning at the Barons'. Madame Baron kept on her feet, waiting on her daughters and the lodgers, Domb and Valesco, who had just come back. The two young men eyed Sylvie with frank admiration. She seemed amused by the impression she was making and her sister's furious glances in her direction.

"Do you know Bucharest?" asked Plutarc Valesco, who was a Rumanian.

"I should just think I do! What's more, I know nearly all your cabinet ministers."

"A delightful place, isn't it?"

"Not too bad—only everybody's stony-broke. . . ."



Sitting on the arm of an easy-chair, Elie sipped his hot grog and gazed down at the Avenue, swarming now with the lunch-hour crowd. Tiny snowflakes were beginning to float down from the sullen yellow sky.

"*Au revoir* then. Hope you'll have a good time at Paris."

"Thanks. See you next Wednesday."

There followed a sound of running taps in Van der Boomp's bathroom....

Nightfall came early, at half-past three, and found Elie lying on the bed, staring at the ceiling, which was dappled with roving gleams thrown up from the street below.

At four the hall-porter saw him going out, and noticed that he hadn't shaved. In fact, he had an unusually bedraggled appearance,

perhaps because he hadn't troubled to get out a clean shirt and collar.

"If Madame comes back while you're out, sir, is there any message?"

"No, thanks. I'll be back presently."

His cheeks were flushed; he looked like a man in the last stages of consumption.



The headlights lit up a drab expanse of muddy road and the low branches of the dripping trees. The window behind the chauffeur's seat was open and he said to Sylvie over his shoulder:

"I've a brother living at Marcinelles, quite near Charleroi. I thought you wouldn't be in a hurry, so I looked him up."

"What's his job?"

"Oh, nothing much. He's employed at the gasworks."

As they neared Brussels there were lighted cafes fringing the road, and the car skirted refuges on which loomed the dark, white-helmeted forms of traffic policemen.

"Monsieur Nagear has just gone out," the porter told Sylvie as she walked towards the lift.

"Oh? Did he leave any message?"

At eight he was still out, and she went down to the grill-room to dine. Van der Boomp was at a table near by, and she noticed that he kept on trying to catch her eye as she ate the lobster mayonnaise of which her repast consisted. But, to her surprise, when she went out and started strolling about the lobby, lingering in front of the show-cases, he did not come up and speak to her.

She went up to the bedroom, and after a while there was a sound of suitcases being closed in the next room, and she heard Van der Boomp say to the valet:

"No, the places in the sleeping-cars are all booked up. A first-class *courette*, please. GePme one facing the engine if you can."

She changed her dress lackadaisically; she was feeling tired and, perhaps, a little depressed. There was still no sign of Elie. She counted the money remaining in her bag: a hundred and fifteen francs.

Still undecided what to do, she walked to the lift. Near the street door she paused, to hand the room-key to the porter.

"A shame, isn't it, that he's leaving," the man remarked familiarly.

" Why? "

" He asked me who you were. Mighty struck on you, he is, that Dutchman. But he can't stand the sight of Monsieur Nagear."

She shrugged her shoulders and leant forward for him to light her cigarette. Van der Boomp emerged from the lift, hesitated for a moment, then went up to the porter, saying to Sylvie:

" Excuse me."

" So you're leaving us tonight, sir? "

"I have to." He emphasized the words, looking straight at Sylvie; then handed the man some crumpled notes he had been holding ready for him. " But I'll be back next week."

He took a few steps forward, hesitated again, and finally, with a vague wave of his hand, stepped out on to the pavement.

" He's a business man from Amsterdam," the porter informed Sylvie. " Rolling in it, I should say. He comes here every Wednesday. So if you're still here next week . . ."

Her eyelashes fluttered. But all she said was:

" When Monsieur Nagear comes back, say I'm at the *Merryland*. . . No, don't tell him anything. That'll teach him a lesson! Pagel Call me a taxi, please."

The snow was coming down steadily now, in big flakes that melted immediately they touched the pavement. Trains were whistling, a hundred yards away, in the Gare du Nord.

II

IT was while he was standing on the pavement in the Rue Neuve, jostled by the crowd and gazing into a tobacconist's window, with a shrill-voiced urchin hawking lottery tickets at his elbow, that suddenly it dawned on Elie how very far he had travelled since leaving his home in Istanbul. The tobacconist's window was packed with boxes of cigars and cigarettes of every brand, and amongst the latter he saw some white boxes bearing the name " Abdullah."

At Pera the most fashionable restaurant in the main thoroughfare is likewise called *Abdullah*. On the eve of his departure Elie had dined there with friends. He knew almost everyone, shook hands at every table.

" I'm off to France tomorrow,"

« Lucky devil I »

And now, standing at the corner of the Rue Neuve, his hands in his overcoat pockets, try as he might, somehow he couldn't recall the *Abdullah* restaurant. Not that he had any trouble in remembering its appearance. But that was not what he was after. He wanted to recapture the atmosphere and, still more, his mood that evening.

Why, for instance, had he set out on this long journey though he had guessed from the start that the deal in carpets was bound to fail? And why had he pretended to be so cocksure, telling everybody he knew, with a triumphant air:

" I'm on to a good thing, and I'm sailing for Marseilles tomorrow? "

All along the main street of Pera, where people were strolling in the cool of the evening, he had buttonholed acquaintances and imparted the great news.

Now, all that seemed so remote, so unreal, that he could fancy it a dream. Reality was the here and now: slushy pavements, a biting wind, fever, a sore nose, a dull ache between his shoulder-blades.

He entered the tobacconist's.

" A packet of Turkish cigarettes, please."

The small blue jet of a gas cigar-lighter danced before his eyes. The tobacconist was pink and plump. Dark forms scudded past outside the window. A packet was handed him.

" Those aren't Turks."

" They're Egyptian. Much better."

" There's no tobacco in Egypt."

" No tobacco in Egypt! That's a good one! "

" It's a fact," he said to the fat Belgian, who was glaring at him indignantly. " What you call Egyptian tobacco is all imported from Turkey and Bulgaria."

Wondering what had possessed him to tell the man all this, he stepped out of the shop, plunged again into the crowd, and walked, or rather splashed his way, ahead. Now and again he halted in front of a shop-window, usually one with a mirror, in which he could take stock of his appearance.

He was wearing a camel's-hair overcoat, an elegant felt hat, a well-cut suit.

Why did he suddenly strike himself as a pitiable sight? Was it because of a two-days' growth of beard, or his red, swollen nose and puffy cheeks? In any case, he was shocked by the face confronting him—" like death warmed up," he muttered with a wry smile.

When someone brushed against him, he winced and gave a stifled cry, as if he had been dealt a blow.

He was looking for a jeweller's, but passed three before finally turning into one. There he placed on the counter a lump of gold shaped like a walnut—Sylvie's "nugget." She had carried it about with her everywhere on her travels during the last two years, as a stand-by in case she were stranded in some foreign town.

The jeweller gave him thirteen hundred Belgian francs for it, and Elie found himself back in the street with many empty hours before him.

He could recall nothing of the voyage to Marseilles; or, rather, he remembered it as if it had been an experience in a previous life, or something in a book. Nothing had reality for him but this bleak darkness of unfriendly streets, this alien city of Brussels with its narrow pavements off which he had to step at every moment to avoid bumping into someone, these shop-windows, so chock-full of food that it made his gorge rise to see them, cafes with livid marble-topped tables that looked like fallen tombstones. . . .

He wasn't thinking: I'll do this; then I'll do that. Yet he had a feeling he was about to do something, and he had a notion what that something was. He was in a quarrelsome mood; he'd shown it already over the "Egyptian" cigarettes. Now he showed it again over a hot grog.

He had entered a cafe in the Place de Brouckere. The room reminded him of the big waiting-hall at a railway terminus. In the centre stood an enormous tankard of beer, twenty feet high, brimming over with white froth, and round it some two or three hundred people were seated at small tables. A band was playing; there was a constant clatter of mugs and saucers. Waiters were dashing to and fro.

Elie ordered a hot grog.

"Our grogs are made with wine, sir."

"I want one with rum." t.

"It's against the law to sell spirits in quantities of less than a quart."

"All right. Give me a quart of rum."

"This is a cafe, not a wine-merchant's."

"Oh, go to the devil! "

To make things worse, the lights in the room were so bright that they made his eyes smart, and there was no shelter from the glare. After some moments he walked out. When he entered the street his

fingers made the movement of clenching on something in his pocket. In the Boulevard Adolphe-Max he stopped in front of an ironmonger's shop, the windows of which were full of tools as highly polished as the silverware in a jeweller's show-window. Going up to the shopman, he said without the least hesitation:

"I want a spanner."

He chose a very large one, and swung it to gauge its weight as if it were a hammer, not a spanner. It was of an American make, and it cost him sixty-two francs.

He was sweating freely under his greatcoat. And at the same time he was shivering with cold. It was the same with his hunger; he felt ravenous, but every time he started to enter a restaurant or a pastrycook's he felt nauseated.

"All the winning numbers of the national lottery! All the winners!"

The crowds in the street gave him the impression of a demented herd, stampeding in all directions. He gazed at the portraits of film-stars in the lobbies of picture-houses and remembered having met one of them at Istanbul; he was one of a group of young men who had shown her round the town one evening. But that, too, seemed like an incident in a half-forgotten dream.

He knew what time the train left, but went to the station just to make sure. Yes; 12.33.

At midnight the station was empty, dimly lit and full of greyish dust, as sweepers were at work.

"Paris. First-class."

"Return, sir?"

He hesitated. He hadn't thought of that.

"Yes, a return, please."

He halted beside the handcart of the woman hiring pillows, and took two of them, and a blanket. There were only ten people on the platform waiting for the train. The station was strangely quiet. Far down the line an engine was shunting, in a maze of red and yellow lights. Sudden gusts of cold wind swept the platform.

Elie noticed a porter from the *Palace* keeping a place in one of the *courette* sleepers, entered the same compartment, placed his pillows and blanket on the opposite seat, and sat down.

He was quite calm.

As he stepped into the carriage Van der Boomp gave Elie a quick glance, and presumably recognized him as the young man he had seen at the cabaret. But he took no more notice of him.

There were four berths, two lower and two upper, but as they were the only passengers in the carriage, the upper ones were not let down*. It was pure chance that there were so few passengers—but Elie felt no surprise. It was as if he had foreknown everything.

Van der Boomp began by putting the attache-case under his pillow. Then he opened a valise, took from it a navy-blue smoking-jacket, a pair of travelling-slippers, and a bottle of Spa water.

He was a heavily built man, with a blotchy complexion and fair hair, thinning over the temples.

" Tickets please,"

The train was starting. When Van der Boomp held out his ticket the guard remarked:

" Were the sleeping-cars full, sir? "

He evidently knew the Dutchman, and addressed him with respectful familiarity. He hardly glanced at Elie as he punched his ticket

" Good-night, gentlemen."

Before leaving the carriage he drew down the blinds.

In his smoking-jacket and slippers Van der Boomp went off to the lavatory, taking his attache-case with him, under his arm. On his return he stretched himself on the berth, took a mouthful of the mineral water, and gargled before swallowing it; then placed the bottle on the floor beside him, within easy reach.

After a final glance at Elie, who was lying, fully dressed, on the opposite berth, he had moved the lighting switch over to the night-lamp. The train was gathering speed, and though the carriage was overheated, icy draughts were forcing their way through invisible chinks.

Elie's right hand was clenched on the big spanner, but actually his mind was void of thoughts. Through half-closed eyes he could see the bulb of the blue night-lamp overhead, bathing the carriage in a dim, spectral light,

The noises of the train settled into a steady rhythm, with a ground-bass of low-pitched rumblings, like the pedal-notes of an organ.

Van der Boomp's mouth was open and he was breathing heavily, with an occasional snore. One of his hands dangled over the side of the berth: a chubby, pink hand on whose fingers glinted a gold wedding-ring and a signet-ring in platinum,

Elie's gaze settled on the wedding-ring, but it conveyed nothing

to his mind. A sudden draught made him turn up the collar of his camel's-hair coat, and he began to perspire heavily.

The train slowed down. There was a sound of voices, hurried footsteps, and yellow light came in spurts through the chinks beside the blinds, while a voice could be heard above the din, shouting out the name of the station:

"Mons!"

A panting woman scrambled into another compartment in the same coach and could be heard slamming her baggage on to the rack.

Elie awoke when someone flung the door open and called:

"Frontier! All passports ready, please!"

Propped on an elbow, Van der Boomp held his out.

"Thank you, sir."

Elie showed his and the man flicked the leaves over with a careless linger.

"Thank you."

The train started and stopped again.

"Feignies Junction. All change for . . ."

Another man entered the compartment, and switched on the white light.

"French Customs. Have you anything to declare?"

Van der Boomp was less flushed, now that the door had been opened several times and the heat *in* the carriage reduced. But he still looked half-dazed, though he was awake enough to hold out a cigar-case containing six fat cigars.

"Right. Nothing else? What's in that suitcase?"

"Clothes—none of them new."

Elie, who had no luggage, held out his box of cigarettes. The Customs officer retired and shut the door.

There was a hubbub of voices, shouts, footsteps, on the platform. An agitated woman could be heard enquiring shrilly of a porter:

"Is the train leaving at once?"

"No, not till thirty-tw> past_____"

Elie lay down again, after switching off the white light.* Van der Boomp seemed to have trouble in getting off to sleep and changed his position several times. But after a quarter of an hour or so he started snoring again.

Elie's eyes were open. His hands were so wet that he could hardly grip the spanner, which was coated with a film of sweat. He kept his eyes fixed on the small lamp-bulb overhead, the filaments of which showed white through the blue glass.

When the train rounded certain bends his body pressed against the wall of the carriage, while that of the Dutchman seemed on the point of rolling on to the floor.

He turned down his coat-collar, but the draught on his neck compelled him to put it up again.

" Saint-Quentin! Next stop Compiègne! "

He slipped out of the carriage into the corridor and encountered a blast of icy wind, as one of the windows was open. On the dark horizon glimmered the street-lamps of a sleeping town.

" It hasn't snowed here," Elie murmured.

He paced the corridor from end to end. The blinds were down in all the carriages. He visited the lavatory, but the tension of his nerves was such that he could do no more than look at his reflection in the glass.

When he got back to the compartment the train was moving again. Van der Boomp was still snoring, the leather attache-case beneath his head faintly creaking under its weight.

Elie lit a cigarette. The match-flame did not evoke the slightest tremor on the sleeper's face.

It was impossible to say at what moment he finally nerved himself to do it. He took some puffs of his cigarette and the smoke had a peculiar flavour that he recognized at once—the taste it always had when he was suffering from a cold. He shot a quick glance at the blinds screening them from the corridor.

The spanner had warmed up to the temperature of his hand. The express was travelling full speed across a stretch of open country. Without rising altogether from the seat he wriggled forward to its extreme edge. For a moment he held the spanner poised in air, taking aim at the centre of the man's skull. Then brought it down with all his might.

What happened was so grotesque that he felt like breaking into hysterical laughter. Very slowly the Dutchman's eyelids parted. The pupils came into view. And the look that wavered up through the dim blue light was one of blank surprise, the look of a man who can't imagine why he has been roused from sleep. And yet a trickle of blood was creeping forward through his hair, spreading across his forehead.

He tried to raise his head, to see what was happening, Elie struck again, twice, three times, ten times, infuriated by those mild, insensate eyes staring up at him.

He stopped only when his arm grew tired and he hadn't the

strength to raise it again. The spanner dropped from his moist fingers, clanged on the floor. He leant back on the cushions, gazing dully in front of him, and took breath. And, while he did so, he listened intently. Was there the sound of another's breathing, besides his own, in the carriage? Fervently he hoped not! His wrist was still aching, he had no desire to start again....

Without looking at the body, he went to a window and let it down, after releasing the blind. There had been no snow at Saint-Quentin, but here, he noticed, the fields were white as far as eye could reach, and the sky had a frosty sheen.

His overcoat kept getting in his way and he flung it off. Then, trying not to look at the Dutchman's head, he raised the body, intending to heave it out of the window on to the line. He made three attempts. Contrary to all his preconceived ideas, the body was limp, and folded up when he tried to move it.

When Elie finally let go, the upper part of the body was trailing on the floor, while the legs remained on the berth.

And then a panic haste came over him. He put on his overcoat, opened the attache'-case, and thrust the bundles of notes into his pockets. He couldn't bear to stay a moment longer in the carriage. Without even stopping to close the window he hurried out into the corridor. As he walked through the concertina vestibule leading to the next coach a rush of icy air enveloped him and he saw blobs of ice on the iron stanchions.

From coach to coach he made his way the full length of the train, only stopping when he came to the door of the luggage-van.

Only then the thought occurred to him: "I forgot to shut the window. Someone will see him when we get to Compiègne."

The blinds were drawn everywhere and he didn't dare to enter any of the carriages. Finally he shut himself up in a lavatory, where the light was so bright that it made his eyes smart. He looked round for a switch to turn it off, but couldn't find one. There was a mirror over the basin and, try as Tie might, he could not help gazing at his face.

"I forgot to shut the window ... I forgot to shut the window ... I forgot. .." The words kept echoing in his head, timing themselves to the thudding of the wheels.

"And when we get to Compi&gne ... When we get to Compi&gne .."

He put down the lid and sat on it, crossing his legs and leaning back against the wall.

When the train stopped he jumped up with a start, for he had fallen asleep. He heard shouts on the platform. But he was too worn out to move. Every limb was aching and he could feel the fever of his blood. After a few minutes the train started again.

"When we get to Compiègne..." No, that was silly. They had just left Compiègne. In an hour they would be at Paris.

He had no plans. He didn't even try to concoct one. All he wanted was to lie down and sleep. But that absurd jingle was running in his fuddled brain: "I forgot to shut the window ... And when we get to Compiègne ..."

By now they must be quite near Paris, crossing the outer suburbs. With a great effort he struggled to his feet, went out of the lavatory and pressed his face to a window. Blocks of tall, five-storey apartment-houses loomed up beside the line, against a background of vague fields. There were some lighted windows, probably those of rooms where workers lived, who had to make an early start.

No one was in the corridor. Then a railway employee appeared at the far end and walked past without looking at him. The glass was so cold that he took his forehead from it; it seemed to be freezing his brain.

"I forgot to shut the window ... to shut the window ..."

Someone dived into the lavatory and the door hit Elie in the back. There was a sound of running water. A woman came up and tried to open the door, in spite of the notice "*Engaged*."

Then came a series of tunnels. Elie had a brief glimpse of a brightly lighted tramcar swinging up a muddy street. Here, too, there was no snow,

A countrywoman, laden with bundles, stepped out into the corridor and took her stand beside him. The train was slowing down; it was entering the Gare du Nord and its rumble swelled to a hollow roar under the high vaulted roof.

Before it stopped Elie opened the door and halted on the step. The woman behind him tapped him on the shoulder.

"Take care!"

He jumped off, but he was not the first to alight. Already a passenger was hurrying to the Way Out, suitcase in hand. The ticket-collector took his ticket without a word. Looking round, Elie saw another train, which people were entering, on the next platform. On a notice-board fastened to the side of a third-class carriage he read "*New Ltige, Cologne, Btrlm*"

No one was watching him.

He took no thought, but started running. The train was beginning to draw out. He opened a door, swung himself in and sank on to the seat of a third-class carriage in which were two women, drinking coffee from a thermos flask.

All one side of the carriage was empty, and he stretched himself full-length on the seat, wrapping his camel's-hair coat around him. When he awoke day had dawned. A railway employee was tugging at his shoulder.

" Ticket, please."

The two women, who were in black, looked at him smiling. His ticket? For some moments he was at a loss. Then he remembered the man at the Brussels booking-office who had asked " Return, sir? "

He felt in his pockets. His fingers groped amongst the wads of notes. Under them he found a small square of cardboard.

The guard looked at the ticket, then at the passenger.

" This is a first-class ticket," he said.

Obviously. Elie gave him a smile that seemed to say, " How silly of me! " And the two women understood now why he was wearing such an expensive-looking greatcoat.

" The third coach, towards the engine," the man said. " If you stay here you'll have to get out for the Customs inspection. First-class passengers are inspected in the train."

His lips were parched, and he had developed a stiff neck. The draught, most likely. He stumbled up the swaying corridor, and, pausing for a moment, saw snowbound fields dotted here and there with cottages and farmhouses, smoke rising from the chimneys.

As he crossed the metal plates between the coaches he was greeted by blasts of bitterly cold air. There was an empty first, and the carriage had a lugubrious, almost sinister appearance in the bleak, grey light

What could the time be? Were they near the frontier? The words started running in his head again: " When we get to Compiegne ... When we get to Compiegne ... "

At all costs he must have a drink. He hurried to a lavatory. The basin was black with soot. He turned the small tap to the right and there was a gush of boiling water. He turned it to the left and there came a trickle of tepid, muddy water, which he cupped in his hand and brought to his lips. It left a taste of grime and fever in his mouth.

The train stopped and Elie hastened out, afraid of being discovered in the lavatory, and bumped into a man in a grey overcoat.

" Were you in this coach? "

" Well • • yes."

" Your passport, please. Thank you. Anything to declare? Any jewellery, valuables, new clothes? "

Elie shook his head.

He was half asleep. His clothes were soiled and crumpled. His handkerchief was a sodden, grimy ball.

Jeumont. Erquelines. Red-brick houses. Windows with snow-white curtains, ferns in copper pots. Public-houses. *Café de la Gore*. *Estamineu* Khaki uniforms instead of blue.

And always, parallel with the line, the Meuse, with long strings of barges towed by stocky little tugs, whistling impatiently at the lock-gates.

The door of the compartment opened. A young man in dark uniform enquired:

" Breakfast, sir? Breakfast will be served immediately after Namur."

On the point of saying " No," Elie took the small red ticket that was handed him, reserving a seat in the dining-car.

He got out at Namur. At last he knew the time. The big station-clock, with a garishly white dial and hands so black that they seemed painted in indian ink, informed him it was eleven.

" When's the next train to Brussels? "

" Twelve-ten."

He was too exhausted to go out of the station, and settled down in the third-class waiting-room, where there were most people. Everyone had a dripping umbrella, and the floor was covered with puddles; even the varnished wooden benches had a coat of moisture.

On the far side of a glazed door white-aproned waiters were hurrying to and fro, and tables were laid. But Elie didn't feel like sitting down to a meal. He went up to the buffet and pointed to a pile of sandwiches.

"A *pistolet*" asked the plump young woman behind the counter.

"A '*pistolet*'?" he asked irritably. "What the devil do you mean? "

" That's what we call 'em here, in Belgium."

" Why can't you call them ' sandwiches,' like everybody else? ... All right, I'll take three."

But he only managed to get through half a sandwich as he paced up and down the third-class waiting-room.

It was dark by the time the train reached Brussels, and at first he didn't recognize the station, for the train had come in at an unfamiliar platform. Outside snow was falling, or rather the air was thick with melting flakes. Hotel portere were waiting at the Exit.

" *Astoria. Palace. Grand Hotel.* . . . A taxi, sir? "

He made a detour so as not to pass the man from the *Palace*. Avoiding the main thoroughfares, he turned to the left, then to the left again, and found himself in a tangle of mean streets, lined with cafes and fried-fish shops.

At last he entered a cafe where people were sitting with cups of coffee and mugs of beer in front of them, waiting for trains apparently, as most of them had luggage.

" Have you a telephone? "

" Yes, over there on the right. You can get a counter at the cash-desk."

But what was he to do with the counter that was handed him? In Turkish cafes counters aren't used.... Yet when he thought of Turkey it seemed no more than a name—the name of a country in which he'd never set foot. He held the disk up enquiringly.

" I see. You're a foreigner. What number do you want? "

" The *Palace Hotel*, please."

Elie picked up the receiver.

" Is that the *Palace*? I want to talk to Mademoiselle Sylvie. What? She's out? . . . I'll ring up again presently. No; no message."

He was longing for a hot grog, and his desire for one had grown to an obsession. But there was nothing to be done; he resigned himself to drinking a glass of beer in a corner of the cafe near the telephone-box. There was a clock almost in front of him, above the bar of polished oak. When half an hour had passed he rang up again; then again after another half-hour.

At eight, when he rang up for the sixth time, a voice said to him:

" I think I saw Mademoiselle Sylvie in the grill-room. Hold the line, please."

He pictured the *Palace* grill-room with its pink-shaded lamps on the tables, flowers in cut-glass vases, the sideboard glistening with silver, and the big dinner-waggon on which the head-waiter now was trundling from table to table the day's joint.

"Hullo? Who's there?"

With his mind's eye he could see the telephone-box beside the reading-room, with its big notice on the glass door: *No Smoking*.

" Hullo? " she called again impatiently.

He felt sure that she was wearing her green silk dress, which was so tight round the hips that he had to help her into it.

"Hullo?"

He had to say something. ...

"It's I, " he whispered into the receiver.

"What! You're back, Elie? And high time, too! Why haven't you come to the hotel? "

" Ssh! Can't tell you now; I'll explain. I want you to come and meet me here. I'm at a cafe near the station. ... Just a moment."

He ran out of the cabin and buttonholed a waiter.

" What's the name of this place? "

" € *Au Bon Dipart*: "

Back at the 'phone he said:

" *Au Bon Depart*. That's the name. You'll find it easily. But finish your dinner first."

She gave a little grunt, then murmured sulkily:

" All right, I'll come."

And by now she must be crossing the lobby, wondering what on earth he had to tell.

" Can I have something to eat? " he asked a man who seemed to be the owner of the cafe.

" There's only ham and white pudding."

He was too hungry to trouble what the food was like. After drinking off his beer at a gulp he wolfed what was set in front of him. If now and then he made a wry face, it was only because of twinges in his stiff neck.

Not once in all the day had he given a thought to the late Van der Boomp.

III

SYLVIE drew back hastily. She had just paid the taximan, after an upward glance to make sure the name above the *cafe** entrance was the right one: *Au Bon Dipart*. As she was stepping across a puddle on the pavement a dark form moved out of a patch of shadow beside the lighted doorway, and a voice whispered: " Sylvie! "

The yellow greatcoat and the voice reassured her. It was Elie.

But, even before she saw his face, she had a feeling that in some way he was changed.

Indeed, so impressed was she that she followed him in the rain, without a word of protest, and down a narrow side-street into a dismal and deserted part of the town where she had never been before.

Under the first street-lamp she shot a keen glance at him, and noticed that he turned his head away.

" You do look a sight!" she exclaimed. " Why haven't you shaved?"

They moved out of the little pool of light and had another fifty yards to walk before coming to the next lamp. The lamps were spaced out at that distance all the way down the street; the only additional light came from a small confectioner's shop some way ahead.

Sylvie wrapped her fur coat more tightly round her. Her high heels made walking difficult, and she could feel drops of muddy water splashing her stockings and oozing through the silk.

" Have we far to go? "

He looked back over his shoulder. There was no one about. A piano was tinkling in an upper room, a pink glow seeping through the curtains.

" Let's go a bit farther," he said.

He could hardly drag himself along. At one moment he linked his arm in Sylvie's, but it was no help. Perhaps they weren't walking in step, or Sylvie, hugging her fur coat to her, had her arm at the wrong angle.

She kept watching him from the corner of an eye. She had guessed that it was something serious.. . .

" Where have you been? " She realized he couldn't bring himself to speak first.

" To Paris."

He could not have explained why the rain seemed to make talking difficult, but so it was. Then he saw a dark porch some ten yards from a street-lamp, and drew her under its shelter. But he didn't kiss her, or take her in his arms. In any case, her furs were beaded with big drops of rain.

After inspecting the street in both directions he drew a handful of notes from his pocket and showed them to the girl in gloomy silence.

She didn't realize at once, and fingered the notes incredulously.

" How much? " she asked after a brief silence.

" A hundred thousand."

She was staring not at his face but at his overcoat.

" In the train ... ? "

They could hardly see each other. The drizzle made a haze, like a teeming cloud of gnats, round the street-lamp.

" Yes. Van der Boom?."

She raised her eyes slowly, taken aback, but not overmuch, and there was an unspoken question in her gaze.

" Yes," he repeated, while in his pocket his fingers made the movement of gripping a spanner.

The wet street stretched out to infinity, grey and gleaming in the patches of lamplight.

" How about moving on? " Sylvie suggested.

Their footsteps echoed in the emptiness between the rows of houses, all exactly alike.

" It's in the newspapers, I expect," he said.

" You haven't looked at them? " She sounded surprised.

He shook his head, and she guessed he hadn't dared to buy one. There was no need for him to speak. She knew that he expected her to help him; that was why he had returned to Brussels. And she knew that he was waiting. ...

" They're sure to be watching the frontiers," she murmured, as if to herself. Then added more loudly: " It's no use hanging about here. See those lights over there? There's bound to be a cafe of sorts."

His arms dangling at his side, he followed her down the street. She seemed to be thinking hard. Before coming to the place where the lights were she halted for a moment.

" Fifty-fifty."

He understood at once and handed her the contents of one pocket, about half the money he had stolen. She put the notes in her bag.

" Oh, they're French notes," she remarked casually.

They came to a sleepy-looking cafe; the two billiard-tables at which nobody was playing made the room seem emptier still. The proprietor was seated by the window, chatting with a fat, red-cheeked man; his wife was knitting at the cash-desk.

" This'll do."

So homely was the atmosphere in the cafe, that it was like breaking in on a family party. When they walked across the room

and settled down behind a billiard-table, the proprietor heaved an audible sigh and rose lethargically from his chair,

"What can I get you?"

Sylvie ordered two coffees.

From now on it was she who took command; both of them seemed to accept this as a matter of course. Elie was staring at the floor, on which sawdust lay in ripples like sand on a sea-beach. When Sylvie rose to her feet he looked up, but didn't ask what she was about to do. She went up to a rack on which were some newspapers rolled round strips of wood.

The man served them in silence. The coffee fell drop by drop from the nickel-plated percolator resting on each cup. The apoplectic-looking customer blew his nose noisily.

There was a rustle of paper as Sylvie turned a sheet of the newspaper she was reading. She looked up to say:

"Put two lumps of sugar in my cup, please."

He did so; then drank his coffee to keep himself in countenance.

"Now—pay," she said.

The proprietor was eyeing them from his seat by the window, obviously wondering why these two young people had dropped in at such an hour. Sylvie rose, and Elie followed her out. After halting on the pavement to take her bearings, she started off towards the central area.

"Well?"

"The guard gave your description, but he doesn't seem to have noticed much, except that you were wearing a yellow overcoat."

And promptly Elie felt as if his overcoat were made of lead and looked anxiously round to make sure no one was watching him.

"Another thing he said was that you'd a foreign accent—but he didn't say what sort of accent."

As they walked on, Elie transferred the notes, his handkerchief, and a penknife from his overcoat pockets to those of his coat. Beside a fence running alongside a field used as a rubbish-dump he paused and turned to Sylvie.

"Here?"

"No. If it's found they'll know you are in Brussels. You'd better drop it in the canal."

"Where's that?"

"Oh, quite a way from here."

From time to time a tramcar sped by, packed with seated, stolid * figures, like museum-pieces in a show-case.

^{f<} "We'd better have a taxi," Sylvie said.

"Think it's safe?"

"Yes_____I know the trick."

She hailed the first taxi that passed and said to the driver, with an affected smirk:

"Take us to the Carnbre woods. Drive slowly, please."

That way he'd take diem for a loving couple. There was no light in the taxi, which creaked at every joint. Elie slipped out of his overcoat—after which neither of them made the least movement.

"Is there water?" he asked under his breath.

"Yes, a big pond. You'll have to put stones in the pockets to make sure of its sinking."

The woods were completely empty. From the leafless branches overhead big drops flashed down before the headlights. After they had gone a mile or so Sylvie tapped on the sliding window between her and the driver, and the car stopped.

"We're going for a stroll. We'll be back in five minutes."

The driver hesitated, swung his shoulders round and bent towards her, whispering something Elie failed to catch. As they walked away he asked what the man had said.

"Qh, he suggested we should stay in the taxi while *lie* went for a walk"

But neither smiled. They groped about for stones. For appearance's sake Sylvie had linked her arm in Elie's. She prodded a big stone with the toe of her shoe.

"Pick it up."

It was chilly in the wood, and; in his grey suit Elie felt the cold. His teeth were chattering. The darkness was heavy with the fumes of. sodden earth and leaves.

"That one too. . . . Put your arm round me. He may be watch-

They .climbed over the low railings round the pond. The ground fell away towards the water. Sylvie held Elie's hand while⁸ he bent forward as far as he could. There was only a faint splash, but they looked round nervously. The driver might have followed them, suspecting suicide.

They started back, Elie in front. Sylvie plucked at his sleeve.

"Not so fast. We don't look like a loving couple."

In the taxi she said, as if it had⁴ just struck her?

"Feeing cold?"

"A bit. But it doesn't matter."

His lips were blue. Now and again his shoulders shook convulsively, and to make things worse, he was continually rubbing against Sylvie's sodden fur coat.

"Now I'll tell you what to do," she said in a low tone. "You must take the train to Charleroi. . . ."

He shook his head emphatically.

"I won't take a train."

"Well, a car if you prefer. When you get to Charleroi go to Number Fifty-three, Rue du Laveu; it's a house where they let furnished rooms. I happen to know that there's one vacant."

He looked at her wonderingly, but put no question.

"My people live there," Sylvie explained. "You can tell Mother that it's I who sent you. You'd better say you've got into trouble in your country—over politics, or something like that—and want to lie low for a bit. Pay three months in advance. That way Mother'll keep her mouth shut if the police come snooping round."

They were back in Brussels, and the driver kept looking round, waiting to be told where to go.

"To the *Merry land* cabaret," Sylvie said.

"But—but I can't go in like this."

"Of course not. You mustn't come with me. But I've got to go there. I've an appointment."

He made no protest. Docile as a child, he let her decide for him. However, he ventured to ask:

"Will you be staying in Brussels?"

"Yes, but I'll come to see you." She puckered her brows, thinking hard. "Listen! Perhaps you'd better not tell Mother I sent you. Pretend not to know me. Once you've given her the money you won't have any bother."

"But how shall I get news of you?"

"I'll write now and then to Antoinette. She's my sister. She'll talk about my letters at meals, and as you'll all eat at the same table . . ."

The taxi had stopped. The *Merryland* commissionaire opened the door and held a big umbrella over Sylvie as she stepped out. Sitting well back in the far corner, Elie was almost invisible.

"*Au revoir*," said Sylvie.

She didn't kiss him. Bending forward, but with her head outside the door, she groped with her hand for his, and shook it hastily.

For want of any better address to give, Elie told the driver to take him to the station.

Strutting on her Absurdly high heels, the fur coat drawn tightly round her hips, Sylvie crossed the pavement under cover of the big umbrella. A burst of dance-music came with the opening door, and shadowy forms could be seen gliding to and fro behind the curtains.

In the brightly lit entrance Sylvie turned and waved to him. The driver let in the gear. It was cold inside the taxi and, huddled up in his corner without his overcoat, Elie felt as if he had nothing on.

" Station's shut." The driver pointed to the dark vestibule in which most of the lamps had been turned off.

" That doesn't matter."

A sudden panic came over him; he had just realized that besides the thousand-franc notes he had only some small change. But after hunting in his pockets he scraped together enough to pay the taximan.

But it meant that he couldn't spend any more money till next morning. There was nowhere to go, eating and drinking were ruled out—and the night was getting steadily colder.

He was so benumbed that he had ceased being conscious of the cold. He walked on and on, now and then halting in a doorway, but always hurrying away the moment he heard footsteps. After a while he marked down four big clocks at different points, and kept moving in a circle, reckoning out how many rounds he would have made before daybreak. He had only the sound of his own steps for company, but, for all their regularity, they afforded some distraction, as the echo varied with the different streets. It depended on the width of the roadway, the height of the houses, and perhaps on the kind of paving-stones employed, as well.

Meanwhile Sylvie was dancing at the *Merryland*. He wasn't in the least jealous, though he knew she was having what she regarded as a good time. There was nothing to prevent his lying in wait and watching her come out, but it never occurred to him to do so.

It was a relief when the first tram made its appearance in the streets, and at seven he chose a taxi from those in the rank at the Place de Brouckdre.

" Drive me to Charleroi."

He had a three-days' growth of beard. The shoulders of his coat were drenched and the bottoms of his trouser-legs a limp, shapeless mass. The driver looked him up and down, and hesitated. Finally, in the tone of a man who is chancing it, he said:

" All right. Hop in."

The snow had melted. Fields and forest were black as ink. The whole visible world was saturated with moisture, exuding a cold, dank vapour, and there was nobody to be seen in any of the villages along the road.

" Stop somewhere where I can change a thousand-franc note," said Elie as they entered Charleroi.

It was nearly nine. Shops were open, but the town, like the countryside, seemed plunged in a sort of stupor, like a hibernating animal. The light was greenish-grey, a light of undersea, and lamps were on in most of the shops.

" Look here! You'd better drop me at a barber's."

The hairdresser hadn't change for a thousand-franc note, but he ran out himself to change it at a co-operative store across the way. The taxi drove off. While the hairdresser tucked a towel into his collar, Elie studied his reflected self and noticed that his eyes were bloodshot.

" You're a foreigner, eh? You must do well over the exchange with our Belgian franc so low. . . . Shall I trim your hair, sir, too? "

Lorries were rumbling past the window. The hairdresser's fingers were stained with nicotine, and the smell of tobacco mingling with that of soap made Elie feel sick.

" We've lots of foreigners at Charleroi, mostly young fellows who come to learn their jobs in the coal-mines and factories. But they're all on the rocks, these days, what with the depression . . . A dry shampoo, sir? "

When Elie rose from the barber's chair he was feeling thoroughly sorry for himself. Instead of improving his appearance, the hairdresser's operations had made him look even more haggard than before. But probably there was something wrong with the mirror. For instance, never until now had he noticed that his nose was crooked. And his upper lip seemed much thinner than the under one.

" Is it far to the Rue dy Laveu? "

" A fair step. You'd better take the Number Three. The tram-stop's just on the right as you go out."

It was still raining, always the same misty drizzle. The tram was empty, but Elie remained on the platform. The conductor gave him the word when they reached the Rue du Laveu, and he walked up a street bordered by rows of houses all exactly alike.

In spite of the rain a woman was outside, washing a doorstep, crouching low with her back to the street, and Elie saw that the number of the house was 53.

" Excuse me. Can I speak to Madame Baron? "

" I'm Madame Baron/ "

Holding a scrubbing-brush in her right hand, she took a long look at him,

" It's about the room." He pointed to the notice fixed to the window with strips of stamp-paper.

" Please step inside. Would you kindly wait a moment in the kitchen? "

The hall had just been washed, the red-and-yellow tiles were clean and glossy. Three overcoats and a mackintosh hung on the bamboo coat-stand. Elie knocked on the glazed door of the kitchen and a male voice called: " Come in. "

A young man, sitting with his feet in the oven, gazed keenly at the new-comer. At the table sat another student, in blue-striped pyjamas, his black hair plastered down with brilliantine. He was spreading a slice of bread and butter with jam.

" Won't you sit down? I suppose you've come about the room to let? "

Out in the hall Madame Baron was taking off her clogs and wiping her hands on her apron. Voices could be heard on the under floor, and Elie was aware of a domestic life in which he had no part, as yet.

" Right! Now we can talk. . . . But fancy coming out without an overcoat in weather like this! You must be perished! "

" Oh, that's because I left my luggage . . . "

" You're not living in Charleroi? "

" No, I've just come from Brussels. "

Automatically she was pouring out a cup of coffee for the visitor.

" Antoinette! " she shouted towards the stairs. " Go and see if the front room's tidy. "

She seemed unable to keep still for a moment. While she talked she busied herself putting coal in the range, stirring the contents of a saucepan, filling a sugar-bowl.

" Monsieur Valesco, didn't I ask you once for all not to come downstairs in your pyjamas? A gentleman like you ought to know better.... Move back a bit, Monsieur Moise. How do you think I can get about my work with your legs stuck in the oven? "

The door opened, Antoinette came in, and gave Elie a long stare. She was wearing a black knitted dress—obviously home-made—that revealed the immature lines of her body, rather scraggy shoulders, the timid curve of breasts set very wide apart, unformed

hips. Her stockings sagged. The small, freckled face was crowned with a mop of unruly red hair.

Her mother snapped at her:

"Where's your manners? Can't you say 'Good morning' to the gentleman?"

Her only response was a slight, defiant shrug. Then she deliberately sniffed Valesco's hair, remarking:

"I can't stand men who soak themselves in scent, like street-girls."

Meanwhile she was continuing to cast curious glances at Elie.

"Would you like to see the room?" her mother asked him. "It's three hundred francs a month, coal and electric light extra. Perhaps I'd better tell you this is a quiet house, and I don't allow my lodgers to take young ladies into their bedrooms."

She led the way down the hall, and opened the first door on the left. There was a smell of beeswax. Against the pink-papered wall was a brass bedstead with a red quilt. Suddenly Elie went quite pale, and felt his head going round.... He took a quick step towards the bed.

At seven in the evening, when all the household were beginning to gather in the kitchen, he was still asleep, his mouth open, his hair plastered with sweat upon his forehead.

IV

MADAME BARON scowled when she saw Domb settling down quite coolly with his biscuit-tin at the place which she had laid so carefully.

"That's Monsieur Elie's place."

Domb was a Pole, tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and hard-featured. He was always very spick and span, and kept up a dignified appearance, even on such occasions as the present—when he had a battered biscuit-tin under his arm. Rising with deliberate slowness, he enquired stiffly:

"May I ask where you wish me to sit?"

The kitchen was far from large, and much of the available space was taken up by a big cooking-range, enamelled white and gold.

At the end of the table farthest from the range, beside the dresser, was the wicker armchair reserved for the head of the household, Monsieur Baron.

The others fitted themselves in as best they could around the table, in the order of their coming. For they didn't wait till everybody was present, to begin the evening meal. For one thing, Baron's mealtimes varied from day to day, according to the train in which he was on duty. His wife served him, moving to and fro between the range and his armchair, sometimes pausing to sit down for a moment and snatch a mouthful herself. Meanwhile Antoinette, her elbows planted on the table, exchanged backchat with the young men.

That was the procedure in the evening. At midday it was different, for Madame Baron did the catering, whereas at night the lodgers were expected to fend for themselves. Each of the young men brought a tin containing bread, a slab of butter, some cheese or ham. Also, each had a private coffee-pot or teapot.

Domb was scowling at the place where he had so often had his meal. It was bad enough to be evicted from it, and to make things worse he noticed that the best dinner-service, with a pink floral pattern, that was never used on ordinary occasions, had been got out. In the *hors-d'oeuvre* dishes were real *hors-d'oeuvre*: sardines, slices of cold sausage, and small smoked fish.

Even Baron, as he munched hunks of bread after dipping them in his coffee, kept eyeing with an odd expression this lavish outlay. Noticing which, his wife helped him to three smoked fish.

"Monsieur Elie is taking full board." There was a hint of pride in her voice.

"He's a Jew," muttered Domb, as he put the frying-pan on the fire.

"How can you tell? You've Jews on the brain, Monsieur Domb. Anyhow, even if he is, I can't see what difference it makes to you."

Domb was feeling disconsolately inside his biscuit-tin.

"Well, what's it you haven't got this evening? "

"Butter."

"All right. I'll lend you some. But it's the last time, I warn you. You're always short of something or other, and I've had enough of it. Why don't you act like Monsieur Moise? "

He dropped a small piece of butter into the frying-pan and broke an egg over it, while Madame Baron went into the hall and shouted:

" Monsieur Moise! We're starting."

As Domb fried his egg he cast sour glances at the cutlets sizzling in another pan, the potatoes and brussels sprouts in saucepans—all for the new-comer.

" What's he studying? " he asked, as he dropped into a chair beside Antoinette.

" Nothing. He finished his studies years ago."

Moise came in, his fuzzy hair standing up like a shaving-brush, his eyes red with poring over his books. He was a Polish Jew, and his mother, a domestic servant in Warsaw, sent him enough each month for his keep, while a charitable institution paid his tuition fees.

Moise, too, stared at the unaccustomed splendour of the table, wondering where he was to sit; there was no question of taking the chair beside Domb, who never addressed him and indeed pretended to be unaware of his presence.

" Sit here, Monsieur Moise," said Madame Baron almost tenderly, for Moise was her special favourite. " I'll wager you let your fire go out again."

She knew he did it for economy's sake. He worked in an overcoat, sometimes with a blanket as well wrapped round his shoulders. When he came down his fingers were always stiff with cold.

" I've set your tea to draw."

He didn't eat an egg; only bread and butter. Madame Baron, who had a habit of nosing round her lodgers' rooms, was the only one who knew his secret—that he wore no socks.

" I wonder if he's still asleep? " she added, referring to Elie.

" He's a queer bird, anyhow," Domb muttered. " Don't like his looks."

" Can't you mind your own business, instead of talking against other folks? Always running people down, that's you, Monsieur Domb. As if the Poles were so much better than everybody else! "

She went out again into the hall and called as naturally as if she had been doing it for weeks:

" Monsieur Elie! Dinner's ready."

Valesco hadn't turned up yet, but that was not surprising; sometimes he did not appear at all for the evening meal. Everyone knew* he had a girl friend in Brussels, and, when flush, took her out to dinner.

" It seems that Monsieur Elie is a Jew too," sighed Madame Baron.

" A Levantine Jew," Moise amended. " That's not the same thing."

" Why not? "

" Oh, it's hard to explain; but there's a difference."

" Of course he's very dark, and you are really rather fair. ..."

There were footsteps in the hall, followed by a light tap on the kitchen door. Elie came in, and halted for a moment, blinking at the light and the already overcrowded table,

" You've met my lodgers, haven't you? Let me introduce my husband, who works on the State Railway."

Baron rose, held out his hand punctiliously and tugged at his long grey moustache. He was collarless, and a brass-capped stud glinted in the neck-band of his shirt.

" Sit down, Monsieur Elie. You must be dreadfully hungry. You haven't had a bite since this morning."

He sat down at the end of the table, facing Baron, taking that seat as if it fell to him by right. Domb looked away deliberately; while Antoinette seemed fascinated by the dark rings round the new-comer's eyes. Moise said to him, but without much show of interest:

" You're from Istanbul, aren't you? "

" Well, my parents are Portuguese. But I was born at Istanbul. ... You're a Pole, eh? "

" /am a Pole," Domb broke in, straightening up as if his national anthem were being played.

Valesco hurried in, bringing a waft of scent and cold air into the overheated room.

" Am I late?"

" You're always late."

He stopped short, seeing the new lodger in the best place, with the array of *hors-d'oeuvre* in front of him. After a sniff directed at the cutlets sizzling on the range, he looked enquiringly at Antoinette.

But she vouchsafed no explanation, while her mother pointed to an empty chair.

" Hurry up and start your dinner."

The walls were enamelled white, and what with the glare and the heat Elie felt slightly dizzy. Moise's biscuit-tin touched his *hors-d'oeuvre* dish, and the young men were packed so tightly round the table that they jogged each other's elbows. Domb had to move his chair alongside Madame Baron's to make room for Valesco.

The Rumanian had fished out of his pocket a package containing

some small pork pies; he got more money from his people than the others, and whenever he ran short, always managed to raise a loan.

" Do you know Rumania? " he asked Elie.

" Yes, I once spent a year at Bucharest."

" Fine city, isn't it? And Constanta! What a glorious climate! It's a bit of a change living in a hole like this, where one wallows in mud from one year's end to the other."

" Then why do you stay here? " Madame Baron retorted.

" No offence meant. . . . But ask Monsieur Nagear. Just ask him if there's any other country that can touch Rumania. And living's dirt cheap there; why, a-fowl costs only a few centimes! "

The blood had come to Elie's head, and the clatter of knives and forks, the buzz of voices, confused him. It was impossible for him to move an inch without touching Moise on his left or Valesco on his right. His mind seemed to have gone blank, and he gazed with unseeing eyes at the people round the table, the biscuit-tins, the cups of coffee, as he went on eating, almost unconsciously, his meat and vegetables. Suddenly he heard Madame Baron's voice directed towards him.

" What do you drink with your meals? " she asked.

" In my country we always have *raku* I don't expect you know it. . . . I'll have water, please."

He had no appetite. His nose felt hot and swollen and there was a throbbing in his temples as if he were immersed in an over-hot bath. Baron, who had finished his meal, pushed back his chair and opened an evening paper.

Each of these people lived for himself or herself; the Barons no less than those birds of passage, their lodgers. While old Baron puffed at a big meerschaum pipe, and read his paper, Antoinette began washing up on a corner of the range.

Elie wasn't thinking of Van der Boomp, or even of Sylvie--though it was in this house she had spent her childhood. All sorts of vague ideas were drifting through his mind. That he was older than the other lodgers; that, as he was paying for full board, he'd be treated with special consideration. This last thought gave him pleasure.

" Do you like cheese to finish off with? "

" Yes, but I don't feel hungry tonight."

He had given his landlady a thousand francs, one of the notes from the wad, though the monthly rate was only eight hundred francs.

" You can carry forward the difference," he had said.

He had glimpses of the newspaper, the *Gazette de Charleroi*, a local daily printed on spongy paper in exceedingly small type.

As usual, Madame Baron was on her *feet* most of the time, occasionally stopping to eat a few mouthfuls. It was she who waited on Elie.

" Won't you finish your cutlets? "

" Sorry, but this awful cold I have seems to have killed my appetite."

Baron looked up from his paper.

" An influenza epidemic is raging all over Europe," he announced. " I see that the death-rate in London went up thirty per cent, last week."

He had a slow, oracular way of speaking. Each time he puffed out the pipe-smoke his long moustache streamed forward from his lips.

" Have they caught the murderer yet? " Antoinette asked.

Though he knew this referred to him, Elie didn't turn a hair, and looked up with no more show of interest than the others.

" No, not yet. But the police are on his tracks, it seems, and an early arrest may be expected. They've made enquiries at Van der Cruyssen's bank and got the numbers of the banknotes."

Baron looked round the room, and a change came over his appearance; he became the vigilant employee of the Belgian State Railways, whose duty it was to go from carriage to carriage checking tickets.

" And to think there's some folks say there aren't any risks in our job!" he exclaimed. " Why, that fellow might easily have killed the guard as well! "

He seemed put out by the faint smile, quickly repressed, that rose to Elie's lips.

" Aye, it's a dangerous job, whatever you may think. And in spite of that they've put back our retiring age to sixty, just like the fellows who work in the office. It ain't fair."

Elie's smile had been no more than a nervous reflex. While Baron was speaking, he had been observing Madame Baron, and had noticed a slight change in her expression, as if a vague suspicion—less than that, an unformulated thought—had crossed her mind. And he had guessed its cause: that reference to the banknotes. The thousand-franc note he had given her must be still in the house.

" Some coffee? "

He had only employed two notes so far; one that the barber had changed at the co-operative store, and the other given to Madame Baron, which, after folding it several times, she had slipped into her purse.

" No, thanks. I never take coffee at night."

" Do you know how many marks of blows were found on the corpse? Eighteen!"

He was as amazed as the others.

" Yes, eighteen blows with a spanner. They think the murderer must be a garage-hand or something of that sort; anyhow, someone who's used to handling tools. The police officer who checked the passports doesn't remember the nationality of the man in the carriage with the Dutchman, as there were a number of foreigners on the train. But he believes the man was an Italian, or a Greek."

Madame Baron was taking from the oven the custard she had made for Elie. The others had finished their meal. Domb, who had been particularly taciturn all the evening, banged the lid upon his tin, rose and stalked out, after making a gesture like a military salute.

" He's furious," Valesco remarked to Elie.

" Why? "

" Because you're a new-comer, and you're better off than he. Also because you're a Jew, and he loathes Jews."

" He should have more sense," Madame Baron observed severely; she was washing the plates her daughter handed her. " What's the point of loathing people if they don't do you no harm. Before the war I had a Russian and a Pole here. Well, those two young men stayed two years under this roof without even saying ' Good morning ' to each other. I never heard such nonsense! .. . Antoinette, give Monsieur Elie an ash-tray."

Baron went on reading. His pipe was sizzling. Elie felt a warm, agreeable languor coming over him as, resting his elbows on the table, he smoked a cigarette. He could feel the blood coursing through his veins, a tinglifulg in his nose and throat, and the tobacco had a queer, spicy flavour.

There was a clatter of crockery from the small zinc basin in which the two women were washing up. Moise was staring at the tablecloth, while Valesco smoked a Turkish cigarette that Elie had given him.

" We dine much later at Istanbul."

" Oh? What time? "

" Nine or ten."

" What do you have to eat? " asked Madame Baron.

" We start off with all sorts of tasty little oddments that we call *ma%et*. After that comes lamb and vegetables—perhaps half a dozen kinds of vegetables—and fruit to finish up with."

" Are they good cooks in your part of the world? "

" First rate! "

He recalled that last evening at *Abdullah*⁹'s with his friends; the sideboard heaped with succulent fare of all descriptions.

" Farced vine-leaves, for instance," he murmured.

" Well, I never! I'm not so sure I'd like that. Farced vine-leaves—they *must* taste funny! "

At *Abdullah*'s he had had an almost royal send-off, and everyone had said to him when he announced that he was leaving: " Lucky devil!"

" What language do you speak at home? "

" French."

" Haven't you another language? "

" Yes, there's Turkish, of course. But all the better-class people talk French amongst themselves."

"Fancy that!"

Antoinette was observing him from the corner of an eye. One had an impression she was trying to size him up but couldn't manage it—and this vexed her.

" At Pera everybody's about till late at night." There was an undertone of regret in Elie's voice. " One meets one's friends and roams about the streets, dropping into little cafes, where they have Turkish orchestras and singers. You can't imagine how mild and pleasant the night air is in Turkey. Nobody dreams of going to bed before midnight."

" Just like Rumania," Valesco put in approvingly. " You'll see as many people in the streets at midnight as at six in the evening."

" That's all very fine," said Madame Baron, " but what about going to work next morning? "

Elie blew his nose again, and she remarked compassionately:

" Why, your handkerchief's wet through! I'll lend you one to keep you going till your things come.... Antoinette, go and get one of your dad's hankies, the ones in the left-hand drawer."

Elie was thinking of the two banknotes, the one at the co-operative store, and the other in his landlady's purse. He wasn't Really anxious. Still, he proposed, as soon as Baron had done with his paper, to ask him for the loan of it and, if the numbers of the stolen

notes were there, to burn it in his bedrooim fire. As for *tht* co-operative, they weren't likely to check the numbers on the hundreds of notes they must receive each day.

"Do you come from Vilna itself ? " he asked Moise.

"Yes, I've always lived there."

"I've been there twice, both times in the winter. It seemed pretty grim."

"Ah, but you should see it in the summer."

"What subject are you studying? "

"Chemistry. I've finished the course* But I'm staying on an extra year to study glass-making."

Moise addressed him in a tone in which deference mingled with rancour; the tone a ghetto-born Polish Jew employs when speaking to an emancipated Jew from Southern Europe.

"In the Stop-Press news," Baron announced^ after taking a puff at his pipe, "they say the murder^{er} seems to have had an accomplice—a mart or a woman, they aren'tsure which. Madame Van der Cruysen is now in Paris and is making arrangements to have the body moved there."

"Oh, he was married? "

For a moment Elie gasped. He'd never thought of that! Then he started trying to picture what the Dutchman's wife might look like.

"There's her photo."

It was badly reproduced, all in smudgy greys, but one could distinctly see a very tall) stately-looking lady trying to elude the pressman's lens.

"She looks much younger than he," Elie remarked.

The photograph gave the impression of a woman in the middle thirties. She had not had time to procure full mourning. Antoinette came back.

"Here's a handkerchief."

Elie took the opportunity of blowing his nose lengthily; when he put the handkerchief in his podcet his face was scarlet. Noticing which, Madame Baron waxed motherly again.

"Listen! I'll make you a nice hot grog, and you'd better take two aspirins before going to bed."

"Thanks very much. Sorry to give you all this trouble...."

"Oh, I'm used to it. You young fellows never'know how to look after yourselves."

It was amusing to be treated as a "young fellow" like the others,

when he was thirty-five! Thirty-five—that must be about Madame Van der Cruyssen's age.. •.

Moise got up, muttering a vague " Good night," and went off to his room. Madame Baron listened to the receding footsteps, then quietly closed the door.

" He's another," she sighed. " Just now I told him to finish off the cutlet you didn't eat. But he was too proud. And all the poor boy has to eat is an egg a day, and some bread and butter."

" Why couldn't he have stayed in his country," Valesco said rather peevishly, " instead of coming here to study? "

" What about you? "

" That's quite different. My people can afford to see I have enough."

" One wouldn't think so—not at the end of the month, anyhow. You're always just as short of cash as he, the last ten days."

She went on washing up as she talked, saying the first thing that came into her head, with a sort of rough good-humour. Meanwhile Baron had started a new page of his newspaper. Antoinette, who was putting back the cups and plates in a cupboard behind her father, gave a push to his armchair.

" Want me to move? " he grunted.

" Don't bother. I've almost done."

Madame Baron tipped the dirty water out into the sink, and wrung out the dishcloth with a brisk turn of her wrists. Valesco rose, stretched himself and yawned.

" Surdy you're not going out at this hour? " Madame Baron exclaimed.

" Got to, I'm afraid."

" Now look here, if you make any noise coming in, or forget the key again, I warn you straight, you shan't stay here another hour. I've no use for men who're always running after . . . after women who're no better than they should be."

Valesco winked at Elie, who was lighting another cigarette. Now that the room was quieter, the ticking of the alarm-clock standing on the mantelpiece between two brass candlesticks could be heard now and again.

" Good night, Antoinette. Good night, everyone."

And Valesco retired to his room to powder his face, brush his hair and spray some more scent on it before going out.

" They're only youngsters," Madame Baron confided to Elie, " and if I didn't scold them now and then, there'd be no peace in

the house. Of course I saw at once you were different, a quiet sort of fellow. Still, I can't understand a sensible man like you getting mixed up in politics. It don't seem natural/'

For, when asking her not to report his presence to the police, he had told her he'd been banished from his country because of his political activities.

" Who's the big man in Turkey? A king? A president ?""

" Neither. A dictator."

He smiled. He was aching in every limb, but, strangely enough, the sensation was more agreeable than otherwise—almost voluptuous. The warmth and intimacy of this humble little kitchen were acting like an anodyne on his jaded nerves.

Now and again he caught Antoinette gazing at him in a curiously rapt manner, and this added to his satisfaction; there was no doubt he'd made a strong impression on her. Not altogether a favourable impression, judging by what he saw in her eyes. It was more like a vague mistrust; as if she, unlike the others, was intelligent enough to realize he had no business in such a house as this. But it proved one thing, anyhow: that she was definitely interested in him—perhaps afraid of becoming too much interested.

He couldn't bring himself to move. The table had been cleared and spread with a blue-and-white check oilcloth. Seated beside the range, Madame Baron was peeling potatoes for the next day's meals, while Antoinette darned socks; Domb's or Valesco's probably.

" I can't abide people who turn up their noses at everybody else, as if they were the lords of creation," Madame Baron remarked. " Most of the Poles I have here are like that." She turned to her husband. " Germain, why don't you offer Monsieur Elie a little drink? "

He jumped up hastily and took a bottle of sloe-gin from the cupboard.

" Tell me what you thjnk of it. It comes from Luxembourg; I'm on duty on the train there once a week."

The liqueur gave off a heady fragrance. The smell of pipe-smoke mingled in the air with the subtler smell of Turkish cigarettes. Now and again they heard Moise's footsteps in the room above.

" He sometimes works thirteen or fourteen hours in the day. He has a letter from his mother once a week, and, would you believe it, she has to get a neighbour to write it for her! Fancy there being folk in these days who don't know how to write! "

The good lady seemed capable of rambling on like this for hours,

but Elie had no wish to check her. He was actually getting to enjoy his cold, and derived a faint, recurrent thrill of pleasure from the twinges in his neck.

He pictured the scene in the street outside, the black, shabby houses^ a squalid sky hung low above the dripping roofs, the air throbbing with a dark clangour of machinery. Here, in this cosy little kitchen, all that seemed infinitely remote, kss real than a dream.

" Well, what do you think of it? " Baron took a sip of the liqueur, then wiped his moustache with the back of his hand. " You've nothing like this in your country, eh? "

" No, but, as I told you, we have *raku* It's an excellent liqueur, rather like what they drink in Egypt and Bulgaria."

" Been there too? "

" Yes, I've been pretty well all over Europe. My father was an exporter of Turkish tobacco."

" Like Monsieur Weiser," Madame Baron commented, for her husband's benefit. She uttered the name in a respectful tone.

It was ten-past ten. Now and then Antoinette would toss her head back when a lock of red hair straggled across her eyes.... Baron w^Tas the first to yawn. Then he folded his paper and put it on the table.

" May I have a look at it? "

" By all means. Afraid you won't find much to interest you, though. It's mostly local news. The glass-workers are threatening to go on strike.... Won't you have another glass? "

And Elie, his cheeks deeply flushed and eyes fever-bright, his nose swollen to twice its normal size, felt himself sinking still deeper into a pleasant coma of no thoughts.

" What are you dreaming about, Antoinette? Why don't you go and make Monsieur Elie's bed? "

They could hear her turning the mattress, patting the eiderdown, drawing tight the sheets.

" Sleep well. And don't be in a hurry to get up tomorrow. Once you're in bed I'll bring you a hot drink and some aspirin."

Only one thing was preying on his mind as he undressed in the unfamiliar room: the picture of Van der Cruyssen's wife. Poor as the reproduction was, it gave a definite impression of quiet beauty; to Elie's thinking, she was much too refined-looking, and above all far too young, to be the wife of that fat, elderly Dutchman.

There was a knock at the door.

" Are you in bed? " Madame Baron asked.

" Just a moment. Right. Come in now."

Still holding the tray, she stooped to pick up the trousers he had let fall on the floor, and to place them on a chair.

" It's nice and hot," she said in an almost motherly tone. " Drink it right away, lad, and you'll feel ever so much better in the morning."

V

SYLVIE alighted at the tram-stop, in front of the grocery, three doors from her mother's house. For a moment, as she picked her way across the puddles, she wondered if Madame Horisse, who owned the grocer's shop and was always on the watch at her window, would recognize her.

The door was ajar and she had no need to knock. She pushed it open, took two steps forward, and saw her mother in the front room, and noticed that the bed had been slept in.

" Oh, it's you, Sylvie. You gave me quite a turn. Why didn't you say ' Good morning ' ? " By force of habit Madame Baron proffered her cheek to be kissed and Sylvie brushed it with her lips. A bottle of rum, with an empty glass beside it, stood on the bedside table.

" Going to stay here for a bit, or is it one of your flying visits? "

There was always a vaguely suspicious look in Madame Baron's eyes when she observed her daughter, and now nothing escaped her; neither the fact that she had a new handbag and a new, rather austere cut tailor-made costume, nor that her eyes had dark rings round them and she seem anxious about something.

" I'll go and have a cup of coffee in the kitchen," Sylvie said abruptly.

She felt sure this was Elie's bedroom, but dared not ask her mother. The kitchen, when she entered it, was full of steam, and a man was sitting in front of the range. The air was so thick that she almost collided with him.

" Can't you see the soup's boiling over? " she exclaimed, and shifted the saucepan to the edge of the range.

The circle of glowing coal came into view, and Sylvie began

hunting for the lid of the saucepan. When she turned, she saw Moise on his feet, bowing to her. He was holding some cyclo-styled sheets, evidently a course that he had been studying.

Elie, who was at the table, eating eggs and bacon, rose slightly from his seat.

" Carry on with your breakfast. Don't mind me! "

The window was coated with vapour, even the walls were wet, and the atmosphere was so stifling that Sylvie went to the door and opened it a few inches, meanwhile casting furtive glances at Elie.

He had only just got up, and all he had done to make himself presentable was to run a comb through his hair. Like Baron on his return from work, he was in his shirt-sleeves.

He went on eating, taking no notice of Sylvie, and Moise settled down again to his studies. One had the impression of a family scene that had been momentarily interrupted—so rooted did the two men seem in their surroundings.

Seating herself in the wicker armchair, Sylvie asked:

" Got a cold? "

" Yes, I've a beastly cold. And a stiff neck, too. "

She gazed at him intently. A silence followed, so tense with unspoken thoughts that the student looked up uneasily from his papers and stared first at Sylvie, then at Nagear. Sylvie was the first to speak.

" Are you comfortable here? "

" Very comfortable indeed. Everyone's most kind. "

And now Sylvie's lips tightened; she made no effort to conceal her ill-humour. She was raging, perhaps against Elie, perhaps against the tiresome young student who persisted in staying where he wasn't wanted.

" I wonder Mother stands it, having the lodgers cluttering up the kitchen all the time? "

Quietly Moise rose, went to the door, and vanished up the hall. Sylvie decided not to waste a moment. Bending forward, she said in a low tone :

" They've found out the numbers of the notes. "

" I know that. "

There was a flash of anger in her eyes.

" You know that—and you can sit here calmly, eating your breakfast! "

That was so; he felt quite calm. He hadn't realized it at first, but, now that she pointed it out, he was amazed at his tranquillity.

He had sweated copiously all night and his cold was much better. Only his stiff neck was still giving trouble; he had to be careful how he moved his head.

" Did you pay my mother in advance? "

" O f course."

She shot a keen glance at him, then rose and opened the soup-tureen on the dresser. It was never used for soup, and served as a receptacle for odds and ends. In it now were some old letters, a tax receipt, a little silver bell with a blue tassel. There was also Madame Baron's purse, and in it Sylvie found the diousand-franc note.

" Well, what are you going to do about it? "

From now on it was clear that they no longer understood each odier. Indeed there were moments when Elie seemed to have no idea to what she was referring. After a pause he answered gloomily:

" Surely it's obvious there's nothing to be done."

She replaced the lid on the soup-tureen.

" Anyhow, you've got to put another note instead of that one in Mother's purse.... Do you hear? "

She was talking much too loud; losing her head, in fact. Elie put a warning finger to his lips and, to keep himself in countenance, fell to poking the fire, as he'd seen Moise doing earlier in the morning.

" I've brought your luggage. It's at die Station Caff."

Elie poured himself out another cup of coffee; then looked at Sylvie, as if to ask, " Would you like some too? "

Just then she noticed the brown felt slippers he was wearing—her father's slippers.

" Listen! You can't stay here. One of the railway staff has told the police he saw you coming back to Belgium. They're hunting for you in Brussels."

" Are you still at the *Palace*? "

" Don't be a damned fdbl! " she snapped.

She went to the door and, opening it, saw her mother washing the tiles in the hall.

" What! Saturday already! " she exclaimed; then closed die door, and said to Elie: " If you must know, I'm sharing a room with another girl, one of the *Merryland* crowd. And I've told her everything. She's a pal of mine."

He was standing in front of the range, toasting his back, his eyes fixed on the window and die dreary little back-yard.

*' I dare say you think you're mighty clever, Elie—but I tell you straight: you've got to clear out of here."

He bent his head, like a scolded schoolboy, and said weakly:

" How can I? I haven't any money."

" That's your lookout. . . . Wait! Here's three hundred francs; that will see you across the Dutch frontier,"

His apathy was getting on her nerves.

" Didn't you hear what I said? For God's sake try to wake up! "

" Ssh! Your mother's coming."

That was so. Madame Baron entered, wiping her hands, and again, when she looked at her daughter, a vague suspicion flickered in her eyes.

" Your room's ready, Monsieur Elie. Antoinette will be back in a few minutes, and she'll light your fire. I shall be needing the kitchen soon; I have to wash the floor and scour the saucepans."

She moved the pots on the range, put some coal on the fire, and bustled out.

No sooner had she gone than Sylvie rounded on him.

" The truth is, you haven't the guts to make a move. You'd rather stick here like a limpet."

" Three hundred francs wouldn't see me far. And, anyhow, I don't see what harm I do by staying here."

He made a wry face; without thinking, he had just turned his head too quickly. Never before had Sylvie seen him in this state, his clothes bedraggled, his collar-stud jogging on his Adam's apple, his feet in shabby slippers much too large for him. What was more, he seemed to take a certain pleasure in flaunting his abasement.

" Anyhow, you've burnt the other notes, haven't you? "

" Not yet. How about you? "

" I've burnt mine."

He knew that she was lying.

" Hullo, there's Antoinette coming back! "

For already he could recognize her "footsteps. She rattled the letter-box, and her mother opened. A minute later she came into the kitchen, and stopped short on seeing her sister there.

" Oh, you're here_____ "

She had been to the butcher's. After slamming some meat down on the table she held up her cheek towards Sylvie to be kissed, as her mother had done; then went to the fire and warmed her hands. No one spoke for some minutes. Then Antoinette gave her sister a frankly disapproving glance, and said sulkily:

" Hope I'm not intruding? "

" What's come over you? "

" And look here, when you give me stockings, you might at least bring silk ones! Monsieur Elie, the best thing you can do is to go straight to bed."

She was obviously determined to remain in the kitchen—if only to spite her sister.

" Will you be here for lunch, Sylvie? "

" Don't think so."

" Then why ever did you come? ... Monsieur Elie, if you *must* stay in the kitchen, you might at least sit down. It makes me quite giddy seeing you standing up, with your head cocked on one side."

" I see your manners haven't improved," Sylvie remarked.

" Why should they? I ain't a grand lady, I don't wear silk stockings."

A long silence followed. The soup began to simmer again, filling the air with steam.

" Look here, I must know if you're staying to lunch because if you are Til go out and buy a beefsteak."

" Don't bother."

Antoinette's gaze fell on the soup-tureen on the dresser. After a quick glance at her sister she walked up to it. She had noticed that the lid had been replaced carelessly, at a slant. Lifting it, she fumbled inside, opened the purse, and seemed reassured.

" What are you up to? " Sylvie asked.

" Oh, nothing. But I might *ask you* that, mightn't I? It's funny you should come all the way from Brussels just to spend a few minutes in a kitchen that stinks of cabbage soup."

Sylvie merely shrugged her shoulders, and said to Elie:

" Give me a cig."

Antoinette kept her eyes fixed on her.

" You'd rather I left you to yourselves, wouldn't you? ... All right, I'll go."

The moment her sister had left, Sylvie bent towards him, asking:

" Have you told her anything? "

" Not likely!"

" Anyhow, get this into your head, Elie:*you've got to go* ... You understand?"

Just then the door opened, and she drew back hastily. Very spick and span as usual, Domb clicked his heels together and, stooping, kissed the hand she extended to h\m.

" I must apologize for entering so abruptly. I'd no idea that I should find myself in the presence of a charming lady! " He was a very susceptible young man, and addicted to high-flown phrases. Turning to Elie, he added: " May I hope you're feeling better after a good night's rest? "

Without seeming to notice the far from cordial expression on their faces, he held his white, well-kept hands towards the fire, then rubbed them together.

" If I'm not mistaken, this is the second time I've had the pleasure of seeing you, Mademoiselle, and as I said yesterday to your mother..."

" That reminds me, I've something to tell her," Sylvie interrupted, and hurried out of the kitchen.

" What on earth's come over her? " Domb looked quite startled. " Did I say something I shouldn't have? "

Elie gazed at him vaguely, as if he had not heard, and watched the smoke of his cigarette curling up through the hot, stagnant air.

Madame Baron was raising her voice in the hall.

" All right, my fine lady, go if you want to, as your home ain't grand enough for you. Sorry we can't offer you chicken and champagne for lunch...."

Sylvie's high heels clicked on the tiled floor. She came back to the kitchen for her bag and snatched it off the table.

" Off already? What a pity! " Domb got into position to kiss her hand again.

She took no notice of him, and after a venomous glance at Elie marched out of the kitchen. A moment later the street door banged.

" What a charming, charming girl! " the Pole exclaimed enthusiastically. " I wonder if you realize how ..."

But, without waiting for him to finish, Elie too went out of the room. Antoinette was kneeling in front of the little old-fashioned stove, waiting for the wood to catch before putting on the coal.

The window overlooked the street. The pavements were almost dry but the roadway was still deep in grimy slush, coated here and there with ice.

Sylvie wasn't to be seen at the tram-stop outside the grocery, and Elie pictured her stalking ragefully towards the centre of the town. On his left he heard a sound of shrill voices, running feet, and a band of school-children came scampering by. It was half-past eleven and they had just left the schoolhouse at the end of the street.

" By the way," he said to Antoinette, " there's something I'd like to ask you to do."

He waited for some moments, expecting her to look round, but she remained kneeling in front of the stove, without moving. Then when he least expected it, he heard her ask impatiently:

"Well? What is it?"

" I don't feel up to going out yet. I wonder if you'd be kind enough to go and fetch my luggage? "

" Oh! So you really have some luggage? "

He felt so uncomfortable that he turned his head and looked out of the window again.

" I left it at the Station Cafe," he said, " as I wasn't sure if I could find a room."

" Why didn't you get Sylvie to bring it? Considering you sleep with her. . . . Oh, it's no use putting on that innocent air, as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth. Mother's easy game, I know—but you can't fool me!" She stopped talking, as the coal was rattling off the shovel into the stove.

When she had done with the fire she looked round and saw Elie still gazing out of the window.

" Why did my sister come today? . . . No, you needn't tell me; I can guess. She was in a state because they've got the numbers of the banknotes. It was that, wasn't it? You may as well own up."

Elie went to the door to make sure no one was listening outside. The bed had been made, the room was tidy, and waves of heat were flooding it from the stove, which was roaring cheerfully, red cinders clattering down into the tin tray below.

" Oh, you needn't look so worried; I shan't give you away. Do you know, I guessed at once why you and Sylvie were glaring at each other when I came into the kitchen. Sylvie'd been telling you to leave this house. That's right, isn't it? "

At that he had to turn and face the girl. Her eyes were fixed on him, and in them he could see faint glints of red, like the red of her unruly hair.

" I know my sister much better than you do. You needn't worry about that note in Mother's purse; I'll manage to change it before Monday. First thing this morning I burnt the paper which had the numbers on it."

So that was why he hadn't been able to find it! When for a few minutes he had had the kitchen to himself he'd hunted for it high

and Jow, for he felt fairly sure the newspapers wouldn't publish the numbers of the stolen notes a second time.

"Is your luggage heavy?"

"There are two suitcases and a small bag. You'll need a taxi/*

"Just fancy a man like you letting my sister lead him by the nose!"

He vainly tried not to blush.

"All right, I'll go and get your things. Then you'll be able to get into some clean clothes—and high time too! You look a sight and a fright got up like that!"

He heard her talking to her mother on the landing, then going up another flight of steps. Elie had worked out the number of rooms. Besides his bedroom and the kitchen the only other room on the ground floor was the dining-room, redolent of beeswax, in which no one ever set foot. On the floor above were only two rooms: that of Valesco, immediately overhead, and Domb's at the back, overlooking the yard.

Strictly speaking, there was no second floor. Moise Kaler had an attic-room with a dormer window. The Barons occupied another attic-room, while their young daughter was relegated to a sort of loft, lighted by a small skylight in the roof.

She went up to it now, to dress. When she came down she walked through the hall without stopping. Elie saw her going down the street, a thin childish figure, wrapped in a shoddy, ill-fitting green coat.

He noticed that she had a way of drawing her hat absurdly low over her eyes and swaying her meagre hips; indeed, anyone who didn't know her might easily have taken her for a juvenile street-walker on the prowl. Her shoes were down at heel, her stockings creased. She had been lavish with her lipstick, and her mouth showed as a red gash in the heavily powdered face.

A knock at the door. Madame Baron entered.

"I've come to see if the fire has caught."

She could never stay quiet for five minutes on end. The stove was so hot that she had to wrap her hand in her apron before opening the fire-door.

"I'm sure you can't get coal as good as this in your country. I have it direct from the colliery, so it only costs you one franc fifty the scuttle. And Monsieur Domb, who feels the cold terribly, makes a scuttle last two fuH days, even when it's freezing outside."

She gave a glance round the room to see that all was in order.

"What do you think of my daughter—my eldest, I mean? You mustn't judge her by her looks; she's quite a good girl at heart. Only she's always been crazy on dancing. Still, I own I wouldn't care to see her here too often,... Have you any sisters?"

Elie had to think. He'd almost forgotten if he had any sisters! The question jerked him back into another life, that now seemed infinitely remote. After some moments he said:

"Yes, I have a sister."

"Is she nice-looking? Does she live in Turkey?"

Yes, she lived at Pera. Presumably she was pretty, as all his male friends had shown an interest in her. All the same, though she was twenty-seven, she had never even been engaged. For the first time Elie caught himself wondering if she'd ever had a serious love-affair.

With an effort he conjured up a picture of the modernistic flat in a big block of houses where Esther and her mother lived. But he found it impossible to visualize the details, and it suddenly struck him that he had never troubled to observe them, and, what surprised him still more, that his sister was a stranger to him.

"Have you any photos in your luggage?"

"No, I don't think I have."

"I'm sorry about that. All my lodgers have pictures of their families hanging in their rooms. So I get to know what their mothers and brothers and sisters look like. Sometimes one of them has his mother come to see him, and she writes to me regular after she's gone back home, and I like that. Last year Monsieur Domb's mother paid him a visit—such a nice lady she is. You'd never think he was her son. He's going bald—you must have noticed that. His mother's such a pretty woman, and quite young. When they're out together you'd take 'em for a pair of lovebirds. It was this room she slept in."

Though she never ceased talking, Madame Baron was always busy doing something, flicking off dust, putting each object in its place. Twice she stepped back to make sure the brass flower-pot container, standing on a small lace mat, was plumb in the middle of the window-ledge.

"I've been meaning to tell you. Don't let my husband know I didn't make you fill in the form reporting your arrival to the police. You see, he's in government service himself, and he don't see things like we do."

Now and again a red-and-yellow tram clanged past the window. A string of a dozen tip-carts, laden with coal, went slowly by, the big iron tyres grinding on the cobbles, the cartmen walking in front of their horses, whips resting on their shoulders.



Sylvie had to wait till one o'clock for the next train back to Brussels. Sitting in the railway waiting-room, she had a glimpse of her sister entering the Station Cafe and coming out with Elie's suitcases.

At Brussels, too, it was raining, but the effect was less depressing, what with the shops all lighted up and bursts of music coming from the big cafes.

At eight o'clock Sylvie, already in evening-dress, was sitting by herself near the band-platform in a *brasserie*^ having a meal of cold meat and beer. The pianist, a thin young man, kept smiling to her, and, without thinking, she returned his smile.

It was as restful as a warm bath—this huge room hazy with smoke, full of the fumes of coffee and beer, where the chink of plates and glasses blended with the languorous strains of a Viennese walse. At a table facing her was a pale, shy-looking youngster, who, cold as was the weather, had only a light mackintosh over his suit. Sylvie observed that he was wearing a flowing bow-tie and there was a wide-brimmed hat of the " Latin Quarter " type on the chair beside him, which made her smile.

An artist obviously; a painter, or a poet. He couldn't be more than twenty. He was doggedly smoking a small stumpy pipe and, unlike the pianist, gazing at Sylvie with romantically wistful eyes.

The pianist noticed him as the band was striking up again after a pause, and favoured Sylvie with a humorous, comprehending wink.

The time passed slowly. The *Merryland* did not open till ten. The entertainment manager, who was an acquaintance of Sylvie's, had taken her on as one of his show-girls, promising her a solo-dance turn the following week.

There was a constant stir of people coming and going. Games of cards and backgammon were in progress on the marble-topped tables. The layer of smoke between the players' heads and the gilt-scrolled ceiling was steadily growing denser.

At a quarter to ten Sylvie went out, after bestowing a final smile

on the musician. Just before opening the door she chanced to look round and saw that the young man with the Latin Quarter hat was following her.

It was raining less heavily. The *Maryland* was only five hundred yards up the street, so she decided to go on foot.

" Wonder if he'll speak to me? "

She quickened her pace, slowed down, then hurried again. When she reached the entrance of the cabaret the young man hadn't yet accosted her.

" Has Jacqueline come? " she asked the commissionaire.

" I haven't seen her going in. "

She went up to the first floor, left her furs in the cloakroom, and spent some minutes in the *Ladies*, redressing her make-up. As she walked towards the bar, she saw the young man, perched on a high stool, smoking his pipe and staring with affected ease at the empty room. Just then Jacqueline came in. She was a plump, good-humoured-looking young woman in a low-cut green silk frock with a vast pink rose in velvet on one shoulder.

" What luck? " asked Sylvie.

The barman, busy with his bottles and glasses, paid no attention to the two girls.

" I've done Gand and Antwerp, and managed to change twenty notes. The money's in my bag. . . . What news your end? Have you seen him? How did he strike you? "

" He's a queer bird and no mistake. He's that calm you wouldn't think he'd done it. "

" Will he be coming to Brussels? "

" I shouldn't think so. He seems to have dug himself in there; he just sits in front of the fire, and eats his meals, and . . . "

She stopped speaking. She had noticed the young man gazing hard at her over Jacqueline's shoulder. On the point of making a face at him, for some reason she changed her mind and smiled.

" Barman, the same again, " he said.

You could see he wasn't used to it. He'd read that phrase in a novel, most likely. And, though he tried to prevent himself from doing so, when ordering the drink he eyed the price-list on the bar with obvious apprehension.

" What are you going to do, Sylvie? "

" Ask me another! It's no use making plans till we see how things are going to pan out. Anyhow, tomorrow you'd better so and change the other notes at Ltege and Namur. "

" Do you think it's safe? To tell the truth, I'm beginning to get the wind up.. .."

But Jacqueline was amenable; finally she agreed to do whatever Sylvie wanted. A bell tinkled; the first customers of the night were arriving. The two girls gave hasty glances at their faces in the mirror at the back of the bar, then swung themselves on to stools. The young man's eyes still hung on Sylvie, wistfully imploring.

VI

IT was the third night. The meal had just ended and the young men were talking at the top of their voices, when Elie, who had watched Domb lighting a cigarette, took advantage of a lull to remark:

" I dare say you think that tobacco you're smoking comes from Egypt?"

" Of course it does. I suppose you're going to tell us that it comes from Turkey." Domb had no use for chauvinism—in others.

" That's just where it does come from. For one thing, there's a law forbidding tobacco-growing in Egypt. I've lived there, so I ought to know, and what's more, my father was one of the leading exporters of oriental tobaccos."

Domb held his peace, and stared sulkily at his plate. It was the third meal during which most of the conversation had turned on Turkey, and he preferred not to give Elie another opportunity of showing off.

But Madame Baron, who had an enquiring mind, asked from the end of the table:

" Didn't you take over your father's business? "

" At the time when I might have done so I was all out for a good time. Travelling about the world. I used to spend the summer in the mountains, in the Tyrol or the Caucasus, and winter in the Crimea or on the Riviera."

" You're an only child, aren't you? "

" No, I've a sister."

" Silly of me to ask! I remember now; you told me you'd a sister. Is your father dead? "

" He lost nearly all his money speculating, and I rather think

that killed him. When he died, my mother and sister had just enough to live on."

Moise was gazing dreamily at the table-clath, unaware to all appearance that anyone was talking. Now and again Valesco shot a quick, searching glance at EKe. It was Madame Baron, above all, who seemed to drink in his words, while Antoinette^ like Domb, feigned complete indifference.

Baron had already pushed back his armchair and started reading the paper. A sharp frost had set in and children had made slides along the gutters; the night was clear, the sky bathed in a pale, wintry sheen.

" You ought to go out for a bit, Monsieur Elie^" Madame Baron had kept on telling him. " If you wrap yourself up well, you won't come to any harm. You'll never get right if you stay indoors all the time."

But, though he was blowing his nose less often and was only conscious of his stiff neck now and then—when, for instance, he had been crouching over the fire for an hour or two and suddenly stood up—he hated the idea of going out. He found a curious sensation of well-being within the four walls of this little house, and, though he did absolutely nothing all day, never felt bored. Even the effort of getting fully dressed was too much for him, and he pottered about the house in slippers, collarless, like Baron, the brass cap of his collar-stud jogging his Adam's apple.

" So you haven't a photo of your sister with you? "

" No. But I wish I'd brought my photos; I'd have shown you one of our villa at Prinkipo."

" Prinkipo? Where's that? "

" It's an island in the Sea of Marmora, an hour's run from Istanbul. In early spring everybody who can manage it clears out of town and goes to Prinkipo, where the climate's simply marvellous. Everyone has his private caique."

" What's that? "

" A light row-boat, with a sail as well. In the evenings you see dozens of them gliding about on a sea that's calm as a lake. Usually there are musicians on board, and the air is full of music, and the most wonderful scents. The islands are a mass of flowers, and in the distance you see the white minarets tapering up along the coast."

AH this was true, and he visualized the scene so clearly that he could have made an accurate sketch of it. And yet somehow he

didn't *feel* it. He could hardly convince himself that he had spent a good part of his life there.

That was why he talked about it; and also because he saw Madame Baron drinking it all in. When Antoinette began to show signs of restiveness, her mother rounded on her.

" Can't you keep still when Monsieur Elie's speaking? "

For his descriptions of the Near East had much the same effect on her as the voices of crooners on the wireless; they plunged her into a world where all was glamour.

" Tell me, Monsieur Elie, what sort of clothes do you wear in Turkey? "

" Oh, the same as here. But, before Kemal's rise to power, most people wore the oriental costume."

" Did you? "

" No. I'm not a Mahometan. And, anyhow, the better-class people at Pera always dressed just as they do in Paris—except that one sometimes wore a fez."

Domb, who was looking more and more bored, stood up, and after a curt bow to the company retired to his room. Madame Baron was so absorbed that she forgot to start washing up, and even Baron now and again looked up from his paper to listen to Elie.

" Of course, life at Pera isn't what it used to be—on account of the depression. But some years ago it was perhaps even more—what shall I call it?—more *brilliant* than at Paris. You could hear every language in the streets, and everyone had pots of money."

That, too, was quite true, yet he had a feeling he was lying. He delved in his memory for something else to tell, something to increase the effect he was already conscious of producing.

" When we went to the seaside, on the Asia Minor coast..." he began.

He leant back in his chair, as he had¹ seen the other lodgers do when the meal was over. When he had finished his description, Madame Baron asked:

" Do your mother and sister know you're in Belgium? "

" No. I haven't written to them yet."

At last Madame Baron had begun washing up, after handing Antoinette a kitchen-cloth.

" In my country," Valesco said, " Constanta on the Black Sea is the great resort. It's quite as smart as any of the Riviera towns."

But it fell flat. Nobody wanted to hear about Rumania.

" Yes, Constanta's not too bad. But it can't touch the places on the Bosporus!"

Moise, who could have told them only of the Vilna ghetto, went quietly out.

" Why not go to the theatre, Monsieur Elie? There's a company from Brussels there tonight. The Number Three tram drops you just at the entrance."

" Thanks for letting me know—but I'd rather stay here."

" What! Don't you like going to the theatre? "

" Oh, I'm sick of theatres; been to too many of them, I suppose. One went to a show almost every night, in my country, and was out till three or four in the morning."

There was a homely sound of splashes and the chink of crockery from the basin in which Madame Baron was washing up. Elie was gazing straight in front of him as he puffed at his cigarette, his mind in a pleasant haze, due partly to his cold and partly to the stuffiness of the atmosphere. They seemed to blend so well that he felt no wish to recover, and whenever his fever showed signs of passing off he took a gulp of hot grog to make himself start sweating again.

" Do you intend to stay long in Belgium? I'm sure you must find it dreadfully dull after all the wonderful places you've visited."

What most of all had impressed the good lady was the contents of his suitcases: silk shirts and pyjamas embroidered with his initials, a whole repertory of ties, a well-cut tail-coat, not to mention a silver toilet-set.

Pointing to the tail-coat, she had asked:

" Do you wear that often? "

" Whenever I go out at night."

Even he himself had gazed at his evening-dress with a certain wonder. Could it be true that only a fortnight ago he was still on board the *Thiophile-Gautkr*, one of the little group of Sylvie's admirers, who after dinner always went with her to the smoke-room, taking turns to stand champagne all round?

Here there were certain words that acted like a spell, and " champagne " was one of them. He had only to mention it for Madame Baron to conjure up a world of gilded opulence, fantastic orgies. Even such commonplace things as a dress-suit and silk pyjamas had much the same effect. When he spoke of his mother's maid she asked:

" How many servants had you? "

" Let's see... • Seven all told, including a dear old nanny who was treated like one of the family. And I'm not including our gardeners at Prinkipo, or my sister's governess."

The grotesque thing was that, though every word of this was true, it sounded to him like a fairy-tale. And it was also true that his father had died three years previously, after losing practically all his money. Actually there hadn't been any great change in their life at Pera. His mother had kept on one housemaid and the old nurse at their flat. The villa at Prinkipo had not been sold, no buyer being forthcoming, and as soon as the weather showed signs of warming up, the two women moved into it each spring.

Had he, Elie, really suffered much by the family *dibdck*? He had behaved just as hundreds of other young Turks had behaved when the depression caught them. In the main street of Pera they were to be seen strolling up and down for hours on end, declaiming poetry, turning into the cafés for a drink *ofraki* and a dish of small smoked fish, and, when fortune favoured, picking up a girl.

One day he had made a thousand Turkish pounds by acting as middleman in the sale of an old English freighter to the Greek Government. And if the deal in carpets had gone through ...

" Aren't you going out tonight, Monsieur Valesco? "

" Nothing doing till the first of next month. I'm on the rocks, and I'd rather stay here than go out without a penny in my pocket."

" I know,... And when your money comes in we shan't see you in my kitchen of an evening, not even for meals—anyhow, for the first few days."

The washing-up was over, and as usual Madame Baron went to the scullery to get her vegetable basket and a pail. Her husband rose with a sigh, and walked to the door. They heard him clumping heavily up the stairs.

" He's on duty on the night train," Madame Baron explained. " He'll be at Herbesthal tomorrow morning, and come back again by the night train. Have you put his clothes out, Antoinette? "

" Yes, Ma. And I sewed on the button."

Valesco, who looked bored, hovered round Elie for some moments, then said:

" Feel like a game of billiards? There's quite a decent table at the pub just up the street"

" No, thanks."

" In that case, I'm off to bed. Good night, everyone."

The only sound in the room was the faint, intermittent squeak of the knife paring the potatoes, and now and again the thud of a potato dropped into the pail.

"It must be nice to travel about the world," said Madame Baron pensively. "I've never had no time to travel, and never shall have, I suppose."

Elie saw Antoinette look up sharply, and noticed that her face was pale. Her eyes were fixed on him. She was trying to convey something to him, and pushing the newspaper in his direction.

"It's in one's young days one should travel," Madame Baron continued. She had noticed nothing. Elie took his time before reaching for the newspaper.

A big heading splashed across three columns announced that eleven miners had been trapped by a fire-damp explosion in the Seraing coal-mine. Beside it was a caption in smaller type: *The Paris Express Murder*.

"You don't often read the papers," Madame Baron observed, without looking up. "But I don't suppose our Belgian papers interest you much."

"This morning a Brussels bank received by post from its local branch at Gand three of the banknotes stolen from M. Van der Cruysen, who, as our readers will remember, was murdered in the Paris express.

"The police were notified at once, and we understand that enquiries are on foot at Gand to trace the origin of these notes.

"In connexion with this case our esteemed contemporary, *Le Journal*, points out that a curious result will ensue from the difference between French and Belgian law.

"It seems that if the crime was committed before the train crossed the frontier, in Belgian territory, the murderer will be liable only to penal servitude for life, capital punishment being to all intents and purposes obsolete in Belgium.

"However, the Customs officials are positive that M. Van der Cruysen, whom they knew by sight, was still alive when the train crossed the frontier. It follows that the murderer will be tried in France, under French law, and his head may fall under the guillotine."

Conscious of Antoinette's eyes fixed on him, Elie struggled his hardest to assume an air of stoical indifference. **But** it was **more** than he could manage. His hands were so clammy that, when he

put back the paper on the table, the imprint of his fingers could be seen on it.

Fortunately, just then Baron came downstairs in his railwayman's uniform, and his wife was too busy fussing round him to pay heed to Elie. After filling a thermos flask with coffee and milk, she packed some sandwiches in a small tin he had brought down from his room.

Elie could still see Antoinette's face immediately in front of him, and he was struck by the fixity of the red-flecked pupils. He had a horrid feeling that he was going to faint; an absurd impression that the chair was giving way beneath him. Try as he might, he could not take his eyes off the pale, set face confronting him, on which he read a look of growing scorn, scarcely a trace of pity.

" Hope you'll soon get over your cold, Monsieur Elie." The railwayman was shaking his hand, but Elie hardly noticed it. Madame Baron accompanied her husband to the doorstep; a gust of cold air entered the kitchen.

" So you're a coward! " Antoinette exclaimed the moment they were alone.

The words conveyed nothing to Elie. He dimly saw the gleaming tiles of the range, the yellow mound of potatoes in the enamelled pail, the singing kettle, and, in the foreground, the girl's white face. But all these things were so blurred, and seemed to be moving away from him at such a speed, that he brought both hands down heavily on the table, to steady himself.

The front door banged and Madame Baron's footsteps could be heard approaching. Antoinette whispered:

" Take care! "

Her mother eyed each in turn, with a particularly suspicious look for Antoinette. Twice already she had said:

" You might be more polite to Monsieur Elie. "

She picked up a potato and her knife.

" If I was you I'd go out for a bit, *cold* or no cold. It's half-past nine. You sleep much too much, in my opinion. "

But he seemed rooted to his chair, incapable of stirring from the kitchen.

" I wouldn't have much use for a man who was always hanging about the house, " Antoinette remarked.

" Nobody asked you your opinion, miss!.. • I'm speaking for Monsieur Elie's good, like I was his ma. "

He rose with an effort*

" That's better! I've given you a latch-key, haven't I? Now mind you wrap your throat up well."

He lingered for some minutes, sitting on his bed, until the silence of the room, in which every object was already like an old friend, began to work on his nerves. He had only a light overcoat. He put it on, and knotted a woollen muffler round his neck.

What need had Antoinette to make him read that article in the paper? Those horrible last words especially, about his head falling under the guillotine?

Never for a moment had any such idea occurred to him. He forgot to turn off the light. Standing in the hall, he glanced round at the kitchen; through the glazed door he could see Antoinette and her mother still sitting beside the range, in an atmosphere of quiet so profound that he fancied he heard the ticking of the alarm-clock on the mantelpiece.

The moment he stepped outside he started shivering. The pavement was like iron underfoot. This was the first time he had seen the street by night, and it looked quite different.

All the houses were in darkness except the grocery, a little to the left. To see other lights he had to look far down the street, where a row of street-lamps marked the beginning of the town proper. Nobody was about. The only footsteps audible were a good five hundred yards away. Abruptly they ceased, and there was the distant tinkle of a bell, the sound of a closing door.

It was too cold to stand about, and he started walking blindly ahead, his hat pulled down over his eyes, his collar turned up. All the time he had a sensation that he was not in a real street, or on the outskirts of a real town.

The houses were not in an unbroken row, as in most working-class districts, nor were there any side-streets. After a block of ten or twelve houses, for instance, all exactly alike, would come an opening, a forlorn field, with sheds and dumps looming up behind it. Then another series of houses, another gap, from which railway-tracks shot out across the road. In the background tall chimneys were belching flames into the darkness, and the cold radiance of the sky was mottled with patches of angry red.

Elie had quickened his pace, though quite involuntarily. There was nowhere to go. He passed the windows of a café and saw in it the green rectangle of a billiard-table; presumably the one Valesco had referred to.

A family—father, mother, and two children hand in hand—

came down the road towards him, and Elie caught a snatch of their conversation.

"I'm always telling that sister-in-law of yours that she was a crazy fool to . . ."

The last word, or words, escaped him. Suddenly he decided he'd gone far enough. Only two hundred yards ahead were lights and shops, and a picture-house in which a bell was shrilling. He could see a number of people queued up at the entrance.

Elie stopped and gazed for a moment at the crowd, then turned quickly on his heel. It was all he could do to keep from breaking into a run. His nerve had given way; he felt as if he were suffocating.

He'd forgotten the latch-key. He walked on, taking long strides, as though escaping from pursuit; indeed, there were moments when he imagined he heard someone at his heels.

At last he saw the Barons' house, the familiar doorway—and he had an impression of having lived there for years and years. The light streaming from the kitchen showed in the keyhole. He didn't ring the bell like a visitor, but rattled the flap of the letter-box.

The eaves were dripping, and big drops splashed down his cheeks. A dark form blotted out the little patch of light and the door opened.

It was Antoinette. Without a word she stood aside to let him enter, her hand resting on the door-knob.

"Brr! It's cold outside!" he muttered.

"You'd better go to bed."

He went into his room and took off his overcoat. He had a vague hope Antoinette would follow him in and, though he made no actual gesture, he fixed his eyes on her imploringly.

"Anything you want?" she asked.

He had an inspiration.

"Well, I'd rather like a fire tonight. It's awfully cold in here."

She made no reply, but she left the door ajar—which showed she intended to come back. And a moment later he heard a sound which had already become familiar, the sound of coal being shovelled into **the** scuttle from the heap in the scullery. The two women in the kitchen exchanged some words.

"I'll make a hot grog for him," said Madame Baron.

Antoinette came back, a scornful look on her face, put down the scuttle, spread a newspaper on the floor, and took off the lid of the stove. It was full of cold cinders and she had to go down on her **knees** to empty it.

" Antoinette! " Elie whispered.

She showed no sign of having heard. Sitting on the edge of the bed, his arms dangling, he repeated her name.

" Yes? What do you want? " She spoke in a loud tone.

And suddenly he was afraid. There was a short silence, then he murmured, so softly that he wondered if she heard:

" You're very unkind. . . . "

She made the cinders into a little heap and gathered them on the shovel. Then, crumpling up the newspaper and thrusting it into the stove, she said :

" Have you a match? "

It was such a joy to hear her voice that he rose with clumsy eagerness and made as if to help her light the fire.

" I don't want your help. I only asked you for a light. "

The paper blazed up and Antoinette dropped a handful of wood upon it. After watching the leaping flames for some moments, suddenly she swung round on Ehe.

" Have you the notes here? "

He hesitated. But her tone had been so imperative that he went to the wardrobe and, standing on tiptoe, brought down the bundle of notes he had hidden on top of it.

" Hand them over! "

Quite naturally, as if she had a perfect right to do so, she dropped the bundle into the flames. As it didn't blaze up at once, she took the poker and stirred the notes to make them catch.

Elie stared at her in silence. He was straining his ears to hear if Madame Baron was still in the kitchen. At last he rose and went up to the girl, holding both his arms out in a gesture of humble entreaty.

" What do you want? " she asked in a matter-of-fact tone, and in her eyes was no anger, no pity; only cool contempt.

" Oh, Antoinette, if you only knew . . . "

" Don't be a fool! " With a laugh she picked up the scuttle and tipped half its contents into the stove. After replacing the lid and making sure with a quick glance that all was in order, she said curtly;

" Now go to bed. "

Footsteps rang receding up the hall, the door of the kitchen shut, and the low murmur of the two women's voices grew still fainter.

" Antoinette! " He had called her name aloud without knowing it as he sat dejectedly on the edge of the bed, gazing vaguely in

front of him. And suddenly he seemed to see her standing there before him, her body taut under the black dress, the angular shoulders, young breasts set so oddly far apart, the sides of her small nose flecked with tiny freckles.

Her tone had been cold, not to say hostile, when she told him to go to bed. And yet—! He guessed that he was in her thoughts all day; he knew that, appearances notwithstanding, it was she who listened most attentively when he talked about his home.

"Antoinette!"

He gazed at the empty bed, then at the lamp-switch, and started sweating again at the mere prospect of the long, dark hours before him. The stove had settled down to a measured roaring, like the noise of an express train. Leaning forward, he had a glimpse of his face in the glass over the wash-basin, and he looked away at once. When taking off his shirt he carefully avoided touching his neck.

His face had the crumpled look of someone's who is weeping, but no tears were in his eyes. When at last he was lying in his bed, in the darkness, he clenched his fists and bit the pillow savagely, muttering to himself: "Antoinette! "

He was afraid, half crazed with fear, and he strained his ears to catch the sounds in the kitchen, where the mother and daughter were still at work.

Then he heard Valesco, in the room above, locking his door, and, after some moments, a loud creak of the bed as he stretched himself on it.

VII

His watch had stopped, but Elie judged it must be a little after nine, for, looking out of his window, he saw the women from the adjoining houses flocking round a market-gardener's barrow on the far side of the street. It was a frosty morning, and they kept stamping their feet; one of them, he noticed, a fair-haired young woman, had her nose quite blue with cold. While they were pawing the vegetables in the baskets, the market-gardener put a tin trumpet to his mouth and blew a long shrill blast—at the first sound of which

Madame Baron opened her door and hurried across the street, purse in hand.

There was a knock at Elie's door.

"Come in." He supposed it was Antoinette coming to replenish the stove.

But it was Valesco who entered. He had a hat and overcoat on, and some books under his arm.

"Well, I must say, you're nice and snug in here... How's the cold today?"

Elie didn't tumble to it at once, and felt quite pleased at this visit, until the Rumanian, who was gazing out of the window, watching Madame Baron haggling for a cauliflower, remarked in a would-be casual tone:

"I say, I wonder if you could do me a small service? Our worthy landlady's getting in quite a state because my monthly cheque from home is overdue. That's what she thinks, anyhow. As a matter of fact, it did turn up—ten days ago—but I've blued the lot. Could you spare me three hundred francs, to tide me over till next week? Got to help each other, haven't we, as we're under the same roof?"

„Hullo! You use the same make of razor as I do. Strictly between ourselves, though she's a very decent sort in her way, our landlady has old-fashioned ideas about money. Not that she's more grasping than most of that ilk, but—you know what I mean."

Without a word Elie unlocked the suitcase in which he kept his wallet. He had a little over eight hundred francs in hand, the balance of the note changed at the hairdresser's. He handed three hundred-franc notes to Valesco, who stuffed them into his trouser-pocket with rather overdone casualness.

"Do the same for you, old chap, another time."

A minute later his head could be seen passing, level with the window-sill, in the direction of the town, while in the background the little group of housewives went on ransacking the market-gardener's baskets.

Elie had no clear idea of the effect this little incident had produced on him. But somehow it had left him with a load on his mind, which, he had a premonition, would not leave him throughout the day. He stared moodily at the open wallet; then fell to counting what remained. There were five hundred-franc notes, and besides these, he remembered, he had some loose change in his pockets.

Say, five hundred and forty francs, all told.

Literally all told—for he had not a sou more in the world. The

thousand-franc notes had been burnt, except the one he had given to Madame Baron. And that, too, was to all intents and purposes as worthless as if it had been destroyed. Antoinette was already aware of this. Quite possibly Madame Baron, too, would get to know it. And a month's board and lodging cost eight hundred francs!

He hadn't given a thought to this before, and now he was appalled at his predicament. Supposing, for instance, he had to leave at a moment's notice. . . .

But no, he wouldn't go away. Really this was an ideal refuge. "They" would never dream of coming to look for him in a humble, out-of-the-way lodging-house.

Still, he foresaw trouble ahead. One of these days Madame Baron would be asking him for money, and what would happen then? Just now she made more fuss of him than of the others—simply because he paid most. He took full board, and was the only one to have meat and vegetables at his evening meal; the only one, too, who had a fire in his room all day.. . .

She had come back to the house. The vegetable-seller had moved a little farther up the street. An almost empty tram went by. And Elie was still considering with dismay the prospect of being turned out of the house for lack of money. It would be nothing short of a disaster! He was sorry now that he had lent those three hundred francs to Valesco. But how could he have got out of it? In his present position wasn't it up to him to make himself agreeable to everybody?

"Monsieur Elie! "

Madame Baron was calling him from the kitchen. When he joined her he found her taking a frying-pan off the range.

"I'd better give you your breakfast before I go up and do the rooms. How are you feeling today? "

When Baron was out Elie always used the wickerwork armchair, which gave a shrill, protesting squeak whenever he sat down in it. The kitchen smelt of eggs and bacon. Only Elie's corner of the table was laid.

"Anything else you'd like? I must go upstairs at once, as I've my ironing this afternoon."

A minute later he heard her talking to Moise, and caught a word or two.

"... better in the kitchen ,... I've no patience with you ... overcoat... your death of pneumonia! "

And presendy Moise came down, carrying some exercise-books which, after muttering " Good morning," he dumped on the other end of the table. He started writing at once, in pencil. He had big, gnarled fingers, and pressed so hard on his pencil that the table quivered as he wrote.

Elie hardly knew what he was eating; the thought of the three hundred francs he'd given Valesco was rankling in his mind, and in any case he had no appetite this morning. He almost envied Moise, who, though he lived on a mere pittance, was sure at least of having enough to pay his board and lodging here.

Moise never looked up. His podgy hand crawled like a fat, assiduous slug over the paper, his back was hunched, the heat of the fire had brought a glow to his cheeks, and he looked the picture of contentment.

Elie fetched the coffee-pot from the range and poured himself out another cup. Then, after lighting a cigarette, he stared gloomily in front of him, conscious of a curious sense of instability. Acting on a sudden impulse, he addressed Moise in Yiddish:

" Have you been here long? " he asked.

It had struck him that by using Yiddish he would remind the young Jew diat there was a bond between them, and make him more favourably disposed.

But, without ceasing to write, Moise replied in French: "A year."

" Don't you speak Yiddish? "

" I speak French too—and I'm here to improve my French."

At last he had raised his head, and his expression conveyed annoyance at being disturbed at his work. In fact, he looked so hostile that Elie retreated to his bedroom, and fell once more to contemplating the wintry scene in black and white outside: coal-grimed houses, pavements sparkling with rime*

The footsteps he could hear in the room immediately above must be Antoinette's, as her mother had gone up to the attics. After listening for a while he went back to the kitchen and picked up a magazine that was lying on the dresser. Moise had not stirred when he came in, and remained bent over his work.

" Don't you smoke? "

" No."

" Don't you like smoking—or is it to economize? "

No answer. Elie fluttered the pages of the magazine, glancing at the illustrations. He had got into the way of drinking coffee at all

hours, helping himself from the coffee-pot, big as an urn, that always stood on the range. As he poured himself out another cup he said to the student :

" Shall I pour you one out too? "

" No, thanks."

" No tobacco. No coffee. And I wouldn't mind betting, no strong drink either!" He spoke in a bantering tone, with an almost affectionate smile. He was prepared to go to any lengths to break the ice between himself and his taciturn companion. But Moise went on stolidly writing, his furrowed brows propped on his left hand.

How strange to think that for seven years this young man had foregone all the amenities of life so as to carry on with his studies! And, Elie could have sworn it, had steered clear of women too!

No, there had been no woman in his life, nor any pleasure but the bleak joy of amassing knowledge. Madame Baron had explained to Elie how Moise would sit poring over his books all day in his fireless room, in a frayed old overcoat, a blanket wrapped round his shoulders; and how at first he used to wash his one and only shirt in the basin, stretching it at arm's length so as to dispense with ironing. Finally, however, she had coaxed him into buying a second shirt, and now she washed his shirt once a week, free of charge.

Three foolscap pages were already covered with writing, and apart from the light creak of the pencil and an occasional rattle of the table, there was no sound except the ticking of the alarm-clock, which stood at a quarter past ten.

" What do you make of me? " Elie asked abruptly. The question had been on the tip of his tongue for several moments, though he hardly knew what prompted him to utter it. All he knew was that he wanted to get on more intimate terms with Moise, who at once attracted and intimidated him.

And now at last the Polish Jew looked up and fixed his eyes on Elie; impassive, almost inhuman eyes.

" It's no concern of mine who you may be."

Bitterly offended, Elie got up, and once again—as he did quite twenty times a day—walked back to his bedroom. But he found it so boring by himself that very soon he returned to the kitchen.

" Please listen," he said impressively. " I know that I can trust you, Monsieur Moise, and there's something I'd like you to do—supposing ... supposing anything happened to me."

Actually there was no particular service he wanted of the young Jew, in any event. But it had occurred to him that by talking in this strain he might jolt the man out of his real, or feigned, indifference. And the words took effect. Moise looked up sharply, and even put down his pencil. Then he said gravely:

" That's enough. Will you kindly drop the subject? "

He rose from his seat. Elie wondered what his next move would be, and he felt the blood rising to his cheeks, his nerves tingling with suppressed excitement. By now he was in the mood to blurt out—almost anything.

" Surely, as members of the same race . . . " he began tentatively.

Moise gathered up his books and papers, and took a step towards the door. In a low tone he said:

" What do you hope to gain by it? "

It wasn't clear if this remark referred to what had just been said, or, in a general way, to Elie's line of conduct.

" Oh, if you take it that way . . . "

" I'm not taking anything in any way. It's none of my business. Still, as you've brought it up, there's one thing I will say. Madame Baron has been most kind to me, and I sincerely hope you won't bring any trouble on her."

He went out without a backward glance, walked slowly through the hall and up the stairs.

Left to himself in the kitchen, Elie felt a rush of hopelessness, a sense of isolation such as he had never known before. The bottom had fallen out of his private universe, there was no foothold anywhere. He had had a similar feeling, though in a milder way, earlier in the morning, when counting up the contents of his wallet. . . .

He had brought it on himself, by forcing his advances on Moise. Still, if he had acted thus, wasn't it because he had a feeling that the young man suspected something?

And, though alone, he conjured up an ironically superior smile, to neutralize the snub he had just received, and even murmured to himself: " Of course he's jealous of me—that explains it."

He put some more coal on the fire and drew his chair up to the fireside. Noticing that there was hardly any water in the saucepan in which the potatoes were boiling, he fetched a jug and added some. While he was doing this, Madame Baron entered, a pail in each hand. When she saw what he was up to, her face lit up.

" That's nice of you! You're not like Monsieur Moise, **who'll** sit there for hours on end with the saucepan right under his **nose**

and never notice nothing, even if the meat's burning to a cinder. Of course he's that wrapped up in his studies he don't notice things like we do. ..."

Elie accepted the compliment with a modest smile, and sat down again.

" You *must* find it dull here, Monsieur Elie."

" Not in the least, I assure you."

" Still, it's very different from what you're used to, isn't it? From what you told me, you had such a gay life at home. Really I can't understand why you don't go out a bit. When I look at you and Antoinette I sometimes think that she's the boy and you're the girl—if you see what I mean."

He was quite prepared, if she asked him, to do anything: to peel potatoes, even to scour the saucepans. Only one thing mattered: to be allowed to stay here, in this snug little kitchen with the white-enamelled walls, whose atmosphere and odours were already more familiar to him than those of his far-away home.

" Antoinette! " Madame Baron shouted. " Don't forget to bring the scuttles down with you."

Elie hadn't seen Antoinette so far that morning, and there was more than curiosity in his eyes when she appeared in the doorway. But she deliberately ignored him, and, carrying the scuttles, walked straight across the room towards the scullery. Her mother scowled at her.

" Well, can't you wish Monsieur Elie ' Good morning'? "

" Good morning."

" Want to be smacked, do you? "

" Oh, please don't scold her! " Elie protested.

" I can't abide manners like that. Especially as you're always so nice and polite to her."

Antoinette gave Elie a long stare with her red-flecked eyes; a stare that seemed to say: " I'll pay you out for that, my man! "

And Elie quailed before her, and shrank back still farther into the armchair, which for some moments had been giving him a queer impression of penning him in, like a wickerwork cage....



The mural decoration of the *Merryland* was nothing if not modern. The artist had begun by painting a series of wavy blue lines to suggest the sea. Between these were inserted shoals of pink,

gold, and vividly green fishes, hovering in the same translucent medium as a fishing-boat and a larger craft resembling a Noah's Ark. In the foreground was a broad band of yellow, presumably a beach, on which reclined a bevy of bathing beauties in skilfully seductive poses.

The general effect was colourful, if crude, and, the room being comparatively small, only a few people were needed to create an atmosphere of gaiety. The lights changed colour frequently, which added to the illusion of an escape from drab reality.

The night was young, and so far hardly anybody had arrived. The band was playing only for the second time, and the professional dancers were turning up, singly or in pairs, shouting greetings to each other and, as they passed the bar, shaking the barman's hand. After that they gathered round a corner table, in front of empty champagne glasses, and waited. ...

In a recess behind a pillar Sylvie was sitting beside the young man with the flowing tie; he had been coming regularly for the last three evenings.

"I can see you're worried about something," he said. "I do wish you'd tell me what it is. Or are you feeling ill?"

She gazed at him with unseeing eyes and answered absent-mindedly:

"I'm quite all right, dear."

He squeezed her hand, which he was holding under the table, and said beseechingly:

"Do please confide in me. You know there's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you."

Smiling, she stroked his hair, which he wore romantically long, but all the time she was watching the door and her thoughts were elsewhere. When Jacqueline appeared, in a moleskin coat, she rose with ill-concealed eagerness, saying to the young man:

"You'll excuse me for a moment, won't you? I've something to say to the girl who's just come in."

The cloakroom attendant helped Jacqueline out of her coat; after which Sylvie led her to the bar.

"Well?"

"So far all's gone well. But, as I was coming in, I thought I saw a fellow snooping round the entrance. I asked Joseph if he'd noticed him, and he said * Yes ' ; the man had been standing there for an hour or so."

The cabaret was still almost empty. The manager, in evening-

dress, was at his usual place at the head of the stairs, gazing lethargically into the dance-room.

"I see your young man's here again," Jacqueline remarked. "Poor kid—it's quite pathetic! "

"Yesterday I told him to stop coming, and what do you think, he burst into tears!... Do you know, the cigarette-girl stuck him for twenty-five francs for a packet of cigarettes just now! I told her it was a dirty trick; he can't afford it."

But the thoughts of both were far from the young poet's troubles. It was Jacqueline who spoke first.

"Well, what's to be done next? "

"I wish I knew.... Bob, mix me one with a kick in it."

She drank at a gulp the cocktail the barman handed her; then knitted her brows, thinking hard. Her eyes were fixed on the young poet sitting on the wall-sofa, but she saw him dimly, like a figure seen through badly focussed glasses. At last she began:

"Now that they've traced the notes to Gand..." Then fell silent again.

"Look here!" Jacqueline said. "I propose we have a meal, to start with. I can't face trouble on an empty stomach, and, by the look of things, they'll be round here any moment."

Just then a telephone-bell purred. When the manager went off to the telephone-box, Sylvie cocked an ear in his direction, for she had a presentiment that the call concerned her.

"Wait here," she said.

As she stepped out on to the landing, the manager was returning from the box.

"Oh, good! There you are! The call's for you."

"Hullo?" She spoke in a low tone, so as not to be overheard by the manager, who was only a few yards away.

"Is that Mademoiselle Sylvie?" a voice enquired. "I want to talk to Mademoiselle Sylvie herself."

"Yes, it's me."

"The porter at the *Palace* speaking." He dropped his voice till it was barely audible. "Listen! The police have just been round. They've found out about your having stayed here with Monsieur Nagear. I thought I'd better let you know, in case..."

The manager had his eyes on her as she walked back to the bar. She gave a smile in passing to her young poet, who gazed at her adoringly.

"We're for it!" she told Jacqueline.

" What do you mean? "

" They've found out about the *Palace*. Where are the notes? "

" In my bag."

" Hand it over."

Under cover of the projecting edge of the big mahogany bar Sylvie managed to extract the notes without being seen, and slipped them under her bodice.

" What do you propose to do? And how about *me*? What ought I to say? "

" Oh, you're safe enough. I only asked you to change the notes. You knew nothing about them."

" And that's the truth. When I went to Gand I didn't know ... "

Two couples were dancing. Furtively Sylvie squeezed her friend's fingers.

" Don't worry, pet. Leave it to me."

When he saw her coming back to him, the young man beamed with delight.

" Your friend's nothing like so pretty as you are," he exclaimed with naive eagerness. " What'll you drink? "

" We've had a drink already."

" Yes, but he's taken the glasses away."

She scowled at the waiter, though, after all, he was only doing his duty in obliging customers to order drinks.

" All right. An orangeade."

In some way it was a nuisance having this sentimental youth on her hands; still, his company made the situation easier than if she'd been alone. Though Jacqueline had turned up, Sylvie continued watching the door, and once again she had a presentiment—on hearing heavy footsteps coming up the stairs, and the voice of the manager, announcing:

" This way, sir. The show's just going to start."

But no one entered, nor was there any sound but that of the clubroom door opening and closing. For, officially the *Merryland* passed for a private club; this enabled alcoholic drinks to be served on the premises. And, for appearance's sake, a small room on the other side of the landing had been fitted up as a reading-room, with magazines strewn on the table, and two big leather armchairs.

" Does this... this gay life really give you pleasure? " The young man blushed at his audacity.

Without stopping to think, she answered almost angrily:

" 'Gay'do you call it? "

But she let it go at that. What was the point of trying to explain things to this guileless youth? She was cocking her ear towards the clubroom, though she knew it was quite impossible to hear what was being said there.

Jacqueline, who was wearing a mauve silk frock^ had chosen a seat beside the band, and had already danced twice. The young man said timidly:

" I hope you're not offended, I shouldn't have asked you that."

"Offended? Not a bit."

Her one desire was for him to keep his mouth shut, for her nerves were on the stretch. At any moment the manager's portly form would show up in the doorway. At last she could bear the suspense no longer.

" Excuse me for a moment."

She jumped up and hurried to the bar.

" Give me another cocktail. Quick! "

No sooner had she drunk it than she saw the manager at the door, beckoning to her.

She stole a quick glance at her reflection, sandwiched between two bottles, in the mirror behind the bar, settled her hair, and whispered to the barman:

" Tell Jacqueline there's nothing to worry about."

The manager watched her coming towards him.

" There's a man here ... " he began.

" I know."

She opened the door of the clubroom, and as she closed it again she saw a man of about forty in an overcoat with a velvet collar, pretending to be looking at the pictures in the magazines.

" You're Sylvie Baron, eh? Sit down, please."

He showed her a card with " Detective-Inspector " under his name.

" Know why I've come, Mademoiselle Baron? "

" O f course."

She saw that he was taken aback by her prompt " Of course."

" Good. I'm glad to hear you say that. It'll make things easier. I need hardly tell you that I shall be questioning your friend Jacqueline presently—and that I know a good deal more than you suspect."

" Really? "

The room was as bare as the parents' waiting-room in a small school, or a dispensary. Indeed, the only difference was

that the air was throbbing with the muffled stridence of a jazz-band.

"Now then," the detective said, "let's hear what you have to say."

"I'll answer your questions."

He looked reassuringly human and had already bestowed appreciative glances on the low V of Sylvie's frock.

"Are you acquainted with a man called Elie or Elias Nagear?"

"You know I am. You'd only to look at the visitors' book at the *Palace*^

"Where did you meet him first?"

"On board the *Th&ophile-Gautier*. He embarked at Constantinople."

"And you became his mistress?"

"His mistress? That's much too big a word for it. We happened to be travelling together all the way to Brussels, and naturally we palled up a bit."

"Do you mean to say you weren't his mistress?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and sighed:

"That's not the word for it, as I said just now. If you can't see the difference ..."

"Did you know that Nagear was short of money?"

"He never talked to me about money matters."

"Did he ever tell you, or imply, that he was going to commit a crime?"

She looked him in the eyes.

"Look here! What's the good of beating about the bush? I wasn't born yesterday, and of course I can see what you're driving at. If he's committed a crime I know nothing about it. All I know is that when I left the hotel bedroom last Wednesday at about eleven he was still in bed with a bad cold. I had my lunch outside, and when I came back late in the afternoon I found him gone."

"What about his luggage?"

She thought quickly. Almost certainly he had learnt at the *Palace* that she'd gone out next day with Elie's luggage.

"Oh, he left it at the hotel."

"Quite so. And when did Nagear return?"

She stood up—it was easier to think standing—and the detective followed her with his eyes as she paced up and down the room.

"He rang me up from the station and asked me to bring his luggage, as he had a train to catch,"

" Yes? What did you do then? "

The police officer had slipped the rubber band off a small notebook, in which he was scribbling away.

" I did as he asked me. He gave me fifty thousand francs, and then took the Warsaw express."

He looked up at her sharply, but she didn't turn a hair.

" Oh, he took the Warsaw train, did he? What time was that? "

She smiled to herself—for she had pat the times of all the international expresses. She'd taken them often enough for that!

" Nine thirty-six. Nagear apologized for leaving me so abruptly and, as I said, gave me fifty thousand francs."

She put her hand down her frock, produced the little wad of notes and laid them on the table.

" In Belgian notes? " The detective sounded surprised.

" No, in French notes."

" Ah, you changed them! In Brussels, I suppose."

" You know quite well I didn't. And you know, too, that girls like us are always suspected of having done something wrong when they're seen with a lot of money on them. I got a friend of mine to change the notes at Gand and Antwerp."

" Had you no suspicions? Didn't you check the numbers? "

" I never read the newspapers."

" Then how's it you know now? "

" Bob, the barman here, told me what had happened to Van der B—" she pulled herself up—" Van der Cruyssen, and I guessed... "

" Then why didn't you assist justice by making a report to the police? "

" Assist justice? Why should I? That's your job, not mine."

There was something like a smile on her face; indeed her self-possession was amazing. And while she spoke she never took her eyes off the detective.

" That's all very well, but suppose I hadn't got on your tracks...? "

" I knew you would, sooner or later."

" Are you prepared to confirm on oarii the statements you have just made? "

" Certainly.... And now, if you've nothing more to ask, I'd like to go back to the dance-room. Any objection? "

She gave him a quick smile, and he, too, was smiling as he snapped the elastic band round his note-book.

" *Au revoir*" she said, her fingers on the door-handle.

" Right. I'll see you again later."

The manager had hardly time to step away from the keyhole, but Sylvie walked past him as if she hadn't noticed anything. Jacqueline was drinking champagne with two men in dinner-jackets, an elderly man and a young one, father and son perhaps. With a flutter of her eyelashes Sylvie conveyed to her that all was going smoothly.

The young poet was moping in a corner; he seemed to have given up hope of seeing her again that evening, for he looked quite startled when he saw her coming.

" Hope you haven't been too bored," she said.

" No . . . not at all. I was waiting for you." The mere sight of her had made him blush, and to cover his confusion he asked: " Won't you have something to drink? "

" What? Has that damned waiter taken away the glasses again? Really he's the limit." Seeing him go by, she shouted at him: " Henri, what do you mean by it? Didn't I tell you . . . ? "

" It doesn't matter in the least," the lad broke in.

She looked him full in the eyes, and he started blushing again. Even his ears went scarlet. Suddenly she asked:

" Are you living with your people? "

" No. They're at Liege. I've a little room, a sort of attic really, in the Schaerbeek district. But when my book comes out . . . "

The manager had left his post at the top of the stairs and entered the dance-room so as to have a better view of Sylvie. Jacqueline was giggling as she nibbled the green almonds which she had persuaded the man beside her to order, and constantly throwing questioning glances at Sylvie over her shoulder.

" Do you really like being here? " Sylvie asked.

" Well—er—not really. But so long as I'm with you . . . "

Bob, too, was staring at her; as indeed were all the staff. Obviously the word had gone round.

" Pay."

" Do you want me to go? "

" We'll go to your place."

" But—!" He was horrified at the idea of taking an elegant young woman like Sylvie to his garret.

" Do what I tell you, my dear. It isn't Sunday every day of the week."

As he counted his change he looked profoundly puzzled. It

So

MAINLY MAIGRET

wasn't a Sunday—so what on earth did she mean by that last remark?

"No, we don't need a taxi," she said to the commissionaire as they stepped on to the pavement. And, linking her arm with the young man's, she said almost affectionately: "Let's take a tram."

VIII

NOW and again Elie opened his eyes and saw heads bobbing past, level with his window-sill, in the bleak morning light. He learnt it was a Friday, for amongst the others he saw Madame Baron go by with a hat on—which meant that she was on her way to the weekly market in the Square. Domb, too, had gone out, and a sound of slippared footsteps overhead told him that Valesco was up and dressing.

For the fourth or fifth time he dozed off; he made a point of staying in bed until the other lodgers had gone out and he could be sure of having the place to himself. The trouble was that every five minutes the clanging of a tram-bell jerked him awake and, as the tram-stop was almost in front of his window, it was hopeless trying to get to sleep till it had started off again.

The postman passed. A letter rattled in the letter-box and Elie was in half a mind to get up and see for whom it was; but his energy failed him and he rolled over, with his face towards the wall. How much more time went by? In a half-dream he seemed to hear Valesco going out. Then, with the dramatic suddenness of a shot fired -in a crowd, his door banged. Someone had come in, and before Elie had time to turn his head, a hand snatched back the counterpane which he had pulled up over his chin.

Something, perhaps the rustle of a dress, perhaps a whiff of scent, told him it was Antoinette; otherwise he'd have postponed opening his eyes. Her face was so white that the freckles showed like angry blotches. With a severe look she handed him a sheet of paper.

"Read this."

"What's the time?"

"Damn the time! Read it!"

For some moments he played the part of a man but half awake, while she stood, silent and hostile, at the bedside. At last, screwing up his eyes, he read:

"Antoinette, use your brains and try to understand. . . . The new lodger has got to leave *at once*. It's *terribly* important. You may have trouble, as he seems to have dug himself in, but he's got to go. Tell him from me that the police know everything and his name will be in the papers within the next few hours. He still has time to make a getaway. Don't tell Ma. Your affectionate sister,—Sylvie."

Though he had read the letter a dozen times, Elie seemed unable to take his eyes off it. And Antoinette, who in her black pinafore looked like a schoolgirl waiting her turn to say her lesson, finished by losing patience.

"Well? What about it? "

He was sitting on the edge of the bed, barefooted; his pyjama jacket was unbuttoned and revealed a lean, rather hairy chest. Slowly his fingers parted, letting the letter drop on the rug, but they went on clenching and unclenching, as if kneading some invisible object. Antoinette's face hardened.

"Stop playing the fool! "

Immediately the hands ceased moving. Elie raised his head, but so far he hadn't fixed on an expression, nor decided what line to take*. His forehead was deeply furrowed; whether with distress or cogitation it was impossible to tell. But there was a wary look in his eyes, a glint of anger and suspicion,

"Do you really want to turn me out? " he murmured brokenly^ striking a pose of profound dejection.

"Whether I want it or not, you've got to go."

The letter itself hadn't been much of a surprise. It was Antoinette's remark that made him lose all self-control. From now on he was no longer play-acting, and there was something so shocking in this sudden breakdown of his morale that the girl Was, for the first time, really scared.

He rose slowly to his feet and the movement brought his face within a few inches of hers' His lips were twitching, there was frenzy in his eyes, his breath came in feverish gasps.

"So you'd betray me to my enemies, would you? "

She wanted to look away, but a horrid fascination, like that which draws a crowd to watch the struggles of a man who has just been run over, held her eyes on him.

"Answer'me!"

His face was grey, unwashed, unshaven, and sweat was pouring down it. His pyjamas were soiled and crumpled. The sight of his abject fear made her feel sick.

"Don't!" She shrank away.

"Antoinette! Look into my eyes."

She could feel his hot breath fanning her cheeks, and it was all she could do to keep from screaming.

"Look at me! I insist. Don't forget I have a sister too. Suppose you had a brother and . . . and he was in my position."

Suddenly, to her consternation, he fell on his knees before her, clasped her hands in his.

"Don't say such cruel things. Please, please don't tell me to go. Once I leave this house I'm finished, and you know it. It will be all your fault. I . . . I don't want to die."

"Get up."

"Not before you've promised...."

She drew back two steps, but he shuffled after her, on his knees.

"Antoinette! Promise me you won't do that. You remember what they said in the paper, don't you? In France . . ."

"Oh, for heaven's sake shut up!" she almost screamed.

As she spoke her body suddenly grew rigid, her heart gave a lurch. A head had just passed the window, halting a moment on the way. It was Madame Baron returning from her marketing, and unthinkingly she had glanced into the room.

A latch-key grated in the door; she heard it open. Then came a soft thud as Madame Baron deposited her market-bag on the hall floor.

"Get up!"

It was too late. Already Madame Baron's plump black-clad form was looming in the doorway. She had a hat on, and this made her look more stern and dignified than was her wont. She gazed first at her daughter, then at the young man in pyjamas rising awkwardly to his feet.

"Go up to your room," she said to Antoinette, after a moment's hesitation. "And look sharp about it. I'll talk to you later."

She was holding herself in. No sooner was her daughter out of the room than she shut the door with a bang and rounded on Elie.

"Well, you dirty swine, ain't you ashamed of yourself—making up to a little girl half your age? What you deserve is a good hiding, and I've a very good mind . . ."

She actually raised her fist, and he shrank away, shielding his head with his arm.

But then her eyes fell on his face and she noticed that his cheeks were deathly pale, glistening with tears and sweat. And suddenly, to her amazement, he started trembling violently, breathing with a sort of rattle, his teeth chattering convulsively.

Mistrustfully she watched him back into a corner of the room and start pounding the wall with his clenched fists.

"What on earth's come over you, man? "

The harsh, vulgar voice was like a summons back to reality, but it took no effect on Elie. He went on beating the wall, and she seemed to hear him whimper:

"Mother! Oh, Mother... !"

All his manhood had left him. In the loosely-fitting pyjamas he looked like an emaciated, half-starved child in the grip of panic terror.

"Going balmy, are you? "

As she spoke she noticed the letter lying on the floor, and recognized Sylvie's writing.

She read the letter, though there was no need to do so; suddenly the truth—of which till now she had not had the faintest inkling—had dawned on her. As she looked up from the letter Elie swung round and faced her, still trembling with emotion, his hands pressed to the wall behind him as if bracing himself to spring forward.

"So that's it," Madame Baron said, letting the letter slip from her fingers. Then her legs seemed to give way and she leaned heavily on the table. "Well, I never! What a fool I've been! I never suspected a thing. Of course, I must say, you went about it cleverly."

She had a feeling that he was going to clasp her hands, perhaps go on his knees to her as well, and start imploring her... Gruffly she said:

"None of that nonsense! It won't work with me. Get dressed and clear out—at once! Got it? If I find you here in a quarter of an hour's time I'll have the police in."

She began to move towards the door, but stopped abruptly, halted by the most appalling sound that had ever reached her ears—one of those long-drawn screams that are only heard in moments of supreme catastrophe, when voices lose all semblance of humanity and sound like the squeals of dying animals.

Elie had staggered to the bed and flung himself across it, his arras

spread out, his fingers scrabbling on the counterpane, and he went on screaming, arching his body like someone in convulsions. Now and again, between the screams, came that low, desperate, whimpered, "Mother!"

Madame Baron glanced nervously towards the window, fearing passers-by would hear; then back again at the writhing form on the bed.

"Steady on!" she said, and was surprised by the sound of her voice. "If you go on making that noise we'll have all the neighbours in." She took a step towards him, and added in a less assured tone: "You know, you can't possibly stay on in this house."

She took off her hat wearily and dropped it on the table.

"Now do try to pull yourself together. You've still time to get away without being caught."

She walked hastily to the door, and listened; then turned the key and came back to the bed.

"Please pay attention, Monsieur Elie. I'm speaking for your own good...."



The kitchen was empty, the alarm-clock ticking away for its own benefit alone, the kettle singing to itself, filling the air with steam. Now and then a shower of red cinders would rattle through the grate into the ashpan. The window-panes were misted over.

Only one end of the table was laid—at Elie's place—and his breakfast, two eggs and a slice of bacon, stood waiting to be cooked on a plate beside the range.

The shopping-bag, from which the heads of a bundle of leeks protruded, remained where Madame Baron had left it, beside the hall door.

The only sounds in the room were the ticking of the clock and an occasional tinkle of the kettle-lid. Never had the house seemed so forsaken. Every door was shut, and for once no pails of water, no mops or brooms were lying about in the passage*. There was an atmosphere of hushed suspense, like that when some great domestic event is impending—when, for instance, everyone is waiting for a woman to have a baby.

Presently a sound of footsteps came from Elie's bedroom. The door emitted a loud creak, as though it were being opened for the first time for years. Carrying her hat, Madame Baron walked past

her shopping-bag, unheeding; then remembered, and went back to fetch it.

On entering the kitchen she was half-suffocated by the cloud of steam that greeted her, and, hurrying to the window, she opened it a few inches, letting in a gush of icy air.

There was a whole series of ritual gestures to be performed, and she went through them methodically, with an unusually thoughtful look on her face. She took the almost empty kettle off the range and filled it at the tap; she placed a saucepan on the fire, then hung her hat on a peg and unpacked the vegetables on the portion of the table which was unladen. Finally she glanced at the clock. It pointed to twenty-past ten.

Taking a paring-knife from the drawer and putting on an apron, she walked back to the hall, and shouted:

" Monsieur Moise! "

Only then did her feelings get the better of her; the second time she called, her voice broke on a sob. And, on returning to the kitchen, she wiped her eyes and nose with a corner of her apron.

There were footsteps overhead, and presently Moise came down the stairs. Madame Baron was skinning onions for the stew, but the onions did not account for the tears in her eyes. Moise noticed them at once, and frowning heavily, enquired:

" What's wrong, Madame Baron? "

" Please sit down, Monsieur Moise. I've something to tell you." She avoided looking at him, but he could still see her face and it was so woebegone that he lowered his eyes. " I know I can trust you, Monsieur Moise. It's something I daren't even tell my husband. You know how he is; he'd only start bawling the roof off, and that wouldn't take us any further, would it? " She blew her nose and, bending forward, slowly closed the door of the range. " I don't know how to start.... First of all, though, you must promise not to breathe a word of this to anyone."

She was cutting up the onions and letting the slices fall into the blue enamel saucepan.

" I've just learned that our new lodger, Monsieur Elie .. ."

She happened to look up, and the first glance was enough.

" What! You knew it? . . . And I was that silly I never suspected a thing! I treated him just like the other lodgers, in fact I made a fuss of him. What a fool I was! This morning I told him he had to go. I didn't like doing it, but seeing as my husband's a government employee..." She paused abruptly, her knife suspended in mid-

air; a hateful picture of the scene in Elie's bedroom had risen before her eyes. " I never dreamt a man could get in such a state. In all my born days I've never seen nothing like it, not even at the pictures. He bit his lips till the blood came, and he kept howling for his ma."

Unconsciously she was glancing over her shoulder towards the hall and the door behind which that dreadful scene had taken place.

" You know what they do to ... to murderers in France, don't you? " And when he made no answer she added with a nervous sob: " They chop their heads off! "

Dropping the onion and knife on the table, she lifted her apron with both hands and hid her face in it. Moise murmured awkwardly:

" Oh, Madame Baron ... please don't take on like that! "

Her shoulders heaved and, her face still hidden in the apron, she said weakly:

" Don't take no notice. I'll be better in a minute. Only, it was such a shock, you know.... "

Timidly Moise laid his hand on her shoulder; that was the furthest he dared go.

" If you'd seen him! " she moaned. " He looked such a poor miserable little shrimp, shivering and shaking in his pyjamas, like a kid that's scared out of his wits. One couldn't but be sorry for him. All skin and bone. ... "

" Madame Baron, do please compose yourself. You'll only make yourself ill."

She wiped her eyes and cheeks and, as she smoothed out her apron, conjured up a feeble smile.

" There! I'm better now."

The window had blown open. She went and drew it to.

" I may have made a mistake. But he swore to me that if I let him stay a few days longer he'd be safe. He has five hundred francs left; I saw them. But five hundred won't take him far."

A new thought waylaid her. She raised the lid of the soup-tureen and, after fumbling feverishly in it, dropped the thousand-franc note into the fire.

" I'd never have breathed a word of this to anyone else. But I know you'll give me good advice, Monsieur Moise. Don't you agree that we can let him stay on for a day or two more? The police think he's miles away, and anyhow they'd never dream of looking for him in a quiet little house like this, would they? " Fearing she had not yet convinced him, she added: " Jh was when he spoke about his

ma... . Somehow it made me think of yours, Monsieur Moise. Of course, if all he had to fear was being sent to prison, it would be quite different. You see what I mean, don't you? "

She had started peeling onions again and her eyes were watery, though not now with tears. She was still snuffling a little, but her composure was returning.

" Good gracious! I'll never have the lunch ready in time at this rate. . . . We've Monsieur Domb and Monsieur Valesco to think of, don't forget. If there's anything about him in the papers, they're bound to notice. If that happens, I'd rather it was you who told them."

Her thoughts took a new turn.

" Have you seen Antoinette about? "

" I heard her going to her bedroom just now."

She opened the door and shouted: " Antoinette! "

No answer. No sound of an opening door overhead. Still carrying her kitchen-knife, Madame Baron hurried up the stairs.

" What are you doing up there? "

Antoinette was doing nothing. There was no heating of any kind in her room, and though the skylight was shut tight, cold air kept seeping in, owing, perhaps, to the thinness of the glass.

Antoinette was lying on her bed, gazing up at the slanted ceiling.

" Why didn't you answer when I called? "

Never before had Madame Baron seen that strange, set look in her daughter's eyes, or her face so deathly calm. Indeed there was something so disquieting about it that she hurried to the bed and gave her arm a little tug.

" Well? What do you want? " the girl said fretfully.

" You gave me quite a turn! Come downstairs. You'll catch your death of cold if you stay up here. . . . Why are you looking at me like that? "

" Where is he? "

" In his room." How was she to explain things to her daughter? " You wouldn't understand," she said vaguely, " but I've my reasons. I've told him he can stay a few days longer. But you're not to have anything to do with him. If he speaks to you, don't answer."

Antoinette seemed to wake up with a start, giving her head a curious backward jerk, as if her neck had gone numb and she had to free it.

" What I can't get over," her mother said, " is the silliness of

Sylvie—to let herself be mixed up in that sort of thing.... Come along."

They went downstairs together. When Moise saw Antoinette he was startled at her changed appearance.

"Til talk to Domb and Valesco," he said hastily.

"Thanks... . Antoinette, go and get the butter from the cupboard." She bestowed a smile of gratitude on Moise. "That's very kind of you, I'm sure. ... I'm doing the right thing, don't you agree?"

By way of answer Moise, too, smiled vaguely; then started towards the stairs.

"Why not come and study by the fire?" she called after him.

Apparently he didn't hear.

The life of the house resumed its usual course. The onions began to sizzle on the range, while Madame Baron fell to chopping up the meat for the stew. Suddenly, without looking up from her work, she said to her daughter:

"You know what your dad's like; it wouldn't do for him to know. You'd better look through the paper before he reads it and, if there's anything, tear the page off."

Antoinette, too, made no reply.

"Now go and do out Monsieur Domb's room. Don't forget it's the day to change the sheets."

At half-past eleven Baron appeared. He had been on duty all night and had the rest of the day off. After hanging his coat on a peg in the hall he entered the kitchen, sniffed the air, and asked:

"Grub ready?"

"In a few minutes."

His wife placed his slippers in front of the wicker armchair, and Baron proceeded to take off his boots, socks, and collar.

"Terrible cold it can be round about Luxembourg. This morning just after sunrise we saw a boar floundering about in the snow."

"Is there much snow there?"

"Nearly four foot deep in places."

She was taking care to keep her back towards him, but a moment came when he had a glimpse of her face.

"What's wrong with you?"

"Wrong with me?"

"Your eyes are all red."

"Oh, that's the onions." She pointed to the onion skins on the table.

"Hurry up with my grub. I want to get to bed."

She bustled about, took the potatoes from the oven where they had been browning, and laid the table. Valesco entered, bringing wafts of frozen air lodged in the folds of his overcoat.

"Sorry, Monsieur Valesco, but I must ask you to wait a bit. My husband's been on duty all night and I'll give him his lunch first."

"Has my friend been round this morning?"

"No one's been. Oh, by the way, you'd better go up to Monsieur Moise's room. He has something to tell you."

"Something to tell me? What on earth can it be?"

She didn't feel at ease till she heard his footsteps on the stairs.

"Has he paid?" asked Monsieur Baron.

"Yes, he settled up yesterday. What's more, he brought a cake for supper; I've kept a slice for you."

"Where's Antoinette?"

"Doing the rooms. She was a bit late this morning getting started."

He began eating by himself, sometimes pausing to push up his straggling grey moustache.

"No news from Sylvie?"

"Our Sylvie never was one for letter-writing—you should know that."

To conceal her nervousness Madame Baron busied herself with her pots and pans. When Domb entered, after bowing to her from the doorway, Baron was drinking his coffee and finishing off the slice of cake.

"Lunch ready, Madame Baron?"

"In a couple of minutes, Monsieur Domb."

He always conveyed an impression of extreme cleanliness, as if, unlike the other lodgers, he never omitted a morning bath. With another bow he started to leave the kitchen.

"Where are you off to?"

"I thought of going to my room."

"Why not wait here? You're not in the way at all." Madame Baron was always a little flustered by the Pole's exaggerated courtesy. "There's a chair. The others will be here in a moment."

Baron rose, yawned, stretched his arms and said to his wife:

"Don't forget to wake me at four."

On his way out he planted a clumsy kiss on his wife's hair, while she called towards the doorway:

" Monsieur Valesco! Monsieur Moise! Antoinette! Lunch! "

To divert attention from her reddened eyes, she tried to put on a more smiling face than usual. It was only when she heard the footsteps of her young folk on the stairs that it struck her she'd forgotten someone.

" Monsieur Elie! Come to lunch."

Some tense moments followed, while the others took their seats round the table. At last Madame Baron, who was listening intently, heard a key turn in a lock and the creak of an opening door.

While she busied herself putting coal on the fire and stirring it with the poker, she heard the kitchen door open and shut and *' Good mornings " being exchanged.

At last she turned and saw Elie at his usual place, his cheeks only a shade paler than usual, only a hint of discomposure in his eyes. He had shaved, his hair was smoothly brushed, and, as he took the plate that was handed him, he said to Antoinette in a low but steady voice:

" May I trouble you for the bread, Mademoiselle? "

Was it because today he was wearing a collar and a tie? For some reason Antoinette's gaze settled on his neck. Then with startling suddenness she jumped up from her chair and, before anyone could say a word, ran out, slamming the door behind her.

Madame Baron started to follow, but thought better of it.

" She's not feeling very well today," she explained.

Moise, who didn't take the same meal as the others—it cost five francs—extracted from his biscuit-tin a loaf and a pat of butter, and put them on the table. Like an orchestra tuning up, there began a confused, steadily increasing noise, the rattle of knives and forks on plates, a chink of glasses, and when at last a voice made itself heard above these sounds, it was Elie's.

" It's terribly cold out of doors, isn't it? "

It was his ordinary voice, a trifle thickened perhaps by the food he had in his mouth.

No one answered.

IX

THE water -jug in Moise's attic-room had burst, and for several days thereafter the block of ice that had done the mischief could be seen glimmering, like a translucent cannon-ball, in a corner of the yard.

At every moment voices, plaintive or indignant, could be heard protesting:

" The door's open again! For heaven's sake shut it! "

The temperature was far below freezing-point, but the sky was cloudless, the air crystal-clear; indeed, there were four consecutive days of brilliant sunshine.

" Do please shut the door! " wailed Madame Baron.

For the kitchen was the only warm place in the house, and everyone made use of it from early morning on. The lodgers came there, one after the other, to get hot water, and, as it was impossible to heat enough water for all at once, hung round the range in their pyjamas, waiting their turn. The first thing Madame Baron did each day was to strew sea-salt on the doorstep and the pavement in front, where ice had formed overnight, and when she came back to the kitchen her fingers were numb with cold, her nose was scarlet.

There was always a scuffle for the place nearest the fire, though as a matter of fact the cold seemed more productive of good-humour than otherwise. Even the children running past the house on their way to school, their faces wrapped in Balaclavas, were hoping that the frost would last, the mercury fall still lower. The next-door neighbour, whose pipes had burst, kept dropping in at all hours for water, a pail in each hand.

" It seems the Zuider Zee is beginning to freeze over."

Everyone was thrilled—Elie no less than the others. He was the first each morning to go out to read the thermometer which they had hung up in the yard. On his return to the kitchen he would announce the latest figure with an air of triumph.

" Twenty degrees of frost. But of course we register far lower temperatures than that in Anatolia, almost every winter/'

His eyes roved round the table from one face to another. Domb never responded, but Elie made a point of feigning not to notice this. Valesco now and then gave a polite smile, to show that he was listening; Moise, in any case, never took part *in* conversations

" One year I started off from Trebtzond in my car to go to Persia, where my father had business interests.... I suppose you know

that practically all the traffic in those parts consists of camel-caravans."

"What? Ain't there no railway?" Baron seemed surprised.

"Not yet. The plans have been drawn up, but that's as far as they have got. Only imagine the distances to cover! We reckon them in thousands of miles in our part of Europe."

Really Baron was now the only one to display much interest in Elic's chatter. He may have been a trifle puzzled by the reserved attitude of the others, but it wasn't marked enough for him to comment on it.

Elie, on the other hand, was more loquacious than ever. He had got over his cold and stiff neck, ate heartily, and went on having, unlike the other lodgers, a full-length dinner every night. Indeed, he had never seemed in better form.

On the first night everybody had eyed him curiously as he piled his plate with meat and vegetables, while the others were content with bread and butter. But he seemed quite unconscious of their scrutiny. Noticing a plate of cheese in front of Baron, he asked politely:

"That Roquefort looks excellent. Would you mind passing it?"

Antoinette, however, seemed to have lost her appetite completely, and her father was quite perturbed.

"You're not looking at all fit, my dear. I've never seen your face so peaked. I suppose it's something to do with your age. Growing pains, most likely. But that's all the more reason to eat well."

Elie promptly put in a remark.

"Yes, my sister got like that when she was Antoinette's age. In fact, we were afraid of losing her, and Mother packed her off to Greece for a change of air. Ever been in Greece?"

"It's just thoughtlessness," Madame Baron whispered to Moise.

"He don't seem to realize *."

Earlier in the day he had told her in a quite matter-of-fact tone:

"You know, you needn't worry, Madame Baron, about the money I owe you. I've written to my sister, and it should be here in a week's time."

She had thought it wiser not to reply, and busied herself with her cooking. But when she noticed him picking up the bag of mussels she had brought that morning, and opening a drawer to get a knife, she couldn't help remarking:

"What ever are you up to?"

"Oh, I'm going to give you a hand at trimming these mussels."

" Please don't bother, Monsieur Elie."

" It's not the least bother. I like doing it."

He was constantly in the kitchen. Sometimes she managed to get him out of it, but he nearly always came back in a few minutes, on some pretext or other.

" Look here, I've got to wash die floor," she would say. " Please go to your room."

He thought up another trick; he left his bedroom door ajar, and no one could enter or leave the house without being hailed by him.

" Hullo, Valesco! Come and warm your hands for a moment. Madame Baron wants the kitchen to herself just now. A cigarette? . . . You see how right I was! There's not a word about me in file papers today."

He was always the first to read them, and would even snatch Baron's *Gaiette* from his hand when he was settling down to read it.

" May I have just a peep? . . . Thanks so much."

When satisfied that there was no reference to himself, he handed the paper back, with a wink to the others round the table and a murmured " All's well! "

In a flutter of anxiety Madame Baron watched her husband's face, but he never seemed to notice anything odd in Ehe's conduct.

All of them did their best to avoid being buttonholed by Elie on their way through the hall, or at the kitchen door—but there was no escaping him. Time and again Madame Baron begged him to remain in his room and keep the door shut.

" But I'd so much rather be with you! " he would reply.

And she never could summon up the courage to tell him frankly that his presence made her feel uncomfortable.

It had the same effect on everyone in the house, with the exception of Baron, who still had no suspicion of any kind. The others, when they wanted to discuss the situation, were reduced to taking refuge in the attics or on the first-floor landing. Even so, Elie, who had sharp ears, would say the moment they came down:

" Been talking about me, haven't you? "

" Don't be silly! Do you imagine we've nothing else to talk about?"

" I'm certain that was it. But you've no reason to feel anxious. In a few days' time they'll have forgotten all about me, and I shall make a move. And, of course, once I'm back at home, I'll send you all nice souvenirs."

He seemed to have completely forgotten that humiliating scene

in the bedroom, his abasement, his tears. It was as if he'd never gone down on his knees to Antoinette, never sobbed and whimpered for his mother, never implored Madame Baron to forgive him, his face so livid that she thought he was going to have a fit. Never could she forget the way he had beaten his head against the wall, nor how he'd sprawled on the floor, jerking his limbs like an epileptic.

Somehow or other he had blotted all that out of his memory, had resumed his place in the household as if nothing had happened. True, his board and lodging were unpaid, as the banknote was burnt; but he was lavish of promises of the presents he would send once he was back in Turkey.

"Before I leave I'll show you how to make Turkish coffee, and once I'm back I'll send you a real Turkish coffee-set in burnished copper."

There were moments when Madame Baron felt like going on her knees to him and begging him to keep silent. She could not even have a minute's quiet talk with her daughter. No sooner had they settled down together in the kitchen than the door opened, and there he was! In fact, he seemed to regard the kitchen as his domain, and fifty times a day walked the length of the hall between his bedroom and the glazed door. It was he who replenished the coffee-pot with boiling water from the kettle; and he who, when Madame Baron was busy in the bedrooms, prodded the potatoes with a fork to see if they were cooked enough.

"It's no trouble, I assure you. It gives me something to do."

He rarely spoke to Moise, and never said a word to Domb, who, the moment he had finished eating, went up to his room.

"Really," Madame Baron sighed, "he might have asked me for a biscuit-tin and had bread and butter for his supper like the others. Don't you agree, Monsieur Moise? As it is, I have to cook a hot dinner every evening, just for him!"

"Why not tell him that you won't go on doing it?"

"Somehow I don't like to* Silly of me, I know, but there it is! And, of course, it would be awkward because of my husband. He'd start asking questions ..."

To crown all, since the cold snap had set in, Elie had taken to wearing a frogged smoking-jacket in purple velvet from morn till night. He had explained in detail how he had had it made for him at Budapest by Admiral Horthy's tailor, and obviously fancied himself in it, striking the poses of a Brummel.

The worst day of all was a Tuesday. Baron was on duty on a

day train and didn't come home till seven in the evening. On the previous day Elie had already scented something in the wind, and when, on the Tuesday morning, he saw Madame Baron come back from her marketings with a large bunch of flowers, his curiosity became acute. So he laid an ambush—in other words, he left his bedroom door open and stayed lurking in the background. Valesco would be bound to pass the door sooner or later.

"Hullo, old chap!" Elie shouted to him. "Step in for a moment, will you?"

"Sorry, I'm in a hurry."

"I only want a word with you. What's happening here today?"

Valesco would have preferred to hold his peace, but he owed Elie three hundred francs, and saw no prospect of repaying them in the near future.

"Oh, it's Monsieur Baron's birthday."

"So that's it. Look here! Will you do me a small service? I don't feel like going out myself. Would you mind going to the best florist's in the town and buying a bouquet? A really posh one, don't you know? A hundred francs should be enough. Wait! I must give a present too. Let's see.... I don't think he has a fountain-pen. Will you please buy one? Choose one of the best makes, please. Here's three hundred francs for the lot."

That morning there were frost-flowers on the panes and the Rumanian's face was blurred almost out of recognition when Elie, watching from his window, saw him crossing to the tram-stop.

A subtle, well-pleased smile lingered on Elie's lips when, after donning his gorgeous smoking-jacket, he entered the kitchen, where Madame Baron was engaged in trussing two fowls. There was a knock at the hall door. It was the baker's boy delivering two fruit tarts.

"Do please go back to your room, Monsieur Elie. Really you'll make me quite annoyed if you stay in the kitchen."

And for once he complied with her request.

At noon Baron was still away. The midday meal was rushed through; Madame Baron and Antoinette were both in their best clothes, ready to go out immediately it ended.

Was it that Elie found they weren't taking enough notice of him, and he resented being eclipsed by the domestic anniversary? Anyhow, as the meal was ending, he thought fit to say, rather loudly, to Valesco, who was seated beside him:

"Do you know, I've just thought of something rather interest-

ing? They were talking in the papers of the difference between French and Belgian law* Well, suppose someone who's being proceeded against in Belgium by the French police commits a crime in Brussels, or some other Belgian town . . . ? "

He paused; the only sound to fill the silence was the clatter of knives and forks on plates—and for some reason it had a sinister effect, like the sound of a distant tocsin.

" You don't follow? What I mean is, that a man who's liable to the death-penalty in France might happen to commit a crime in Belgium. In that case, it seems to follow that he should first be tried in Belgium, if it's in that country he's arrested. And it also follows, doesn't it, that he would serve his sentence in this country? "

His face was pale. His lips had an odd twist—but at a stretch it might have passed for a smile. And he looked genuinely pleased when he saw that Antoinette was smiling.

Moise straightened his back and looked him in the face.

" Would you be good enough to change the subject? "

He didn't dare to persist, and turned his eyes away, but there was still a flicker of some curious emotion in the pupils.

The table was cleared more quickly than usual. Domb was the first to leave; then Valesco went to his bedroom. Madame Baron was starting to go up the stairs when Moise, putting on his student's cap, walked past her on his way to the front door.

" Monsieur Moise! " she called.

" Yes? All right, I'm coming. "

They talked in whispers on the landing, and Elie, left to himself in the kitchen, strained his ears in vain to catch what was being said. No sooner had Madame Baron and her daughter left the house than Moise, instead of settling to work in his room, brought his manuals and exercise-books to the kitchen.

Without a word he seated himself in the armchair, Elie's usual place when Baron was out, and started jotting down rows of figures.

Elie put some coal on the fire, poked it noisily, then drew up a chair beside it. Smiling, he said:

" You've been told to keep an eye on me. Are they afraid I may steal something? "

Moise pretended not to hear.

" I'm not so dense as I may seem; I know you want to see the last of me. But you won't have to wait much longer. Once the police have lost interest in me I'll be off—and you can have your harem to yourself! "

The Polish Jew slowly raised his head. There was no trace of anger in the pale, staring eyes—and this made what followed all the more impressive.

"If you don't keep your dirty mouth shut," he said, "I'll bash your face in!"

Though smaller than Elie, he was more toughly built, and looked quite capable of putting the threat into execution. After he had spoken, the pencil could be heard biting into the paper, and the table started vibrating again.

Some minutes passed, and presently, for all his imperturbability, Moise looked up, puzzled by the long silence. He saw Elie sitting perfectly still, his eyes fixed on the red glow of the open ring of the fire; his under-lip was sagging, quivering.

Moise resumed his work, and after a while, without a sound, almost, it seemed, without the least displacement of the air, Elie rose and walked out of the kitchen. The fire in his bedroom had gone out, but none the less he stayed there, sitting in front of the window.

Towards four, when the lamp-lighter was going his rounds, he saw two dim figures moving by, which he recognized as Antoinette and her mother. He heard the key turn in the lock, then footsteps in the hall. The two women had almost reached the kitchen door when there was a slight rattle of the letter-box; the evening paper had just been delivered.

Elie ran out and took it; then followed the women into the kitchen, where he found Moise gathering up his books and papers. The table was strewn with parcels of various shapes and sizes.

"Go upstairs and change your things," said Madame Baron to her daughter.

Before even taking off her hat she went to the range, added a shovelful of coal, and set the kettle on to boil. Her cheeks were blue with cold; little beads of ice glittered on her fur stole.

"Has no one been, Monsieur Moise?"

"No one."

Without a glance at Elie she went upstairs to change her clothes, and a moment later Moise went up too. The wicker chair creaked as Elie settled into it. The pages of the newspaper rustled. There was nothing of interest on the first or second page. But on the third he found a short paragraph headed: "*The Murder on the Paris Express*"

There were only a dozen lines or so—which seemed to indicate that Press and public had lost interest in the case.

" The police authorities are continuing their investigation of this daring crime. Four days ago a cabaret dancer, Sylvie B., now residing in Brussels, was questioned, and she was able to furnish some useful information. It is now known that the murderer is a Turkish subject, named Elias Nagear, and that this young woman was his mistress. So far, however, all efforts to trace him have been unavailing. The police theory is that Nagear crossed the frontier into Germany before the crime was discovered. The young woman, Sylvie B., has been admitted to bail."

Quite calmly Elie tore off this portion of the page and laid it on the table. His eyes were sparkling. He lit a cigarette and took long, luxurious puffs at it. As he did so, he listened to the noises in the house with growing impatience. The moment Madame Baron appeared in the doorway, her hands behind her back as she knotted her apron-strings, he jumped up and almost shouted at her:

" Well? What did I tell you? "

His voice was shrill with triumph. He thrust the piece he had torn from the paper into her hand.

"Read this." And he couldn't help chuckling: "So they're looking for me now in Germany! Isn't it priceless! "

She ran her eyes over the article and, without thinking, handed it back to him; after which, though there was no need to do so, she poked the fire vigorously.

" So it's only a matter of a few days, and then, as I told you, I shall..."

" Oh, keep quiet! " she exclaimed irritably. That reference to her daughter as the young man's " mistress " was rankling in her mind.

"But it's such good news!" he insisted. "Now that they're looking for me in another country ... "

" For heaven's sake shut your mouth! And go back to your room. I don't want you here."

" Oh, if you take it that way.... "

Tears were streaming down her cheeks as she went about her cooking. But she wept silently, after the manner of women no longer young. "The young woman was his mistress!" What would the neighbours think?—for they were sure to guess that " Sylvie B," stood for Sylvie Baron. And what would her husband say when he found out?

Antoinette came in and stared at her mother in amazement.

" What's wrong, Ma? "

" Nothing. Give me the flour."

" Has he been talking to you again? "

" No. Don't ask questions, please. My nerves are all to bits."

" Will he have dinner with us tonight? "

" I don't see how we can prevent him."

Antoinette began unpacking the parcels. There were two pairs of socks, a black silk tie dotted with small white flowers, a smaller oblong packet containing a narrow cardboard box.

" He'll be awfully pleased with this fountain-pen," Antoinette remarked. " I wouldn't mind having one like it for my birthday too."

It had cost sixty francs, and was a rather shoddy imitation of a well-known American make. The gold nib was only fourteen carats.

" Hand me the butter."

Meanwhile Elie was reading again the article about himself. After he had got it by heart he folded up the slip of paper and thrust it into a pocket of his velvet smoking-jacket.

Domb came back and tramped up to his room. Moise went out and jumped into a moving tram, but was back again half an hour later.

There were all sorts of noises in the kitchen, and the house was full of unusual smells. For once in a way everybody kept to his room. Elie, who had drawn his curtains, held them a few inches apart and kept peeping out every time he heard footsteps in the street.

He was the first to hear the tinkle of the bell of a delivery-boy's tricycle as it halted outside, and he ran to the door, some small change in his hand.

It was the bouquet. He retreated to his room without having been seen from the kitchen and, after stripping the silverfoil off the stems, placed the flowers in his water-jug to keep them fresh. Valesco returned only a few minutes before seven. Elie, who had been on the watch, opened his door at once and took the little oblong package Valesco handed him.

" It's a first-rate make—the best I could find. A hundred and sixty francs. If the nib doesn't suit, it can be changed."

In the kitchen Madame Baron kept wiping her eyes with her apron. She wasn't actually shedding tears, but try as she might to prevent it, her eyes kept filling.

" He'll be here any moment now," she said.

She picked up the flowers that were lying in the sink, shook off the water, and arranged them in two vases. This evening the table was laid with a red-and-white check table-cloth, which enhanced

the festive aspect of the room. Antoinette had disposed the presents in a little pile beside Baron's plate.

" Hadn't you better powder your face, Ma? "

" Does it show—that I've been crying? " Then she added rather sadly: " Hasn't Sylvie sent him anything at all, not even a birthday-card?"

Elie watched the tram come to a stop. The windows were misted over and the body of the vehicle hid the people getting down from it. When it started again, with the usual clanging of its bell, he saw Baron crossing the street.

The rattle of a latch-key. Heavy footsteps in the hall. Holding his door ajar, Elie heard Antoinette say:

" Happy returns, Pa."

There followed a sound of kisses, a confused murmur of voices. Upstairs, too, on the dark landings, the young men were leaning over the banisters, listening to the noises on the ground floor.

Elie was the first to enter the kitchen, his huge bouquet in one hand, the tiny package in the other.

" Monsieur Baron, please accept my wishes for many happy returns *of the day.*"

The bouquet was far too grandiose for the humble little kitchen, and, grasping it awkwardly between his stubby fingers, Baron gazed at it with stupefaction. At last he stammered out some words:

" Really, Monsieur Elie, I don't know what came over you! It's much too fine for the likes of me."

He turned the small packet over in his hands, at a loss what to say or do. Then, lumbering up to Elie, he kissed him, once on each cheek—or, rather, brushed it with his bristly moustache.

" Well, I must say, I never expected ..."

Madame Baron went into the hall.

" Monsieur Moise! Monsieur Domb! Monsieur Valesco! Dinner's waiting."

The socks were unpacked, and duly approved; and then the necktie. But when Baron undid Elie's packet he went into transports of delight.

" Why, it's a * Parker'! A real one, not the imitation! "

While Elie beamed, Antoinette, looking thoroughly unhappy, reached towards the other fountain-pen, which was still in its wrappings. But her father noticed the gesture.

" What are you up to, you little rogue? "

He was in high good-humour. But when he opened the box and

saw the other pen, the sixty-franc one, his face fell for a moment, and he didn't know what to say. Pulling himself together, he remarked cheerfully:

" Well, well, it never rains but it pours, as they say, and if I lose Monsieur Elie's . . . "

Madame Baron was busy with her saucepans. Clicking his heels punctiliously, Domb bowed to the company, then handed Baron a horse-shoe tie-pin.

" I wish you a very happy birthday, " he said gravely, " and many more to come. And may I take this opportunity of assuring you that I shall never forget the hospitality I have enjoyed under this roof? "

Valesco hurried in, and presented Baron with a briar pipe.

For some reason Baron did not give them the accolade he had bestowed on Elie—perhaps because neither young man came near enough.

Moise was the last to enter, and as he shut the door behind him he said:

" Happy birthday, Monsieur Baron. "

He gave no excuse for failing to bring a present; everyone knew he was too poor. When he was placing his biscuit-tin on the table, Madame Baron tapped him on the shoulder.

" Not tonight! . . . Bless my soul, what's come over the lad? "

Blushing, Moise sat down at his place and stowed the biscuit-tin under his chair. Baron surveyed the company with an all-embracing smile.

" I am deeply touched . . . " he began.

Everyone fell silent—with the exception of Elie, who remarked :

" In my country the birthday of the master of the house is the great event of the year. Even the servants bring presents . . . "

For once soup had been omitted from the menu, as being too ordinary, not to say vulgar. Madame Baron placed the chickens on the table, and her husband rose to his feet to carve them.

" No ! Let me ! "

Elie again! Antoinette's face was pale and set. Under the table she was giving little kicks to Moise, who was staring glumly at his plate. Madame Baron was too busy at the range to be able to sit down.

" You, Moise, should know the rites and ceremonies, " Elie observed as he plied the carving-knife. " The Jews have all sorts of quaint, elaborate customs.... I say, Madame Baron, haven't you any candles? "

She looked round quickly.

" What do you want candles for? "

" We'd need ... How old are you today, Monsieur Baron? "

" Fifty-two."

" Fifty-two candles. I don't suppose you could run to that. But in my country we always have the full number. At a certain moment of the evening all the lights are switched off, and . . ."

Moise gave him a hard stare. Elie hesitated, smiled, stopped talking. But five minutes later he was rattling away again.

" If there'd been any way of getting the ingredients, I'd have made you a Turkish trifle. My sister's a real dab at it, but I'm not too bad myself."

" What's it like? " asked Baron.

" Well, for one thing, we flavour it with flowers. They've a much more delicate taste than jam."

" What? Do you mean to say you eat flowers? "

" No, it's an extract of flowers we use."

" What's wrong, Antoinette? Off your feed? "

To please her father she took a mouthful of chicken. Domb was staring glumly at the wall in front of him, Moise's brows were deeply furrowed. Only Valesco made some attempt at cheerfulness.

" I hope you'll come to Istanbul one day, Monsieur Baron. We should be delighted to put you up, and I'd show you the sights."

" Me go to Turkey? What an idea! "

" Why not? It only takes a day, by air."

While she stirred a sauce Madame Baron too was casting angry glances at him, trying to make him shut up. But he appeared not to understand.

" The Turks are the most hospitable people on earth. Once you've stepped into a Turkish house you're its lord and master, and there's nothing they won't do for you."

" Even if you ain't asked in? " Baron naively enquired.

He hadn't meant it humorously, and was quite startled when Antoinette went into peals of laughter, so violent that she seemed on the point of choking. She rose abruptly and, turning her back on the others, spat out what she had in her mouth into her napkin. She was still laughing when she returned to her place, her lips twisting in queer grimaces, tears welling in her eyes.

Elie went on quite calmly.

" Yes, it sounds unlikely, doesn't it, but I can give you actual instances. Before the Great War my father had once been the guest

of a Russian nobleman. After the Revolution the Russian came to Constantinople, as Istanbul was then called. Well, he stayed five years under our roof."

Antoinette was becoming hysterical; it was impossible to say if she were laughing or crying, and her father turned on her severely.

" Really now ! How dare you behave like that when Monsieur Elie's talking? . . . Please continue, Monsieur Elie."

" That's the sort of thing you westerners can never understand. My mother and sister have hardly any money left, but if someone came to see them and mentioned he was a friend of mine, they .. "

" Antoinette! " said Baron sharply. " If it wasn't my birthday, I'd pack you off to bed."

His wife snorted angrily. " I'd like to see you try it! "

Never had his wife talked to him in that tone before—anyhow in public. He blushed to the tips of his ears and started shovelling food into his mouth, hardly conscious of what he was doing.. . .

As usual, Domb was the first to get up and go.

" Them Poles are a stuck-up lot," Baron remarked as the door closed behind him. " Not a bit like the Turks. They seem to think they're doing you a favour every time they wish you ' Good morn* ing.' Another thing I don't like in them is their way of treating Jews, even the Jews of their own country. When all's said and done, isn't Monsieur Moise just as much a Pole as he? "

He gazed at Moise, who, however, kept his mouth firmly shut.

" Where's your ma got to? " he asked Antoinette.

She went out and found Madame Baron sobbing to herself at the foot of the stairs.

" Don't bother about me," she snuffled. " I'll be all right presently. Tell them I'm coming back in a minute."

Antoinette could contain herself no longer.

" Listen, Ma! He's got to go. If he doesn't leave the house I won't stay here a day longer.. . . Did you read that bit about him in the paper? "

" So he showed it to you too? "

" Yes. He called me down on purpose. Wasn't it awful what they said about Sylvie's being his .. his ' mistress'? "

When they returned to the kitchen Moise was just leaving, and Valesco waiting for a pretext to follow suit. Baron had taken a bottle of the Luxembourg liqueur from the cupboard, and Elie had moved to the empty place beside him.

" Here's luck! And here's the best to Turkey! "

"The best to Belgium!"

" Oh, dear! Pa's been drinking!" Antoinette whispered to her mother.

They cleared the table while the two men continued their potations. Elie was very flushed, and Baron in a state of noisy animation that his wife knew only too well.

" How did you know I specially wanted a * Parker'? "

" Oh, a litde bird told me——"

They roared with laughter. There was a constant clatter of plates and dishes in the background, and presently Madame Baron poked the fire for the last time, saying to Antoinette:

" Go to bed now. We'll finish washing-up tomorrow."

Planting herself in front of the range, her arms akimbo, she eyed the two men disapprovingly.

" Another glass, Monsieur Elie? Yes, yes, I insist. It isn't my birthday every day."

" What a good friend you are to me, Monsieur Baron! Do you know, I took a liking to you the very first day we met. To your wife too. But that's not the same thing. It's never quite the same thing with women, is it—or isn't it? There's no friend like a man friend, what? "

Vaguely conscious of Madame Baron's gaze intent on him, he made an effort to sober up, but without avail.

" And when you vish't us in Turkey, old boy..." he began thickly.

And Baron, who was almost getting to believe it, cut in cheerfully:

" Yes, yes. I dare say, one of these days...."

X

VALESCO had the habit of hanging his shaving-mirror on the hasp of the window for his morning shave. On this particular morning the sight of the diildren lining up at the school gate, and of an old fellow, who daily caught the 8.5 tram, waiting at the stop, told him the exact hour. Otherwise the street was almost empty, and the few passers-by were preceded by little blobs of mist formed by their breath.

When, after finishing his left cheek, Valesco was starting on his right, he noticed three men alighting from the tram and scanning the house numbers. One of them was fat, and his unbuttoned overcoat displayed a gold watch-chain looped across his waistcoat. He wore his hat well back on his head and was smoking a big briar pipe.

One could tell he was the man in command, and when he had spotted No. 53 he indicated it to the others with an upward nudge of his chin and a long stare, in the course of which he observed Valesco at the first-floor window. But the lace curtain prevented him from seeing more than the dim outline of a man's body.

After that he said something to the smaller of his two companions, a middle-aged man with a drooping moustache, who seemed to feel the cold, as he kept both hands thrust deep into the pockets of his tightly buttoned overcoat. After that the small man started pacing up and down outside the grocer's, while the other two came across the road.

Valesco waited to hear the doorbell ring, for he felt convinced that these two men were coming to No. 53. But there was no ring, and bringing his face closer to the window he saw them going round to the back of the row of houses, presumably to make sure there was no exit there.

When they returned their shoes were white with hoar-frost—which showed they had been walking in the rank grass of the field behind the house.

Another confabulation followed. The little man looked so perished with cold that Valesco felt quite sorry for him. The fat man, after a moment's indecision, turned into the grocer's, and remained there a good five minutes. After he came out, the grocer's wife could be seen peeping excitedly from her window in the direction of No. 53, Valesco decided it was time to take action.

He went out on to the landing and shouted: "Madame Baron! "

"What do you want? rfoot water? "

"No. I want you to come up and see something."

But, as ill luck Would have it, when he went back to the window, followed by Madame Baron, the fat man was already shaking hands with the small one; after which, looking pleased with himself, he moved off in the direction of the town. The third man walked slowly across the road.

"Why did you call me?"

"You saw those men, didn't you? "

" Yes—what about them? "

" They're police officers, I'd swear to it. They've interviewed the grocer, and that little chap keeps watching the house all the time. And I'm pretty sure the third man has gone to the back, and is keeping watch there too* The big fellow who's just gone must be a Superintendent."

Madame Baton stayed some minutes peeping from under cover of the curtain. Two trams stopped at the halt, but the little man didn't budge.

Vatesco pointed downwards.

" Is he up? "

" No. He sat up with my husband, drinking, till three in the morning* and he's sleeping it off."

There were heavy footsteps on the stairs; Domb was going out. Madame Baron asked anxiously:

" Don't you think we ought to tell him? "

" What's the good? He loathes Elie, anyhow."

The street-door opened and footsteps rang receding on the frozen pavement. The little man whipped out a note-book, looked hard at something in it, then hurried along on the other side of the road, parallel with Domb, staring hard at him,

" What did I tell you? "

He Went Only a hundred yards or so; then, reassured, no doubt, retraced his steps to the iron pillar that marked the tram-stop.

" Now, Madame Baron, if you'll kindly leave me for a moment^ I'll finish dressing."

Madame Baron found Antoinette in the kitchen, having her breakfast, and her first idea was to say nothing* Nor did her daughter make any remark, but there was a questioning look in her eyes—which gave the impression of having grown much bigger during the last few days.

" I think today will see the end of it," said Madame Baron with a sigh, as she took her vegetable basket from the cupboard, " And I must say I shan't be sorry.... Is Pa still asleep? "

Antoinette nodded.

" I'd like it to be all over before he comes downstairs. There's a policeman's front of the house, and another at the back."

The girl's face grew rigid and she seemed unable to swallow the piece of bread she had just put in her mouth.

" I wonder," her mother continued, " if we should warn him? When I went to see him just now he was sleeping like a log* You

could tell he'd had a drop too much last night. He was lying face downwards, and snoring hard."

After taking thought for a moment, she tiptoed up the stairs and tapped at the door of Moise's room. He opened at once. His hair unbrushed, the collar of his overcoat turned up, he had already started his day's work.

"Don't make a noise." She pointed to the wall between his room and the one where her husband was sleeping. Then she opened the window in the roof, but the eaves made it impossible to see down into the street. "No, you'll have to come downstairs," she murmured.

Moise followed her obediently. On the first-floor landing she turned in to Valesco's room. He had finished dressing and was back at his observation-post at the window.

"Is he still there?"

Instinctively they spoke in hushed tones, like people in a house of mourning. Madame Baron pointed to the man in the black overcoat, who was stamping his feet to keep them warm, his eyes still fixed on the house.

"That's a policeman. There's another at the back."

Moise avoided uttering Elie's name.

"Does *he* know?" he whispered.

"No. He's asleep. He was so tight last night that he went to bed with his shoes on."

Antoinette had joined them, and was watching the plain-clothes man from the other window. The deeper he thrust his hands into his overcoat, the more his shoulders seemed to shrink together.

"We'd better not hang round the windows," Madame Baron said. "Come along, Antoinette."

Moise went out first.

"You'll keep your eye on him, Monsieur Valesco, won't you?" Madame Baron said over her shoulder, and the young man nodded.

In the kitchen she poured out a cup of coffee and handed it to Moise.

"Drink it while it's hot.... Now tell me, what would you do in my place?"

Surprisingly enough, no one seemed in the least excited. But there was something sinister about their calmness that recalled to Madame Baron that day of evil memory when a German advance-guard entered Charleroi and some twenty neighbours had gathered in the Barons' cellar. Then, too, there had been the same impression of helplessness, of being at the mercy of events, and now and again

one of them would go to the narrow, grated window, flush with the pavement, and watch a troop of cavalry clattering down the street.

" Really, it's my husband I'm most concerned about. There's no knowing how he'll take it, if he finds out all of a sudden like. . . . "

" What time does he go on duty? " Antoinette asked.

" Not till three. I only hope he'll go on sleeping.. . . Monsieur Moise, don't you think someone ought to warn him—Monsieur Elie, I mean? I don't feel up to it myself. When I think that it's perhaps the last time in his life he's had a proper bed to sleep in "

" Are you quite sure that man in the street is a policeman? "

" Monsieur Valesco says he is. "

Moise felt in his pockets, then blushed and asked:

" Can I have a franc, please? "

A moment later he went out, leaving the door " to "—as Madame Baron termed it; that is to say, without letting the latch quite home. Valesco, from his vantage-point, saw him hurry across the road and noticed that the man in the overcoat gave a start and fished out his note-book at once.

Moise entered the grocer's, but, by straining his eyes, Valesco could still just make him out behind the dingy panes. He stayed there several minutes, during which the man in the overcoat studied his note-book.

Valesco hurried down to hear the news when he saw Moise running back across the street.

" He's a policeman, right enough. The big one, who's gone, asked if you'd had a new lodger for the last fortnight or so. The grocer's wife said she couldn't be sure, but it was quite likely, as she'd seen a light in the ground-floor room. "

" Have a cup of coffee, Monsieur Valesco. Antoinette, go and get the bottle of rum. It'll do us all good, a drink of something strong. "

It was a sunny morning and there were patches of moisture on the white walls of the back-yard. But the block of ice like a cannon-ball—from Moise's split jug—was still practically intact.

" I'll go and see if he's woke up. "

Madame Baron walked boldly into Elie's room, and stood beside the bed. He was sound asleep, the sheets and blankets tossed back in disorder. A stale smell of drink hovered in the air, mingling with fumes from the stove and the pungent odour of warm linoleum.

Still in a drunken stupor, he was evidently quite unconscious of her presence.

" Well? " Antoinette asked when her mother came back to the kitchen.

" Oh, he's asleep. Somehow I couldn't bring myself... But really he ought to be told. Monsieur Moise, won't you do it—just to please me? "

Moise kept silent. Valesco prudently slipped out of the kitchen, for he had no wish to be saddled with this unpleasant task, and returned to his post behind the curtain.

The street was still almost empty. Sometimes a tram went by, bathed in sunlight, but with its windows frosted over. The distant stridence of a tin trumpet could be heard down on the left; the vegetable-man was going his round. The police officer had lit a pipe, and smoke was mingling with the white cloud of his breath.

The air was calm and clear, and the least sound evoked an echo, as on the fringes of a mountain lake. A rumbling high in the air announced the passage of a train of skips on the aerial trackway. A little locomotive, too, could be heard puffing and blowing on a colliery siding, and emitting a high-pitched whistle every time it made a move.

The plain-clothes man, it seemed, was waiting for someone or something, for he now kept throwing glances in the direction of the town. Madame Baron set to peeling potatoes, while Antoinette, forgetting for once to tidy up the bedrooms, stood with her back to the range, hugging her knitted shawl round her breast. Suddenly she asked:

" Are you quite sure there's someone in the field behind? "

" Well, Monsieur Valesco saw the other policeman going that way."

" Because, if there wasn't, *he* could climb over the wall. And once he'd crossed the railway line ... "

The policeman had been at his post for over an hour, and Elie was still asleep. The sickly-sweet odour of hot rum pervaded *the* kitchen. Even Antoinette had had a tot.

" Take a glass upstairs to Monsieur Valesco," her mother said. " There's no fire in his room, and it's perishing by that window." Then she plucked at Moise's sleeve. " For goodness' sake say something! What do you think I ought to do? I'm all a bundle of nerves, really, but I have to hold myself in because of Antoinette." Her lips were quivering; she seemed on the brink of tears.

no

MAINLY MAIGRET

Suddenly she gave a start; her cheeks grew pale.

"Listen!"

A car had stopped outside. There was the sound of someone walking briskly up the steps, a rattle of the letter-box.

"You go and open. I don't feel up to it."

The door opened just enough to let someone enter and to give a glimpse of a taxi drawn up outside, its windows flashing in the level light. There was a click of high heels on the tiles.

Sylvie burst into the kitchen, bringing with her a gust of icy air. Without even pausing to kiss her mother she asked excitedly:

"Has *he* gone?"

Tactfully Moise had remained outside, in the hall, but Madame Baron called him in, perhaps because she feared being alone with her daughter. Sylvie unbuttoned her coat and poured herself out some rum, without troubling to fetch a clean glass.

"So he's still here! Didn't Antoinette get my letter?"

"Don't talk so loud. Your pa's upstairs."

From which she gathered that her father had been kept in the dark. But that was a side-issue, and she had no time to waste on it.

"Anyhow, *they* haven't been here yet, have they?"

"There's been a policeman in front of the house all the morning, and another at the back."

"Did they come from Brussels?"

"How can I know? The man in front hasn't moved once. Monsieur Valesco's keeping an eye on him, from his window."

Sylvie ran up the stairs and entered the young man's room without knocking. He looked round and bowed to her hastily.

"Is that him? That little fellow?"

"Yes. He's just taken the number of your taxi."

Sylvie had told the taximan to wait, and he was now pacing up and down the pavement in front of the house.

Valesco asked: "Have you come from Brussels?"

She walked out of the room without answering. All her movements were brisk, decided. She passed her sister on the stairs without a word. Greatly impressed, Madame Baron watched her activities from the kitchen, and sighed:

"I wonder what she means to do?"

Moise said confidently:

"Oh, she knows what she's about, and she'll handle it much better than we should."

But everyone gave a start—Valesco as well as the two in the

kitchen—on hearing a familiar creak; Elie's door had just been opened. It closed again immediately, and nothing more could be heard.

Elie had moved in his sleep and was sheltering his eyes with his arm from the sunlight flooding in through the window.

"Get up at once!" Sylvie shook his arm vigorously.

He groaned, and shifted his position again. When at last he opened his eyes and saw the girl gazing down at him, he muttered:

"What on earth . . . ?"

His head was throbbing, and he could remember nothing of the night before. There was a foul taste in his mouth, and he had an impression that his neck had gone stiff again. He stared vacantly at Sylvie.

"You got my message, didn't you?" she said. "Well?"

There was a vicious edge to her voice; no compassion in her eyes. In a half-dream Elie watched the sunlight playing on her hair, rippling along the sleeve of her fur coat.

"Get up, damn it! Don't you realize they're after you, and they'll be here any minute?"

He leapt out of bed and landed on his feet with the agility of a monkey.

"What's that?" Suspicion flickered in his eyes.

"Don't play the fool! I tell you, the game's up. They're at the door."

His face grew contorted with fury.

"Ah, so you betrayed me, did you?"

"Betrayed you, indeed! Stop play-acting and get your clothes on."

He stared at her for a moment, then exclaimed:

"I've tumbled to it! It's just a trick of yours to get me out of this house. Very clever of you, but—nothing doing!"

Then he noticed the taxi drawn up outside, and he went to the window. Sylvie pointed.

"Do you see that fellow there, beside the tram-stop? He's a plain-clothes man."

Even now Elie seemed only half convinced. He went to the basin, gargled and spat the water out. Never had his features looked so angular, his cheeks so pale and wasted.

"Yes," he said bitterly, "I understand it all now."

"Good! In that case, hurry up and get dressed."

"Yes," he said again, "and, what's more, I know why you gave

me away. For money, of course. You'd do anything for money, wouldn't you? "

" Oh, stop that damned nonsense! "

"And I should have guessed that was your game when you tricked me into coming here."

She raised her arm to slap him, but he looked so frail and wretched in his draggled pyjamas that she let it fall again;

"Get dressed!"

" Don't you order me about! I'll do what I damn' well please—and I warn you you'll regret it! " He watched Sylvie from the corner of an eye to see what effect his threat had had on her, but she had her back to him and was staring out of the window.

On the previous evening she had been summoned to the headquarters of the Brussels Surete and confronted by three police officers. Two of them were smoking pipes. The detective who had questioned her at the cabaret was sitting on a corner of the table, beside a Belgian Police Superintendent. The third man, who kept pacing up and down the room, was a member of the Paris Surete.

" Take your seat, Mademoiselle. Now let's hear why you told us all those lies. . . . "

She had found time to glance at the papers strewn on the table and to notice a letter headed: *Station Cafe, Charleroi*.

With an effort she conjured up a smile, an air of injured innocence.

" And wouldn't you have done the same thing in my place? " she asked breezily.

The three men exchanged glances; then they too grinned, taken by her effrontery.

For three days Sylvie had been expecting this to happen. She knew the porter at the *Palace* had seen her taking away Elie's luggage; and not only the porter but the boots, who had helped to load it into the taxi. And as it's always the same taxis that use the rank outside a big hotel, there had been no difficulty in tracing the one she'd taken. The trail led to Charleroi, first to the Station Cafe, then to No. 53, Rue du Laveu.

" Is he still lodging with your parents? "

" I haven't a notion.... And that's the gospel truth. "

" Are you aware that we could arrest you for aiding and abetting? "

Her eyelids fluttered; she smiled again.

"I acted as anyone in my place would have acted—that's all I have to say. By the way, I can assure you that my parents haven't the faintest notion who he is,"

That closed the proceedings* The three men exchanged glances *once* more, but could think of nothing more to ask. The only question was—should she or should she not be taken into custody? The French police officer shrugged his shoulders to show it was a matter of indifference to him.

"All right, you can go now. But hold yourself in readiness to appear whenever we require you."

"Any objection to my going to Charleroi?"

The three men conferred.

"No, you may go there if you want to."

It was eleven at night when Sylvie left Police Headquarters. She felt certain they were at this moment telephoning to the Charleroi police, telling them to keep watch on the house—if indeed they weren't doing that already. She drove to the *Merry land* and had a whispered conversation with Jacqueline. After that she danced, stayed up well into the small hours drinking champagne with a ship-owner from Antwerp, and day was breaking when she changed her dress.

Now Elie was eyeing her with hatred and disgust. He saw her in profile, sunlight still playing on her hair, a fainter sheen on the tightly drawn silk stockings—stockings he had given her!

"Get dressed!" she repeated wearily.

Then she walked out of the room, closing the door behind her. In the kitchen her mother gave her a questioning look; then asked: "Well? What did he say?"

Antoinette's eyes were fever-bright, her lips tight-set, and she gazed intently at her sister. But all that Sylvie, who was warming her hands at the fire, found to reply was:

"What did you expect him to say?"

Valesco entered and, without being asked, helped himself to rum. Again Madame Baron was reminded of those chaotic days of 1914, when all the conventions of ordinary life went by the board.

"The cop's still hanging about outside," the Rumanian informed them. "But his nose isn't quite so red, as he's in the sun now."

He glanced at the clock, which pointed to half-past ten. Suddenly Madame Baron stopped peeling her potatoes and said to Antoinette:

"I'm so afraid your pa may wake up. Go and see if he's still asleep."

Obediently, Antoinette went to the door, and tiptoed up the stairs,

• "Are you sure there isn't anything we can do . . . ?" Madame Baron began tentatively, but refrained from looking at her daughter.

"No," said Sylvie peremptorily. "It's no use looking for trouble."

"If it wasn't for that policeman at the back," Valesco murmured. "But they're taking no risks."

Sometimes a faint sound from Elie's room made them cast nervous looks at each other.

"I know what I'd do in his place," Valesco added.

Madame Baron looked him in the eyes.

"Yes? And *what* would you do?"

Valesco made the gesture of a man pointing a revolver at his forehead. Madame Baron shuddered, and poured herself out some rum. None of them was conscious of drinking—but the bottle was half empty already. Antoinette came back.

"Pa asked me what the time was. I told him it was only eight, and he went to sleep again."

Like her mother, she refrained from looking at Sylvie, who was the only one to seem quite unperturbed. Moise, however, kept stealing glances at her, after each of which he promptly turned away.

"Ssh! He's coming!"

A door creaked. Sunlight was pouring in through the narrow window over the front door, filling the hall with a luminous haze, through which Elie's spare form showed in dark relief. They saw him linger for a moment outside his door, then walk quietly towards the kitchen.

The only sound was a choking sob from Madame Baron.

They could hardly recognize the man who halted in the doorway, so changed he seemed. There was something terrifying in the preternatural calm that had descended on him. But the red-rimmed eyes were dark with scorn and hatred as they roved from one face to the other, and there was a bitter twist to his lips.

"Well? Are you satisfied—now?" he asked with a harsh laugh, and reached towards the bottle.

Never had the little kitchen seemed so cramped. They were huddled up together, afraid to meet each other's eyes. The sun had reached the block of ice in the yard, and Antoinette, who was nearest the window, could see it sparkling with broken lights.

Sylvie rounded on him.

" Keep your mouth shut!"

Beads of sweat glistened on Elie's upper lip and he had cut his chin, shaving. He had on the smart grey suit that he had worn on board the *Th&ophik-Gautier*.

He looked out into the yard and, tilting his head back, measured the height of the white wall, above which stretched a dazzling expanse of bright blue sky. Madame Baron started sobbing again, and moaned:

" Do speak, someone. . . . Isn't there anything we can do? "

She couldn't bring herself to look at Elie. Moise had turned away and was staring at the wall. Valesco made a hasty move, and ran up to his room.

" There's nothing to be done," said Sylvie gravely. " If there had been, I'd have done it! "

For some reason Elie had drawn closer to Antoinette, and she did not move away. He fixed his eyes on her and their expression was so strange that, when he made as if to lay his hand on her shoulder, the girl screamed and threw herself into her mother's arms.

Valesco came racing down the stairs.

" They're here! " he cried.

The engine of a car was throbbing outside the door. There was a clatter of footsteps on the pavement, a sound of voices. Elie swung round so quickly that everyone fell back in alarm, and just as the door-bell rang he dashed out and scrambled up the stairs.

" Oh, dear! " wailed Madame Baron, clasping Antoinette to her breast. " He'll wake your pa! "

Valesco remained in his room, and it was Sylvie who opened the door. Three dark forms could be seen outlined against the sunlight.

" So you got here first," laughed one of the men. " Not been up to any tricks, I hope? "

The detective who had interviewed her at the *Merryland* promptly opened the first door, saw the suitcases marked *E. N.* and, stooping, looked under the bed.

" Where is he? "

The French police officer was smoking a cigarette on the doorstep, and appeared to take no interest in the proceedings*

" Upstairs," Sylvie replied.

They could see Madame Baron and Antoinette watching from the dimly lighted kitchen, and from their end the two women saw the Superintendent take a revolver from his pocket and load it.

" You go in front." It was to Sylvie that the Superintendent spoke, and without the least hesitation she started up the stairs.

On the landing she halted and opened the doors of the bedrooms occupied by Domb and Valesco. Both were empty.

The little plain-clothes man in the street had approached the house, and he too was clutching a revolver concealed in his overcoat-pocket

" Don't be alarmed," Valesco murmured, looking at Madame Baron.

She tried to smile, and went on stroking Antoinette's red hair. In an agony of suspense the girl was listening to the sounds upstairs.

" Ssh! Don't speak! " she whispered.

By now Sylvie and the two men had reached the top floor. Suddenly there was a scream, followed by a series of crashes as if furniture were being thrown about, windows smashed.

A moment later came a sound of almost tranquil footsteps on the stairs. It was Sylvie coming back. She was very pale, and on entering the kitchen she walked straight to the window and pressed her forehead to the pane, which grew misted with her breath.

" What are they doing? "

The thuds were continuing, and now there were shouts as well.

" The last thing I saw of him "—Sylvie got the words out with an effort—" he was sitting on the edge of the roof. He seemed to go quite crazy all of a sudden, and they had a dreadful fight, rolling about on the floor. He broke loose and climbed out of the window. They're trying to haul him back." She turned on the tap, soaked her handkerchief in the ice-cold water and dabbed her face.

Suddenly Madame Baron screamed:

" Antoinette!"

Moise sprang forward just in time to catch the girl, who had fainted.

" Lay her flat on the table."

In his haste Valesco upset the bottle of rum and knocked a tumbler on to the floor. No one had an idea what to do next, until Madame Baron said:

" Vinegar...."

But just then there was a noise on the stairs and she looked away from her daughter towards the hall. She had a glimpse of Elie's

back, and didn't realize it was the handcuffs that made him walk so awkwardly.

"She's coming to," said Moise, who was bending over Antoinette.

But Madame Baron had rushed out, followed by Sylvie, who was vainly trying to drag her back.

The three men halted in the hall. Madame Baron, who was standing a couple of yards from Elie, seemed incapable of making the least movement, or getting a word out,

Elie's face was badly knocked about, his hair plastered on his forehead, his nose bleeding profusely—but what impressed her most was the change that had come over his eyes. They kept moving restlessly from one object to another, and had a curious blank intensity that reminded her of the eyes of certain caged animals she had seen in the Zoo. In fact, one had the impression that he failed to recognize her, or any of the others.

"Do wait a moment," she begged the police officers, "he can't go out in that state," and edged past them into the bedroom.

Her husband was standing half-way down the stairs, but she paid no heed to his look of horrified enquiry.

The Superintendent had got out his handkerchief and was stanching the flow of blood from a gash across his hand.

"Fetch his suitcases," he said to the plain-clothes man, who had just come in.

Madame Baron returned with a damp towel and started wiping Elie's face. It all had taken no more than a few minutes, but already quite a crowd had collected outside. A small boy, perched on the railings, was peeping in at Elie's bedroom window.

Elie took Madame Baron's ministrations quite calmly, but blood kept oozing from the wounds as fast as she wiped it off.

At last the Superintendent intervened, and gently thrust her aside. "Let him be, Madame. He's not badly hurt." To the men with him he added: "Get* those people away. We don't want a crowd outside."

A moment later they heard a gruff voice in the street:

"Move on there! What are you hanging about for? There's nothing to see."

Now and then Baron took a cautious step down the stairs, moving like a man in a dream. What was happening passed liis comprehension. He only had a shirt and trousers on, and his slipped feet were bare.

" Move on! Didn't you hear what I said? "

Of his own accord Elie started walking towards the door. He had to stand back to let the inspector carrying his suitcases go out first. Sylvie's taxi and the police car were drawn up one behind the other.

"Shove him in!"

There was a shrill scream from the kitchen. Valesco, who was half-way down the hall, went no farther. Madame Baron stood beside him, the blood-stained towel in her hand, gazing towards the street.

After that events moved fast. The police-officers and their prisoner crossed the zone of sunlight and vanished into the car. The Frenchman took the seat beside the driver. The door slammed and some of the people outside ran after the car as it moved off, for a last glimpse.

Sylvie, to whom nobody was paying much attention, gave her mother a perfunctory kiss and stepped into the taxi.

All was over, but people were still hanging round the house, and Madame Baron shut the door. She seemed utterly worn out, hardly able to drag herself along. Her husband, as puzzled as ever, glanced into the empty bedroom and his eyes fell on the pink-stained water in the basin.

At last he got some words out:

" What on earth has happened? "

Children were scrambling on to the window-sill; it was Moise who had the presence of mind to think of closing the shutters. Valesco was trying to forget about the money he still owed Elie.

On the previous night Elie's bouquet had been put in a pail and left in the scullery, to keep the flowers fresh. The water had frozen in the night, and they had to be thrown away.

XI

THE string of vehicles approaching La Rochelle was headed by a large open car, in which were the camera-men. Following it in single file came fifty-three cars, all police-vans, which had set out at dawn from the big convict prison at Fontevrault.

It was a fine, warm autumn morning and the villages were bathed in sunlight. People came to their doorsteps to watch the grey, windowless vans, with armed warders posted beside the drivers, streaming past.

As the long procession slowed down on its way through La Rochelle the camera-men stood up in their car and took shots of it. Then came La Pallice, and the cars halted on the North Quay, to the right of the harbour, across which fishing-boats were gliding.

The crowd was kept back by a police cordon, which only those with special permits were allowed to cross. So there were few except pressmen and photographers actually on the quay, where a tug was made fast in readiness to convey the prisoners to the He de Rd, the first stage of their journey to the convict settlement.

"Where are the star-turns? " one of the press-photographers asked a policeman posted at the gangway.

" The what? Oh, yes, of course... . Delpierre's in the second van, I think."

Delpierre was a locksmith who had slaughtered his wife and his five children with an axe.

" And Nagear? "

" Fourth or fifth van. You've seen his sister, haven't you? That's her, over there." He pointed to a tall girl in grey, who was standing in the front row of onlookers. The photographer ran across the open space towards her, but before he could level his camera she had hidden her face with her gloved hand.

Her neighbours in the crowd began to eye her with interest, and noticed that she was carrying field-glasses. The word was passed round that she was a relation of one of the prisoners.

The door of the first van opened. From each cell a man in ordinary clothes stepped out, hampered by shackles and handcuffs which constrained the movement of his arms. A kitbag on his shoulder, a loaf of black bread under his arm, he slowly walked between the rows of journalists and was led by a warder to the back of the boat. There he squatted on the deck, blinking at the glare off the water.

Most of the convicts were in rags and advanced timidly, as if afraid of making some blunder and being reprimanded, perhaps struck. Some, however, faced the pressmen with defiant eyes, a scornful curl of the lips.

" Look! That's him! "

Elie had on his grey suit, a black felt hat, and a well-cut mackin-

tosh. He took no notice of the bystanders and concentrated his attention on the shackles, which made his movements curiously ungainly. To make things worse, the big round loaf kept slipping from under his arm.

Only when he was on board, seated on the deck between two fellow-convicts, did he look up and face the cameras pointed at him. Five hundred yards away a tall girl was feverishly trying to adjust the focus of her field-glasses.

" He's smiling! " a journalist remarked.

Was it really a smile? That furtive ripple of his lips might have meant almost anything. Then he turned to the grey-haired prisoner on his right and entered into conversation with him.

" Is that girl in grey really his sister? "

" Yes, and Pm told she's come all the way from Constantinople."

None of those present could remember the departure of a ship-load of convicts having taken place in such perfect weather. Though autumn was well advanced, it was like a summer's day, the sky serenely blue.

And, a week later, when the final embarkation was about to take place, the fine spell still persisted. Drenched in sunlight, the white-walled house of the He de Ri reminded one of well-washed sheets spread out to dry on a green meadow.

The curtain was rising on the second act. The convict-ship *La Martiniere*, was anchored in the offing, surrounded by a swarm of fishing-boats. All the rooms in all the hotels of the island were bespoken. In every caft you could see newspaper-men greeting each other; cameras lay on the billiard-tables.

" Many relatives turned up this time? "

" Yes, and there's a whole tribe of gypsies."

The gypsies had tramped it all the way from the Mediterranean coast, to see off the patriarch of their clan. They had camped at the foot of the ramparts, and all day long wild-looking women and children were to be seen prowling about the town, never addressing a word to anyone.

" Nagear's sister has come too."

She had taken a room at the best hotel, and she too was to be seen walking on the sea-front at all hours. She was still in her grey tailor-made costume, and always wore gloves. She never talked to the other guests at the hotel and had her meals by herself, but on several occasions had been noticed conversing with members of the prison staff.

" Most likely she's trying to get some money through to him," someone observed.

That was so, and though constantly rebuffed, she kept on trying. She even appealed for help to one of the pressmen.

" You'll be in the front row, won't you, when they're marched on board? Do please slip this into his hand as he goes by."

She couldn't understand why they always refused, and her look conveyed what she thought of them. One morning she even button-holed the governor of the Saint-Martin penitentiary, in the main street of the town. He took off his hat politely when she came up to him, but no sooner had she started to explain than, taking off his hat again, he walked away.

Even so she did not lose heart. She harried people with questions, as if they had nothing else to do than to give her information.

" Tell me, please! Which road do they go down? Where are the public allowed to stand? "

She was told that windows overlooking the route taken by the prisoners could be rented, and she paid for one. But on learning that the Venetian shutters had to be kept closed when the men were passing, she returned to the house and insisted on having her money back.

Two smartly dressed men who had been hovering in the background promptly came forward and rented the window she had given up. One of them, she learnt, was a brothel-keeper from Marseilles, the other the brother of a man under sentence of transportation.

Everyone knew everybody else by sight, as they passed each other ten or a dozen times a day on the water-front. On the last morning, however, there was a new-comer—a woman in black who landed from the La Rochelle ferry-boat, and looked about her with a bewildered air.

" Is this where the convicts go on board? " she asked the first person she met. " They haven't embarked yet, have they? "

By way of luggage she had only a handbag, and she carried it about with her all the morning. When the clock struck twelve she seated herself on the sea-wall, opened the bag and took out some food.

Elie's sister walked past her once or twice, and gave her a long look each time.

Meanwhile the prisoners were being lined up in the jail courtyard for the final roll-call. The prison buildings were built of the velvety

grey stone so much used in this part of France, and the sky above them was a dome of pale, translucent blue.

In an adjoining yard another parade was going on: of military police and warders, who were being given their final instructions for the voyage.

Meanwhile squads of police were barring the approaches to certain streets, refusing access to all who were not provided with police passes. Esther found herself held up by one of them.

" But I tell you you *must* let me through," she almost shouted at the police officer in charge. Then, calming down and pointing to a road bordered by tamarisk trees, she asked: " Will they come by that road? "

" Yes, Mademoiselle."

She had noticed a garden surrounded by a low wall half-way up the road, and saw that, by turning up a side-street she could approach it from behind.

On the stroke of one the great gate of the convict prison swung open, and the first to emerge were some prison officials in dark clothes. They were followed by a long procession, like a funeral cortege, moving slowly between two lines of civil policemen holding back the crowd.

The District Superintendent remarked to the Prefect of the *dipartement*, who was walking at his side:

" I'm pretty sure those gypsies will put in an appearance. The whole tribe clubbed together to pay their fares here, so I'm told."

Escorted by Senegalese infantrymen, the seven hundred convicts advanced at a slow funereal pace, as all were wearing clogs, many of them for the first time. Each man had a haversack on his back, a roll of bedding on his shoulder. Their civilian clothes had been taken from them and replaced by the convict garb of coarse brown serge, and they wore oddly shaped black caps.

As they were approaching the low wall Esther's head bobbed up, her field-glasses trained on the front ranks.

"Sergeant! Get that woman to clear off!" said the Superintendent as he walked by.

The sergeant had only to give a glance, and the head ducked down again behind the wall. The Superintendent explained to the man beside him:

" That was the sister of that young chap Nagear. She wanted to slip some money through to him."

" Nagear? Who's he? "

" He's the fellow who killed that Dutchman with a spanner on the Brussels express."

" Ah, yes, I remember."

Cameras clicked. The crowd surged forward and were hustled back again. Just then, on catching sight of the man for whom they were watching, the gypsies set up a long shrill keening, a cry of desolation so intense that for a moment all seemed in abeyance, all movement arrested.

But then the steady tramp set in again, and soon they had reached the quay and the three tenders that were to take the prisoners on board *La Martiniere*. Though as they passed along the gangways in single file all looked much alike, one of the press photographers managed to recognize Elie, who was plodding ahead with the same slow, mechanical steps, the same look of sullen resignation on his face, as his companions.

A woman in black was dodging to and fro behind the serried ranks of spectators, vainly trying to see over their shoulders, now and again plucking someone by the sleeve.

" Please would you tell me, are they passing now? Yes? I do wish you'd let me squeeze in—or couldn't I have your place just for a moment? "

She ran a little farther along the quayside, only to come up once more against a solid wall of bodies.

" Couldn't you let me have a peep? Just a little peep? .. Anyhow, you might tell me what they're doing. Are they going on board now? "

A group of young men brushed past her, with cameras under their arms. They had chartered a motor-launch so as to be able to accompany the tenders up to *La Martiniere*. The motor-launch was alongside the quay, the engine turning over.

" Wait! " she called to them.

They stopped and stared at her, wondering who she was and what she wanted.

" I'm coming with you," she panted.

" Very sorry, but we can't take passengers."

But already she had dumped the handbag on the edge of the wharf and, stretching out her arms, was about to spring on to the boat. There was a five-foot drop between her and the deck.

" Stand back! You can't come with us."

The boat was beginning to draw away. She sprang clumsily

forward and fell into the arms of a young journalist, who looked terribly embarrassed.

"Hurry up!" someone said. "There's no time to spare."

"Oh, I've left my bag!" she gasped.

But there wasn't time to turn back for it. The tenders were casting off, and the camera-men wanted to be in front of them*

Troubled by the motion of the boat, the woman sat down.

"Do you know who any of them are?" she asked the man beside her, who was fitting a reel of film into his camera.

"Two or three."

"I wonder if you happened to see a young fellow amongst them—brown hair he has, and looks like a boy of sixteen, though he's really much older?"

"What's his name?"

But to that she gave no answer. They were moving past the tenders and hundreds of convicts were looking down at the motor-launch speeding seawards.

"Have their clothes been taken away?"

"Yes—they've only numbers now to distinguish them."

The skipper of the launch whispered in the ear of one of the pressmen:

"Better keep an eye on her. I expect she's a relation. Take care she doesn't do anything silly—throw herself overboard, or something like that. There've been cases of that sort, you know."

Word was passed round, and they took turns at sitting beside the elderly woman, who, however, showed no particular sign of emotion. One of them asked her:

"Is it one of the convicts you're interested in?"

She made a movement of her head, which might have been a nod.

"Perhaps we could help you. Is there anything you particularly want to know?"

"Do they have a very hard time out there? Can one send them comforts?"

The tenders had outpaced the motor-launch, which was now bobbing in their wake. Sunlight played on the streaming lines of foam. Some fishing-boats, too, were going out to sea; on the deck of one of them the crew could be seen having a meal and passing a bottle of red wine from mouth to mouth.

"Can't we get a bit closer?" the woman asked.

"Nothing doing, I'm afraid. Those tenders have the legs of us."

But you'll have a good view of the prisoners when they're going up the Jacob's ladder."

" Well I never! Have they to climb up a ladder? "

Her eyes were dry, and indeed she showed no signs of distress; and it was this strange calmness that alarmed the others. The skipper whispered to the man beside him :

" I once saw a woman jump overboard just when the convict-ship weighed anchor."

As an extra precaution he detailed one of the crew to keep watch on their uninvited passenger.

" Why ever do they make them wear those horrid clothes? " she murmured. " A proper shame I call it! "

One of the camera-men, noticing her accent, remarked:

" You're Belgian, aren't you? I didn't know there were any Belgians in this lot."

But she still refused to let herself be drawn. She was wearing cotton gloves, shoes that were rather down at heel, and obviously home-made stockings.

" How'll you manage about your bag? "

" My bag? I haven't thought about it. Anyhow, I shall be starting back this evening."

Evidently she was not concerned for the fate of the handbag. All the time her eyes were fixed on the tenders and the rows of heads showing above the rails, all in the same grotesquely shaped cloth caps.

" If only I had field-glasses! " she sighed.

One of the crew handed her a pair, but she didn't know how to focus them, and after some vain attempts she gave them back.

The convict-ship was looming up just ahead. A yacht glided past, with young men and women in white dresses lounging on the deck.

Someone said :

" Look! They're going'on board now."

One of the tenders had made fast alongside the steamer, and men could be seen climbing up the ladder. But when the motor-launch approached, a peremptory blast from the ship's siren warned them to stand off. The sailor on duty beside the woman held himself in readiness to pounce on her if she made the least move.

Crowded together on the deck of a small fishing-boat, the gypsies passed them. All were standing, craning their necks towards the convict-ship, shading their eyes with their hands.

The camera-men got busy,

" One more shot. Get as near as you can, skipper."

The sailor asked:

" Have you spotted him? "

But she kept silent. She had seen nothing except a number of men who, in the distance, all looked exactly the same, like a procession of black ants crawling up the ship's side. In her coat of dazzling white paint, bathed in sunlight, *La Martiniere* might have been a luxurious steam-yacht, and the sea was dappled with silvery glints.

" Let's go straight back to La Rochelle," a camera-man said.

" I mustn't miss my train/'

For a good hour yet the convicts would go on streaming up the ladder, but it made a monotonous picture; a few dozen feet of film sufficed.

No more notice was taken of the woman in black, who remained seated on a hatch, a vague smile on her lips as she gazed across the sea. Only when they were making fast at La Rochelle and she went up to the skipper, opening a shabby black purse, did they notice her again.

" How much do I owe you? " she asked.

" Nothing at all. These gentlemen are paying for the trip."

She murmured some words of thanks; then enquired :

" How does one get to the station? "

" Walk along the wharf a hundred yards, and you'll find it just in front of you."

" Thank you. . . . You're most kind "

And Madame Baron went on smiling to herself, perhaps because it was such an exceptionally fine day. They had told her that calm weather would prevail in the Atlantic. "Anyhow, that blanket looked nice and warm," she reflected.

The train did not leave till nine in the evening, and it was now only six. She had plenty of time to look round the town, or, anyhow, to stroll about the station. But she did neither. She settled down in the third-class waiting-room, feeling a little ill at ease, perhaps because she hadn't her handbag with her. It had remained on the *He de RL*. She bought a sandwich at the buffet, after first enquiring the price.

She did not notice Esther, who came back by the eight o'clock ferry and dined in the Refreshment Room.

The two women travelled in the same train, one in a second-class

carriage, the other in a third. When the guard came round to check her ticket soon after the train had left, Madame Baron happened to mention that her husband also was a guard on the Belgian Railways; and when the train stopped at Niort he moved her into an empty first.

A CRIME IN HOLLAND

Translated from the French .

Un Crime en Hollande

by Geoffrey Salisbury

I. A Pedigree Calf

MAIGRET had only a very faint idea what it was all about when he arrived one May afternoon at Delfzijl, a small town squatting on the low coast at the extreme north of Holland.

A certain Jean Duclos, a professor at the University of Nancy, had been on a lecture tour through the countries of Northern Europe. At Delfzijl he had been the guest of Monsieur Poppinga, who was a teacher in the training-ship, and this Monsieur Poppinga had been murdered; and though the French professor could hardly have been called a suspect, he had nevertheless been requested not to leave the town, and to hold himself at the disposal of the police.

That was about all Maigret knew, except for a rather confused report which Jean Duclos had forwarded himself. He had at once informed the University of Nancy, whose authorities had asked for a member of the *Police Judiciaire* to be sent to the spot.

It was just the job for Maigret, being semi-official rather than official. He had made it all the less formal by having taken no steps to warn the Dutch police that he was coming.

At the end of Jean Duclos's report came a list of the principal characters concerned, and it was this list that Maigret had been consulting during the last half-hour of his journey:

Conrad Poppinga, the victim, aged forty-two, formerly a captain in the merchant service and now teaching the cadets in the training-ship at Delfzijl. Married. No children. Spoke English and German fluently, and fairly good French.

Liesbeth Poppinga, his wife. Daughter of the head-master of a lycee in Amsterdam, a woman of considerable culture, including a thorough knowledge of French.

Any Van Elst, the latter's younger sister, on a stay of some weeks at Delfzijl, has recently taken her degree in Law. Twenty-five years old. Understands a good deal of French, but speaks badly.

The Wienands, the family living next door. Carl W. teaches

mathematics in the training-ship. Wife and two children. No French.

Beetje Liewens, aged eighteen, daughter of a farmer breeding pedigree cows. Has twice been to Paris. French quite good.

•

The names conveyed nothing to Maigret. He had been travelling for a night and half a day and wasn't feeling particularly enthusiastic.

Right from the start he found Delfzijl disconcerting. At dawn he had found himself rolling through the traditional Holland of tulips*. Then came Amsterdam, which he already knew. But the Dfenthe, an endless stretch of heather, had taken him by surprise. A twenty-mile horizon sectioned by canals.

And what he now came to was something which bore no relation to the ordinary picture post-card of Holland. It was far more Nordic than anything he had imagined.

A small town. At the most, ten or fifteen streets paved with beautiful red tiles, as regularly laid as those on a kitchen floor. Low houses of brick, ornamented with a profusion of carved wood-work painted in light, gay colours.

The whole place was like a toy, all the more so from being completely encircled by a dyke. In this dyke were openings with heavy lock-gates which were closed at spring tides.

Out beyond was the estuary of the Ems, and then the North Sea, a long silver ribbon of water. Ships were unloading their cargoes under the cranes on the quay. In the canals were innumerable sailing-boats, big as barges and as heavy, but built to stand the open seas.

The sun shone brightly. The station-master was wearing a lovely orange cap to which he automatically raised his hand to salute the unknown passenger.

There was a cafe opposite. Maigret went in, but he hardly dared sit down. Not only was it scrubbed and polished like the most respectable of dining-rooms, but the atmosphere was no less homelike.

There was only one table on which lay all the morning papers, fixed to wire frames. The proprietor, who was having a glass of beer with two customers, came over to welcome the new-comer.

" Do you speak French? " asked the latter.

The proprietor shook his head, with a touch of embarrassment.

" *Donne^moi de la Here. . . . Bier !* "

Having sat down, he once more scanned Professor Duclos's list. Somehow the last name seemed to him the most hopeful. He showed it to the proprietor, and two or three times pronounced the name:

" Liewens."

The three men began talking together. Then one of them stood up, a huge fellow wearing a fisherman's cap, who beckoned Maigret to follow. The inspector had not yet provided himself with Dutch money. When he offered a hundred-franc note the proprietor waved it aside.

" *Morgen! . . . Morgen!* "

Tomorrow! So he'd have to come back! .. .

Yes, the atmosphere was certainly one of intimacy; it was all so simple and candid. Without a word, Maigret's guide led him through the streets of the little town. On the left, a large shed was full of old anchors, rope, lengths of cable, buoys, and compasses. The gear was even spreading on to the pavement. Further on, a sail-maker was working on his doorstep.

A confectioner's window exhibited a great choice of chocolates and complicated sweetmeats.

" Speak English? "

Maigret shook his head.

"*Deutschi*"

And Maigret shook his head again, at which the man relapsed into silence. At the end of the street the open country began. Green meadows. A canal, the greater part of whose surface was broken by floating tree-trunks from northern countries waiting to be towed to their various destinations inland.

In the distance, a long roof of glazed tiles.

" *Liewens!* " said the man, pointing to it. " *Dag, mijnheer!* ... "

Maigret went on alone after doing his best to thank his guide, who had come nearly a quarter of an hour's walk to do a perfect stranger a good turn.

The sky was clear, the air extraordinarily limpid. The inspector skirted a timber-yard in which piles of lumber—oak, mahogany, and teak—rose high as houses.

There was a boat moored to the bank. Children were playing close by. Then solitude for over half a mile. More tree-trunks in the canal. White railings round the fields, where here and there magnificent cows were grazing. Then Liewens's farm.

And here was something else Maigret hadn't bargained for. The

word " farm " had another meaning here than the one he was accustomed to. For him the word had always implied a thatched roof, a manure heap, the clucking of hens, and cackle of geese.

The one he now came to was a fine new building surrounded by a large garden blooming with flowers. Everything trim, quiet, and peaceful. On the canal just opposite the house, a graceful rowing-boat built of mahogany. By the gate, a lady's bicycle nickel-plated all over.

He looked in vain for a bell, called, but got no answer. A dog began barking.

To the left of the house was a long building with regular windows, which, however, had no curtains. You would have taken it for a shed had it not been so spick and span, and so obviously painted with an eye to colour effect.

A noise of mooing came from within, and Maigret, walking round the flower-beds, found himself looking through a wide-open door.

The building was in fact a cowshed, though clean as any house. Red tiles everywhere, which gave a warm glow and even a feeling of sumptuousness. Gutters everywhere to provide drainage. An ingenious mechanism controlled the fodder in the mangers. A pulley at the back of each stall, whose use Maigret only found out later. They were to hold up the cows' tails during milking and prevent dirt being flicked into the milk.

The light inside was dim. All the cows were out except for one lying on its side in the first stall.

A young girl came up to the visitor and began speaking to him in Dutch.

" Mademoiselle Liewens? . . . "

" Yes. . . . Are you French? "

While she spoke she looked towards the cow. There was something a little ironical about her smile which Maigret did not understand at once.

Another thing which clashed with his preconceived ideas was that Beetje Liewens wore black rubber boots, which gave her the air of a horsewoman.

She was wearing a green silk dress, though it was almost entirely concealed by a white overall like that of a hospital nurse.

A ruddy face, perhaps too ruddy. A healthy sunny smile, but which lacked subtlety. Big china-blue eyes and red hair.

At first she seemed to have some difficulty in finding her words in French, but she soon got into her stride.

" Did you want to speak to my father? "

" No. To you."

She nearly burst out laughing.

" I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me . . . my father's gone to Groningen and he won't be back before this evening. Our two men are by the canal, fetching a load of coal. And the maid's out shopping . . . And this is the moment that this wretched cow has chosen to have her calf. We weren't expecting it at all, or I should never have been left all alone."

She was leaning against a windlass which she had all ready in case it was needed to assist the calf's delivery.

Outside, the sun was shining brightly, reflected by her boots, which glistened in the dim light as though they had been varnished. She had pink plump hands, the nails of which were carefully manicured.

" It's about Conrad Poppinga . . ." began Maigret.

But she frowned. The cow had painfully scrambled to its feet and then sunk to the ground again.

" Here we are! . . . Would you like to help me? "

She snatched up her rubber gloves that were lying all ready.

Thus Maigret began his investigations by aiding a pure-bred Frisian calf to come into the world, or rather by acting as assistant to this capable girl whose easy movements showed her as well versed in athletics as in farming.

Half an hour later he and Beetje were bending over a copper tap lathering their hands and arms right up to the elbow.

" I dare say this is the first time you've put your hand to that job . . ."

" It is."

She was eighteen years old. At least that's what Duclos had said. When she took off her white overall, her silk dress outlined her rounded figure. Perhaps the sunshine was showing her off to advantage, but she certainly seemed just the sort to turn a man's head.

" Come indoors. We can talk over a cup of tea."

The maid had returned. The drawing-room was austere, even a little sombre, but elegant and comfortable. The glass of the small window-panes was faintly tinted with pink, another detail that was new to Maigret.

A bookcase full of books. Numerous works on cattle-breeding, handbooks of veterinary surgery. On the walls, gold medals and diplomas that had been won in international exhibitions.

And in amongst the books the latest works of Claudel, Andre* Gide, and Valery . . .

Beetje's smile was coquettish,

" Would you like to see my room? "

She watched him closely to see the impression it made on him. There was no bed, in the ordinary sense of the word, but a divan covered with blue velvet. The walls were lined with *toile de Jouy*. Bookshelves with more books. A doll that had been bought in Paris, all frills and furbelows.

It could almost have been called a boudoir, though it was a little heavy, solid, ponderous.

" Quite like Paris, isn't it? "

" Tell me what happened last week. "

Beetje's face clouded, though not very much. Not enough to give one to think that she took the event very tragically.

No, it certainly was not weighing on her mind. Otherwise she would hardly have shown her room so proudly.

" You'll have some tea, won't you? "

They sat opposite each other. Between them the teapot covered by a cosy.

Beetje still had to grope for a word now and again. In fact, she did more than grope. She fetched a dictionary, and sometimes there were long pauses while she looked for the exact expression she wanted.

A boat with a large grey sail glided slowly by on the canal. There was hardly any wind, so she was being punted along, threading her way through the timber which partially blocked up the stream.

" You haven't yet been to the Poppingas'? "

" I only arrived an hour ago, and so far my time has been devoted to cattle-breeding. "

" Yes. . . . Conrad was a charming man, really very charming. . . . He'd been many years at sea, and been to every country. Soon after he got his master's ticket, he married. It was for his wife's sake that he gave up the sea and accepted a post in the training-ship. Rather dull — At first he had a yacht, only Madame Poppinga was frightened of the water, and in the end he sold it. . . . Since then he's only had a little boat on the canal. . . . Did you see mine as you came? . . . His is practically identical.... In the evening he used to give private lessons to some of his pupils. He worked very hard. "

" What was he like? "

She didn't understand at once. Then she went and fetched a photograph. It showed a tall, round-faced man, with pale clear eyes and closely cropped hair, who looked a picture of good health and good-nature.

" That's Conrad. You wouldn't think he was forty, would you? ... His wife is older. Perhaps forty-five. ... I suppose you will be seeing her. She's entirely different. Quite a different outlook. Of course, everybody's Protestant here, but Liesbeth Poppinga belongs to the strictest sect of all. She's very conservative.. .."

" An active woman? "

" Yes, very. She's president of anything that's ever got up for charity."

" So you don't like her? "

" Of course I do. ... But. ... it's difficult to explain. ... Her father's a head-master, while I'm only a farmer's daughter. Do you understand? ... All the same, she's always very sweet and kind_____"

" And now? ... What happened? "

" We often have lectures here. It's only a little town of five thousand people, but all the same we like to keep in touch with what's going on. Last Thursday we had Professor Duclos of Nancy. You know him, of course. ..."

She was astonished when Maigret told her he didn't, for she had assumed the professor to be one of the lights of French civilization.

" A great lawyer. He specializes in criminology and criminal psychology.... He was talking to us of criminal responsibility, *la responsabilit  des criminels*. Is that right? Stop me if I make mistakes.

" Madame Poppinga is President of the Society, and the lecturers always stay at her house. Often she invites people there to meet them.

" She did so this time after the lecture. Not a real party. Just a few friends. ... There were Professor Duclos, Conrad Poppinga and his wife, Wienands with his wife and children, and lastly me."

" At what time was it? "

" Rather late. About ten o'clock.

" The Poppingas' house is over half a mile from here, and it's on the Amsterdiep too ... The Amsterdiep—that's the canal you can see from where you're sitting.... We had tea and cakes, and there was some cognac. Conrad put on the wireless. Oh, I forgot—Any

was there too, Madame Poppinga's sister. She's a lawyer. . . . Conrad wanted to dance, and we rolled up the carpet. . . . The Wienands left early on account of the children—the little one had already started crying. They live next door. . . . Towards midnight Any said she was tired. Then I went and fetched my bicycle. Conrad did the same. He saw me home.

"My father was waiting for me here. . . .

"It was not till next morning that we heard about it. The news was all over Delfzijl. . . .

"I don't think it was my fault. . . . When Conrad reached home he went to put his bicycle away in the shed behind the house. Someone fired a revolver and he fell. He opened his mouth, but died before he could speak."

She dried a tear which looked strangely out of place on that smooth cheek, red as a ripe apple.

"Is that all?"

"Yes. Detectives came over from Groningen to help the local police. . . . They came to the conclusion the shot had been fired from the house. And it seems that the professor had been seen coming downstairs with a revolver in his hand . . . the same revolver that had killed Conrad."

"Professor Jean Duclos? "

"Yes. That's why they wouldn't let him go."

"So at the moment of the crime there was nobody in the house except Madame Poppinga, her sister Any, and Professor Duclos? "

"Yal "

"And during the evening there had been those three, plus the Wienands, you, and Conrad? "

"There was Cor. I'd forgotten him."

"Cor? "

"It's short for Cornelius. He is a cadet in the training-ship, and he used to have private lessons from Conrad."

"When did he go?"

"At the same time as we did—I mean Conrad and me. He hadn't brought his bicycle. We walked together for a moment, then we jumped on our bikes and left him.—Do you take sugar? "

The tea steamed in the cups. A car had just driven up before the three steps that led to the front door. A moment later a man entered the room. He was a tall, broad-shouldered greying man with a grave face. There was something heavy about him which accentuated his calmness.

It was the farmer Liewens. He stood still, waiting for his daughter to introduce him to the visitor. When that was done, he shook Maigret's hand heartily, but said nothing.

" My father doesn't speak French."

She poured out a cup of tea for him, which he sipped, still standing. Meanwhile she told him in Dutch of the calf that had been born.

She must also have told him of Maigret's share in the operation, for he looked at the latter with a surprise that was not unmixed with irony. Then, after stiffly taking his leave, he strode off to the cowshed.

" Have they arrested Professor Duclos? " asked Maigret as soon as he had gone.

" No. He is at the *Hotel Van Hasselt*. All they've done is to keep a policeman there."

" What have they done with the body? "

" They've taken it to Groningen. That's twenty miles away. A big town with a population of a hundred thousand, and a university where Duclos had given a lecture the previous day. . . . It's awful, isn't it? . . . We don't know what to make of it"

No doubt it was awful. But it was difficult to realize it, probably because of that limpid atmosphere, the comfortable room in which Maigret was sitting, and the tea which steamed in the cups. In fact, the whole place was the antithesis of awfulness. A little toy of a town laid gently down by the seashore.

By leaning out of the window you could see rising above its red tiles the funnel and bridge of a big merchantman unloading cargo. And the boats on the Ems that glided slowly down towards the sea.

" Did Conrad often see you home? "

" Whenever I went to his house. . . . He and I were great pals."

" Wasn't Madame Poppinga jealous? "

That was a chance shot, prompted by the fact that Maigret's eye had fallen on Beetje's inviting bosom.

" Why? "

" I don't know Going off like that. . . . At night"

She laughed, showing a row of healthy teeth.

" It's quite common in Holland. Cor often saw me home, too."

" And he wasn't in love with you? "

She didn't answer yes or no. She giggled. That was the word for it. A little giggle of self-satisfaction.

Her father passed in front of the window carrying the calf just as if it had been a baby. Then he stood it down on the grass of the meadow right in the sun.

The creature swayed on its slender legs, almost fell on its knees, suddenly pranced four or five yards, then stood stock-still.

" Did Conrad ever kiss you? "

Another giggle, but this time she reddened slightly,

" Yes."

" And Cor? "

This time, she was inclined to be evasive. She looked away, hesitated, but finally said:

" Yes. He did too . . . But why do you ask? "

She had a strange look in her face. Did she expect Maigret to follow suit and kiss her too?

Her father called her from outside. She opened the window, and they talked for a while in Dutch. When she drew her head in it was to say:

" Excuse me . . . I must go into the town to fetch the Mayor. It's about the calf's pedigree. He has to be a witness, and it's very important. . . Are you going back to Delfzijl? "

They went out together. She took her nickel-plated bicycle by the handle-bars, and wheeled it along. She walked with a slight swing of the hips which were already broad as a woman's.

" What a lovely day to be out of doors, isn't it? Poor Conrad who will never . . . The baths open tomorrow. He used to bathe every day. He could stay as long as an hour in the water...."

Maigret walked by her side, staring at the ground.

2. *The Cap in the Bath*

MAIGRET was always more interested in people than in places, but this time he noticed certain precise details about the place which came in very useful afterwards. If it wasn't luck that made him do so, it can only have been his flair.

From the Liewens's farm to the Poppingas' was just about twelve hundred yards. Both houses were by the canal, and the shortest way from one to the other was by the towing-path. This canal was little

used now, since the Ems canal had been made to join Delfzijl and Groningen; for the latter was much bigger.

This one, the Amsterdiep, a winding, muddy canal, shaded by beautiful trees, was hardly used at all except for lumber and by some of the smaller craft.

Farms scattered here and there. A shipwright's yard . . .

Leaving the Poppingas' house for the Liewens's, you would first of all come to the Wienands's villa, which was only thirty yards away. Then a house that was being built. Then a large piece of waste land, and after that the timber-yard with its piles of tree-trunks.

Beyond the latter was a bend in the canal, and then came another empty space. From here you could distinctly see the windows of the Poppingas' house and—a little to the left—the white lighthouse over on the other side of the town.

Maigret looked up at the lighthouse, then asked: " Does the light shine this way? "

" Yes, when it comes round. It's a revolving light."

" So at night it lights up this bit of the towing-path? "

" Yes," she said again, with a little laugh, as though reminded of something which tickled her.

" Given away many a spooning couple, I dare say! " grunted Maigret.

She left him just before they reached the Poppingas' on the pretext of taking a short cut, but really so as not to be seen with him.

Maigret did not stop. It was a modern brick-built house with a little garden in front and a vegetable garden behind. A path on the right-hand side, and on the left a patch of empty ground.

He preferred to go back to the town, which was only five hundred yards away. Coming to the lock which separated the canal from the harbour, he stopped. The latter was alive with boats, ranging from one to three hundred tons, made fast alongside each other.

To the left the *Hotel Van Hasselt*. He went in.



A large dark room with varnished panelling in which floated a complex smell of beer, schnapps, and floor-polish. A full-sized billiard-table. A brass-railed table covered by newspapers.

As soon as Maigret entered, a man rose to his feet and came forward from his corner.

"Are you the person who has been sent by the French police?"

He was tall, thin, and bony, with a long face with accentuated features, horn-rimmed spectacles, and thick hair standing up *en brosse*.

"I expect you're Professor Duclos?" answered Maigret*

He had not pictured him so young. Duclos might have been between thirty-five and thirty-eight, hardly more. But there was something about him which struck Maigret oddly.

"You come from Nancy, I think?"

"That is to say, I have a professorship there. Sociology. . ."

"But you weren't born in France?"

They were already sparring.

"In Switzerland, the French part. And I'm now a naturalized French subject. I took my degrees in Paris and Montpellier."

"And you're a Protestant?"

"What makes you think so?"

It was difficult to say. Somehow or other it was written all over the man. Duclos belonged to a type the inspector knew well. Men of science. Learning for learning's sake. Abstract ideas. A certain austerity in his gait and movements, and no doubt also in his conduct. Contacts in many countries. The kind of man who had a passion for lectures, conferences, and correspondence with colleagues abroad.

He was distinctly nervous, if such a word could be applied to a man whose features hardly ever moved. On the table at which he had been sitting was a bottle of mineral water. Big books and papers were scattered over it.

"I don't see any policeman on guard here."

"I gave them my word of honour I wouldn't leave the hotel. . . But I should like to point out that I am expected by literary and scientific societies in Emden, Hamburg, and elsewhere. I am booked for a number of lectures before I. . ."

A fair stout woman appeared, obviously the landlady, and in Dutch Jean Duclos explained to her who his visitor was.

"I thought I might as well ask for a detective to be sent here, though, as a matter of fact, I have every hope of solving the mystery myself."

"Perhaps you'll tell me what you know. . . ."

Maigret sinking into a chair, ordered:

"A *Bols* . . . in a large glass, please. . . ."

" First of all, here are some plans drawn exactly to scale. They've been made out in duplicate, so I can let you have a copy. The first one is the ground floor at the Poppingas'—the passage on the left, the drawing-room on the right, then the dining-room behind. Then right at the back the kitchen, and behind this again the shed where Poppinga kept his bicycle and where he would lay his boat up in the winter."

" You were all in the drawing-room, I think? "

" Yes, all the time, except that twice Madame Poppinga and once her sister Any went out into the kitchen to see about the tea, as the maid had already gone to bed. . . . This is the first floor—at the back, the bathroom directly over the kitchen. In front, two rooms; to the left, the Poppingas' bedroom; to the right, a little study provided with a divan where Any slept. The other bedroom—over the dining-room—had been given to me."

" Show me from which windows the shot could conceivably have been fired."

" From *the* one in my room, the bathroom one, or from the one downstairs in the dining-room."

" Tell me just what happened during the evening."

" My lecture went off splendidly. I gave it in this hotel. They have a good room for that sort of thing. Come and see...."

He led Maigret across the hall of the hotel to a long room, hung with paper garlands, which served for charity dances, banquets, and amateur theatricals. Behind a platform at one end hung a drop-curtain representing the grounds of a chateau.

" Afterwards we walked back towards the Amsterdiep," said the professor, leading the way back into the cafe.

" Along the quay? . . . Will you tell me the exact order in which you walked? "

" I led the way with Madame Poppinga. . . . A most cultured woman. . . . Conrad Poppinga followed, flirting with that little idiot of a farmer's daughter, who can do nothing but grin and giggle, and who certainly didn't understand a word of my lecture from start to finish. Behind them came the Wienands, Any, and that young pupil of Poppinga's. A pale-faced, nondescript boy of whom I can tell you nothing."

" You had reached the house. . . ."

" I dare say you've heard about my lecture. I spoke of the responsibility of criminals for their actions. Madame Poppinga's sister, who has just taken her degree, and who will be practising next

term, asked me some questions which took us on to the subject of the way a lawyer should play his part in a criminal action. Then we discussed scientific methods of detection, and I remember advising her to read the works of the Viennese professor, Grosz. I was maintaining that scientific crime is, under present conditions, undetectable. I spoke at some length on fingerprints, the analysis of all sorts of remains, and the limited deductions that can be made from them. . . . Conrad Popinga, on the other hand, insisted on our listening to the wireless."

The shadow of a smile flitted across Maigret's face.

"He got his way, and we had to listen to jazz. Popinga fetched a bottle of cognac and was astonished that a Frenchman could refuse it. He had some; so did that farm-girl. They were in very high spirits . . . they danced . . . Popinga was positively exuberant. I heard him say: * *Comme a Paris?*^y "

"You didn't like him!" said Maigret.

"There certainly wasn't much in him beyond health and muscle. Wienands was different. Though he specializes in mathematics he's not narrow, and he had been following our conversation with interest. . . . Then one of the infants began to cry, and the Wienands left. . . . The farmer's daughter was laughing and giggling more than ever. . . . Conrad offered to see her home. They left with this boy they call Cor, and rode off on their bicycles. . . . Madame Popinga took me upstairs, and I sat in my room sorting out some papers and jotting down a few notes for a book I am writing. Then suddenly I heard a shot. It was so close that it might have been in the room itself. . . . I dashed out. The bathroom door was ajar and I rushed in. The window was wide open. Someone was groaning in the garden near the bicycle-shed. . . ."

"Was the light on in the bathroom?"

"No. . . . I leant out of the window, and as I did so my hand touched the butt of a revolver. Without thinking what I was doing, I picked it up. . . . I could just make out the man's figure lying on the ground. . . . I turned and ran downstairs, running into Madame Popinga on the way. She had heard the shot too, and was in quite a panic. We ran down together, and were halfway across the kitchen when Any joined us. She was quite beside herself and had come down just as she was. . . . In her combinations! That will mean more to you when you get to know her...."

"And Popinga?"

"He was dying. He looked at us with big troubled eyes, pressing

one hand to his chest. . . . I think he wanted to speak. . . . But the moment I tried to lift him he stiffened in my arms. . . . He was dead, shot through the heart."

" Is that all you know? "

" We telephoned to the *gendarmérie* and to the doctor. We called Wienands, who came over to help us. . . . I was conscious of a certain embarrassment in the air, and I suddenly realized I had been seen holding the revolver. The police called my attention to the fact and asked me to explain it. They politely asked me to hold myself at their disposal/'

" That's six days ago, isn't it? "

" Yes. Since then I've been working on the problem. It certainly is one! . . . Look at these papers.... All the same, I feel I'm making progress."

Maigret knocked out his pipe without so much as glancing at the papers in question.

" You're confined to the hotel? "

" As a matter of fact, I'd rather it was left like that. I wish to avoid any possible incident. Poppinga was very popular with his pupils, and it's impossible to go out without running into them at every corner."

" They haven't found any clues? "

" Precious few. But Any brings me any information she thinks might be helpful. She is working on the case too, and has hopes of clearing it up, though to my mind she doesn't go about it quite methodically enough. . . . She told me that the bath is provided with a sort of wooden lid which, when down, serves as an ironing-board. And the day after the crime, on raising this lid, a cap was found lying in the bath, a peak cap such as all the sailor folk wear round here. It had never been seen in the house before. . . . A careful examination of the ground floor, moreover, had brought to light a cigar-end on the dining-room carpet. It was of very dark tobacco—Manila, I think. Nobody wh6 had been in the house that night was in the habit of smoking such a thing. As for me, I never smoke at all.... And this is the interesting thing—the dining-room had been swept directly after dinner. . . ."

" From which you conclude? "

" Nothing," answered Jean Duclos dryly. " I'll come to my conclusions in due course. I must apologize for having brought you on so long a journey. But I must confess I am surprised they should have sent someone who doesn't speak Dutch.. •. Really I think

there's not likely to be anything for you to do, unless they take any action against me that necessitates an official protest."

Maigret ran his finger up and down his nose, smiling a smile that was nothing short of delicious.

"Are you married, Monsieur Duclos?"

"No."

"And until you came here the other day you had never met the Poppingas, Any, nor anybody else here?"

"We were quite unknown to each other, though of course they knew me by reputation."

"Of course. . . . Of course. . . ."

And Maigret picked up the duplicate plans that were lying on the table, stuffed them in his pocket, touched the brim of his hat, and wandered out.



The police station was a modern building, well lit, clean, and comfortable. They were expecting Maigret. The station-master had informed them of his arrival, and they were astonished that he had not yet shown up.

He strode in as though he belonged to the place, taking off his light overcoat and throwing it and his hat on to one of the chairs.

The detective who had been sent over from Groningen to take charge of the case, spoke French slowly and just a little pedantically. He was tall, fair and lean, extremely cordial, nodding as he spoke, in a way which meant:

"You understand, don't you? . . . I'm sure we agree. . . ."

Though in point of fact it was Maigret who did the talking to start with.

"Since you've been here six days," he said, "you've probably checked all the times? . . ."

"What times?"

"It would be interesting to know, for instance, just how many minutes it took Conrad Poppinga to see Mademoiselle Beetje home and return to the house. And then there's another thing. I would like to know the exact time Mademoiselle Beetje went indoors. . . . And also at what time young Cor went over the gangway of the training-ship—I expect there was a man on watch who would be able to tell you."

The Dutchman looked embarrassed. He got up suddenly as

though an idea had just struck him, went to the other end of the room, and returned with a sailor's cap that looked as though it had weathered more storms than one. Then, speaking with exaggerated solemnity, he said:

" We've found out who is the owner of this cap. It's the one that was found in the bath. It belongs to . . . to a man we call the Baes. . . . That means something like *the boss*...."

Was Maigret even listening?

" We haven't arrested him, as we thought it better to watch his movements. Besides, he's very popular in the district. . . . Do you know the mouth of the Ems?... Approaching from the North Sea you come to some little sandy islands, which are almost completely submerged by equinoctial tides. They are about seven miles from here. . . . One of them's called Workum, and it's on this island that the Baes lives. He has his family there and some men who work for him. He's taken it into his head to use the place for cattle-breeding.... He also gets a small income from the Government for running the lighthouse there. He's even been made Mayor of Workum, of which he and his people are the only inhabitants. . . . He has a motor-boat in which he runs over to Delfzijl...."

If Maigret was interested, he certainly didn't betray it.

" He's a queer fish—a man of about sixty, hard as nails. And his three sons are each of them as big a brigand as their father. . . . You see . . . Well, it's like this___though we don't say much about it, as we have to turn a blind eye to it. . . . The ships that come here, as I dare say you know, are mostly carrying timber from Riga or Finland. And some of the cargo is stowed on deck. And the skippers have orders, if they run into bad weather, to throw some of their deck cargo overboard, so as not to risk the ship. . . . Do you understand what I'm driving at? "

Perhaps Maigret did, perhaps he didn't.

" He's a cunning fellow, the Baes. He knows the captains of all the ships that call here, and he can wangle anything with them. They can generally find a pretext to jettison some of their cargo, and the next tide washes it up on the Workum sands. The Baes goes fifty-fifty with the skippers.. . . And that's his cap that was found in the bath. . . . There's only one thing that doesn't quite fit. He's a pipe-smoker. Never smokes anything else. . . . Though, of course, there might have been somebody with him. . . ."

"Is that all?"

" Monsieur Poppinga, who has friends all over the place—or

rather, who used to have—was only a fortnight ago appointed Vice-Consul of Finland at Delfzijl."

The thin fair young man was triumphant. He almost panted with self-satisfaction.

"Where was his boat on the night of the crime?"

The answer was almost shouted out:

"At Delfzijl! . . . Alongside the quay! . . . Near the lock! . . . In other words, only five hundred yards from the house."

Maigret filled his pipe, wandering up and down the room. From time to time he cast a gloomy look at the police reports that were lying on the desk, and of which he couldn't understand a single word.

"You haven't found out anything else?" he asked, thrusting his hands deep in his pockets.

He was hardly surprised to see the Dutch detective redden.

"You know already?"

But he corrected himself.

"Of course you've been the whole afternoon in Delfzijl. . . . French methods, I suppose! . . ."

He spoke awkwardly.

"I really don't know how much importance we ought to attach to it. . . . It was on the fourth day after the crime. . . . Madame Poppinga came to see us. She said she'd been to see the pastor first to know whether she ought to speak. . . . You know the Poppingas'? • • . Not yet? . . . I can let you have a plan...."

"Thanks. I have one already," answered the inspector, taking it out of his pocket.

The other was taken aback, but nevertheless went on:

"You see the Poppingas' bedroom? . . . From that window one can only see a small bit of the road leading to Liewens's farm. Just the bit which is lit up for a moment every fifteen seconds by the beam of the lighthouse."

"And Madame Poppinga was watching? . . . Jealous, I suppose."*

"Yes, she was watching. . . . She saw the two ride off towards the farm. Then her husband riding back. . . , And then again, only a hundred yards behind him, Beetje Liewens."

"In other words, after Conrad Poppinga had seen her home,, Beetje followed him back? . . . What does she say about h? "

"Who? "

"The girl. . . Beetje."

"Nothing, so far. I was in no hurry to question her. You see,

it's really a very serious matter. And you put your finger right on it when you speak of jealousy.... You see, don't you? ... And it's not made any easier by the fact that Liewens is on the Council."

"What time did Cor arrive on board?"

"That I can tell you. Five minutes past twelve,"

"And when was the shot fired?"

"At five minutes to. . . . Only, don't forget there's the cap and the cigar-end."

"Has he a bicycle?"

"Yes. . . . Everybody cycles here. It's so convenient. I do myself.

•.. But that evening he hadn't taken his."

"Has the revolver been examined?"

"Ya. It was Conrad Poppinga's. A service revolver. It was always fully loaded in one of the drawers of his desk."

"At what distance was the shot fired?"

"About six yards, which is exactly the distance from the bathroom window. . . . But the distance from Monsieur Duclos's window is the same. . . . Then there's nothing to prove that the shot came from upstairs. Judging from the wound, it was fired from above, but Poppinga might have been leaning over his bicycle, in which case the line of fire would have been about level. . . . Only, there's still that cap in the bath,.. and the cigar...."

"To hell with the cigar!" muttered Maigret between his teeth. And then out loud :

"Does her sister know what Madame Poppinga told you?"

"Yes."

"What does she say?"

"She says nothing. She's a very -studious girl and no chatterbox. She's not like other girls."

"Is she very plain?"

"She's not exactly pretty. . . ."

"Right. That means she's plain. . . . And you were saying?"

"She wants to discover the murderer. She's working on the case, and has asked to be allowed to look through our reports."

As luck would have it, she came in at that very moment. She was dressed with a severity that was almost bad taste. A leather brief-case was tucked under her arm.

She went straight up to the Groningen detective and began speaking to him volubly in Dutch. Either she didn't notice Maigret or she chose to ignore him.

The Dutchman reddened, shifted from one foot to the other, and

fiddled with his papers to cover his embarrassment. He looked up at Maigret to warn her of his presence, but she didn't take the hint.

Finally, in desperation, he said awkwardly in French:

" She says it's illegal for you to question anybody in Dutch territory."

" Is this Mademoiselle Any? "

Her features were irregular. The mouth too large. Yet if it hadn't been for her teeth, that were all askew, her face would have been no worse than many others. She was flat-chested and had large feet. But the most striking thing about her was her self-assertiveness, which was like that of any suffragette.

" And of course, strictly speaking, she's right. But I'm telling her that it's often done, all the same."

" Mademoiselle Any understands French, doesn't she? "

" I think so."

With her chin in the air the girl waited for them to finish as though their conversation did not concern her in the least.

" Mademoiselle," said Maigret, with exaggerated courtesy, " I have the honour to introduce myself. Inspector Maigret of the *Police Judiciaire*.. . . The only thing I'd like to ask you is what you think of Mademoiselle Beetje and the way she carries on with Cornelius."

She tried to smile. A forced, shy smile. She looked at Maigret and then at the Dutch detective, finally stammering in painful French:

" I . . . I . . . I don't know what you mean. . . ."

No doubt she had never had to speak French before, for with the effort she blushed scarlet to the roots of her hair.

3. *The Quay Rats Club*

THERE were about a dozen of them, men in thick blue knitted smocks, peak caps and varnished sabots. Some of them were leaning up against the town gate, others sitting on bollards, others simply standing on their two legs, which their wide trousers made enormous.

They smoked, chewed tobacco, and more than anything else, they

spat. Now and again someone would make a joke at which the others would roar with laughter and slap their thighs.

A few yards from them were the boats, and behind them the prim little town, nestling within the circle of its dykes. Further off still, a crane was at work unloading a collier.

Maigret, as he approached the group, had time to observe them, as at first no one noticed him coming along the wharf.

He already knew who they were. That is to say, he knew they were the men who were laughingly spoken of as the Quay Rats Club. But even without that information he would have had no difficulty in guessing that the majority of these sailors spent the greater part of their days at the same place, regardless of rain or sunshine, yarning lazily, and bespattering the ground with their saliva.

One of them was the owner of three clippers, fine sailing-boats of four hundred tons, provided with auxiliary motors. One of these was at that moment beating up the Ems and would, before long, be entering Delfzijl harbour.

Others were of humbler station. One, a caulker, didn't look as if he had very much to caulk. Another was lock-keeper of a disused lock, but he had none the less the distinction of wearing a uniform cap.

One, standing in the middle, eclipsed all the others, not only because he was the tallest, broadest, and reddest in the face, but also because one felt at once that his was by far the strongest personality.

Sabots. A smock. The cap on his head was brand new, and somehow it looked ridiculous, as though it had not yet had time to settle down on its wearer's head.

He was Oosting, more often called the Baes. He was smoking a short-stemmed clay pipe while listening to the talk around him.

A vague smile hung about his mouth. From time to time he would remove his pipe to exhale the smoke with greater relish between his almost closed lips.

A minor pachyderm. Thick and tough, he had none the less very gentle eyes. In fact, there was at the same time something tender and something hard about his whole person.

His eyes were fixed on a boat that was made fast to the quay, a boat about fifty feet long, of good lines, obviously fast. Probably it had once been a yacht, but was now ill-kept and dirty. It was his.

Beyond it stretched the Ems, twelve or thirteen miles wide, and

beyond that again the distant expanse of the North Sea. In one place a streak of reddish sand which was Oosting's domain, the island of Workum.

The day was closing in, and the colours of sunset made this little brick town of Delfzijl redder than ever.

Oosting's eyes, wandering gently over the scene, gathered Maigret—so to speak—on the way. The greenish-blue eyes were tiny. For quite a time they remained fixed on the inspector, after which the Baes knocked out his pipe on the heel of his sabot, spat, groped for something in his pocket, and produced a tobacco-pouch made of pig's bladder. Then, shifting his position, he leant lazily back against the wall.

From that moment Maigret never ceased to be conscious of the man's gaze trained upon him. A gaze in which there was neither arrogance nor defiance. A gaze that was calm, and yet not free from care, and which measured, weighed, and calculated.

The inspector had been the first to leave the police station after his meeting with Any and Pijpekamp—for that was the Dutch detective's name.

Any emerged shortly afterwards, walking briskly with her brief-case under her arm, her body leaning forward, like a woman who was engaged on some important business and had no time to spare for what went on around her in the street.

Maigret did not bother about her, but watched the Baes. The latter's eyes, however, followed her as she receded into the distance, finally turning back once more to Maigret.

Then, without knowing exactly why he did so, the inspector went up to the group, amongst whom all talking ceased abruptly. A dozen faces were turned on him, all expressing some measure of surprise. He addressed himself to Oosting:

"Excuse me J Do you understand French? "

The Baes did not flinch/ He seemed to be reflecting. A wizened sailor standing next to him explained:

"*Frenchman! . . . French-politie! . . .*"

It was not dramatic, and yet it was one of the strangest minutes Maigret ever lived through. The Baes, whose eyes had rested for a moment on his boat, was obviously hesitating.

There was no doubt about it. He wanted to ask the inspector to come on board his boat with him. It was fitted with a little oak-panelled cabin in which was a compass and a compass-lamp.

Everyone stood stock-still, waiting. Finally Oosting opened his mouth.

Then all at once he shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say: "It's preposterous."

But those were not his words. In a hoarse voice which came from right at the back of his throat he said:

"*Pas comprendre . . . Hollandsch . . . English?*"

Any, wearing her veil of mourning, was still visible in silhouette as she crossed the canal bridge and turned along the Amsterdiep.

The Baes caught Maigret looking at the new cap, but it didn't seem to trouble him at all. The shadow of a smile flickered on his lips.

Maigret would have given all he possessed to be able to talk to this man in his own language, even if it was only for five minutes. In desperation he went so far as to blurt out a few syllables of English, but with such an accent that no one understood a word.

"*Pas comprendre! . . . Personne comprendre! . . .*" said the wizened sailor who had intervened before.

The Quay Rats Club gradually resumed their conversation as Maigret sadly walked off with the feeling that he had come close to the heart of the mystery, but all to no purpose.

A few minutes later he turned round to look at the group, who were still gossiping in the last rays of the setting sun, which made Oosting's red face more inflamed than ever.

So far, Maigret had kept—so to speak—to the outskirts of the case, postponing the visit—invariably painful—to a bereaved household.

He rang. It was a little after six. He had not realized that it was a meal-time with the Dutch, until he saw, over the shoulder of the little servant who opened the door, two women sitting at table in the dining-room.

They both rose hastily with a prompt but rather stiff politeness. The sort of manners a girl might bring away with her from a finishing-school.

They were both in black from head to foot. On the table were the tea-things, thin slices of bread, and cold meats. In spite of the twilight the lamp was not lit, the light of a gas fire being left to battle with the gathering darkness.

It was Any who thought of switching on the light, telling the servant to draw the curtains.

"I am so sorry to be disturbing you," said Maigret. "All the more so at a meal-time. I didn't know . . ."

Madame Poppinga waved a hand awkwardly towards an armchair and looked about her with embarrassment, while her sister edged away to the furthest corner of the room.

The latter was very similar to the one he had been in at the farm. Modern furniture, but of a modernism in no way exaggerated. The soft neutral colours combined sombreness with elegance.

"You've come about... ?"

Madame Poppinga's lower lip quivered, and she had to put her handkerchief to her mouth to stifle a sudden sob. Any did not move.

"I won't bother you now," said Maigret. *I'll come back later_____"

With a sign she insisted on his staying. She was making a valiant effort to regain her composure. She must have been some years older than her sister; she was tall and altogether much more of a woman. Her features were regular, though she was just a little too florid about the cheeks. In places, her hair was beginning to turn grey.

All her movements were marked by a well-bred self-effacement. Maigret remembered that she was a head-master's daughter, and that she had the reputation of being very cultured and speaking several languages. But all that had not sufficed to make her a woman of the world. On the contrary, her shy awkwardness was thoroughly provincial, and obviously she was the sort of person who would be shocked by the least thing.

He remembered, too, that she belonged to the strictest of Protestant sects, that she generally acted as president of any charity that was organized at Delfzijl, and was also the leading spirit in intellectual circles.

She managed * to recover her self-control—though she looked pleadingly at her sister, as though to ask her to come to the rescue.

"You must excuse me, Inspector. . . . It's unbelievable, isn't it? . . . Conrad, of all people! . . . A man who was loved by everybody . . ."

Her eyes fell on the loud-speaker of the wireless in a corner of the room, and at the sight of it she nearly burst into tears.

"It was his chief amusement," she stammered. . . . "That and

Jiis boat, in which he would spend his summer evenings on the Amsterdiep. He was a very hard worker... • Who could have done such a thing? "

Maigret said nothing, and she went on, reddening slightly, in a tone she might have used had she been taken to task.

" I'm not accusing anybody ... I don't know ... that is, I don't want to think. ... It's only the police who thought of Professor Duclos because he was holding the revolver. ... I've really no idea ... it's too terrible. But there it is—someone killed Conrad. ... Why? Why him? And not even for robbery. ... Then what could it have been for? "

" You spoke to the police about what you saw from your window. ... "

She reddened still more. She was standing leaning with one hand on the tea-table.

" I didn't know whether I ought to or not. I don't for a moment think Beetje had anything to do with it. ... Only, as I happened to look out of the window, I saw ... And I've heard that the most insignificant details can help the police. ... I asked the pastor what he thought about it, and he said I ought to speak. ... Beetje is a good girl. ... Really, I can't imagine who ... But whoever it is, it's someone who ought to be in an asylum."

Unlike Beetje, she did not have to grope for her words. Her French was easy, and only tintured with the faintest of accents.

" Any told me you'd come from Paris on account of Conrad's death. Is that really so? "

She was getting very much calmer. Her sister, still keeping to her corner, did not move, and Maigret could only see her reflection in a mirror.

" I expect you'd like to see the house? "

She seemed resigned to it, though she added with a sigh:

" Would you like to go with ... Any ... ? "

The girl's black figure stalked past the inspector⁵, and he followed it up the newly-carpeted stairs. The house, which could not have been more than ten years old, was lightly built of hollow brick and wood, but it was so well kept and so well painted as to be perfect in its way. Almost too perfect, suggesting an ornament or a model rather than a real dwelling-place.

The bathroom door was the first to be opened. The wooden cover was lowered over the bath, which was thus transformed into an ironing-table. Leaning out of the window, Maigret saw the

bicycle-shed, the well-kept vegetable garden, the fields out beyond, and the town of Delfzijl with its low houses. Few had more than one story, and not one had more than two.

Any waited in the doorway.

"I hear you're making your investigations too," said Maigret to her.

She winced, but made no answer, and hastily turned to open the door of the room Professor Duclos had occupied.

A brass bedstead. A pitch-pine wardrobe. The floor covered with linoleum.

"Whose room is this as a rule?"

It cost her an effort to find her words.

"Mine . . . when I stay here."

"Do you come often?"

"Yes.... I. . ."

It must have been her shyness. The sound seemed to be strangled in her throat. She looked round her as though for a way of escape.

"But, as the professor was here, I suppose you slept in your brother-in-law's study?"

She nodded, and opened the door for him to inspect it. A table was laden with books, including some new handbooks on gyroscopic compasses and the control of ships by wireless. Sextants. Photographs on the walls showed Conrad Poppinga in Asia and in Africa wearing the uniform of first officer or captain.

A divan covered with blue repp.

"And your sister's room?"

"It's the next one."

There was a door leading to it, as well as one leading to the professor's room. The Poppingas' room was better furnished than the latter. An alabaster lamp stood at the head of the bed, and the Persian carpet was quite a fine one. The furniture was of some exotic wood.

"And you were in the study ..." said Maigret dreamily.

A nod from Any.

"Which you could only leave by passing through one of the two bedrooms. ..."

Another nod.

"And the professor was in his room, and your sister in hers. . ."

Any's eyes widened. She opened her mouth, gaping with astonishment.

"You don't imagine . . . ?"

" I don't imagine anything," muttered Maigret. " *Ym* simply investigating, eliminating. And, so for, you're the only person who can be logically eliminated—that is, unless Duclos or your sister were shielding you."

" You . . . you . . ."

But Maigret went on talking to himself:

" Duclos could have fired the shot either from his room or the bathroom. That's obvious. +.. Madame Popinga, for her part, could have fired from the bathroom. But the professor was there within a few seconds, and he saw nobody. . . . When he did see her, it was coming out of her own room a moment later...."

Any seemed to be getting over her shyness. These technical considerations seemed to reassure her. The angular half-fledged woman was giving way to the fully fledged graduate in Law.

" The shot could have been fired from below," she said, her eye brightening, her thin body tense. " The doctor says . . ."

" Whatever he says doesn't alter the fact that the revolver which killed your brother-in-law is the one Duclos was holding in his hand . . . unless, of course, the murderer threw it up through the bathroom window on to the sill inside,..."

" Why not? "

"Indeed! Why not?"

And Maigret turned, without waiting for her to lead the way, and went down the stairs, which seemed too narrow for him, and whose steps creaked beneath his weight.

He found Madame Popinga standing in the dining-room, apparently not having moved since he left her. Any followed him into the room.

" Did Cornelius come here often? "

" Nearly every day. He only had lessons three days a week, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. But he'd come just the same the other days. . . . His parents live in India. . . . It was only a month ago that he learned of his mother's death. She was buried, of course, long before he got the letter.... So we tried .. ."

" And Beetje Liewens? "

There was an awkward pause. Madame Popinga looked at Any. Any stared at the floor.

" She used to come...."

" Often? "

" Yes."

" Did you invite her? "

They were getting down to brass tacks. Maigret felt he was making progress, if not towards the solution of the mystery, at any rate in his knowledge of the Poppingas' private life.

" No ... yes _____ "

" She's not quite the same type as you and Mademoiselle Any, is she? "

" She's very young, of course . . . her father was a friend of Conrad's ... she would bring us apples, raspberries, or cream."

" Was she in love with Cor? "

" No."

The answer was categorical.

" You never cared much for her, did you? "

" Why shouldn't I? ... A jolly girl: whenever she came she'd fill the house up with her chatter and laughter. More like the chirping of a bird, if you see what I mean. ... "

" Do you know Oosting? "

" Yes."

" Was he a friend of your husband's? "

" Last year he had a new motor put in his boat, and he asked Conrad's advice about it. In fact, Conrad drew up some plans for him. Then they used to go seal-shooting together on the sandbanks . . . "

She hesitated a moment before suddenly blurting out:

" You're thinking of the cap, perhaps . . . you think he might have . . . Oosting! . . . it's impossible. . . . "

She heaved a sigh and then went on:

" No, I can't believe it's Oosting either. I can't believe it's anybody. Nobody could have wanted him to die. . . . You never knew him. . . . He . . . he . . . "

Weeping, she turned her head away. Maigret thought it better to go. They didn't offer to shake hands, so he simply bowed his way out, muttering excuses.

Outside, he was surprised by the chill dampness that rose from the canal. On the other bank, not far from the shipwright's yard, he caught sight of the Baes talking to a young man in uniform, evidently one of the cadets of the training-ship.

They were standing together in the twilight. Oosting was apparently speaking emphatically. The young man hung his head. Maigret could only just make out the pale oval of his face, but he at once jumped to the conclusion it was Cornelius. And when he saw a *aSpe* band on his sleeve, he felt quite sure.

4, *Floating Lumber*

THERE was nothing clever about it, nor was anything done in a sneaking sort of way. From start to finish Maigret never had the feeling he was spying on anybody.

He had just walked out of the Poppingas' house and taken a few steps from it. Seeing the two men on the other side of the canal, he had stopped quite naturally to look at them. He didn't attempt to conceal himself. There he was, standing full length, right on the bank of the canal, his pipe between his teedi, his hands in his pockets.

But if he was not hiding, he was nevertheless unseen. The conversation on the other bank went on as earnestly as before. Yes—there was no doubt about it—they were quite oblivious of his presence. There could be no doubt either about another thing: whatever it was that was being discussed, it was something of the gravest importance. And whether it was the tone of voice or the emphasis that was given to the words, there was something tense, even something touching, about the scene.

Or perhaps it was the setting. There was no one else on the other bank of the canal. All round them, it was deserted. A shed was standing in the middle of a shipwright's yard, where two boats lay shored up on the dry land.

Lastly, in the canal itself were the floating tree-trunks, so many that it was only in the middle that a narrow strip of water was visible only a yard or two in width. The evening was advancing. The air was beautifully clear, and there was just enough light left for colours to have their full value.

So intense was the calmness that it was almost surprising. And the croaking of a frog in a distant pond broke through it so harshly as to be positively startling. Yet on the opposite bank neither of them seemed to notice it.

The Baes went on talking. He didn't "raise his voice, but in his quiet way he nevertheless hammered out the syllables. Either he was taking great pains to make himself understood, or he was giving orders in such a way as to ensure their being obeyed. With lowered head the cadet listened. He wore white gloves, which struck two sharp notes in the otherwise quiet scene.

Suddenly there was a rending cry. It was a donkey braying in the meadow behind Maigret. This time it was enough to break the charm. Oosting looked up towards the animal, and as he did so he

noticed Maigret, at whom he looked quietly, seeming in no way startled. For a moment he gazed steadily at him, apparently not in the least disconcerted.

Turning back to the boy, he wound up his discourse with a few final words; then, stuffing the short stem of his clay pipe into his mouth, he walked off towards the town.

What was it they had been talking about? Maigret wondered. In all probability it was something far removed from the case he was on. Had the people of Delfzijl nothing else to talk about than the death of Conrad Poppinga? . . . And yet. .. And Maigret went on wondering.

Oosting's path soon branched off from the canal, and he disappeared behind some sheds, though for a good minute the sound of his sabots could clearly be heard.



Lamps were being lit in the town and along the canal as far as the Wienands's house, where they ceased. There were no houses on the other bank, which was fast melting into shadows.

Maigret turned to look back without knowing why. He growled an oath as the donkey once more rent the heavens.

And in the distance, beyond the last of the houses, he caught sight of two little white spots dancing over the canal. They were Cor's gloves.

It would have been a weird sight, those hands waving over the water, the body lost in the semi-darkness, if Maigret had not remembered the tree-trunks.

Oosting's steps were now out of earshot. Maigret walked back towards the last of the houses, once more passing the Poppingas' and then the Wienands's.

He was still taking no pains to conceal his presence, but he knew very well that his figure, like Cor's, must be indistinguishable from the shadow's. More than Cor's, as he had no white gloves.

He watched those gloves crossing the canal. He understood. To avoid going all the way round by Delfzijl, where there was a bridge over the canal, the boy had gone straight from bank to bank, using the tree-trunks as stepping-stones. In the middle, he might have had as much as five or six feet to jump.

Cor was now on the same bank as Maigret, walking barely a hundred yards in front of him. Maigret followed.

It might have been accidental; it might have been instinctive. In any case, *it* wasn't done on purpose. But the fact remains that Maigret's footsteps crunching on the cinder path were exactly in step with the other's.

Maigret tripped over something, and for the fraction of a second the unison was lost. It was only then that he became aware of the fact that he was dogging Cor's footsteps like a sleuth-hound. He had no idea where he was being led. When the boy quickened his pace he quickened his too. He was getting worked up to it. A sort of giddy passion of pursuit.

At first the stride had been long and regular. Little by little the steps had shortened and quickened. Just as Cornelius passed the timber-yard a whole orchestra of frogs struck up, and he stopped dead.

Was he frightened?

On again. But the steps were now more irregular than ever. Sometimes one foot seemed to hesitate in the air. At other moments Cor took two or three steps so rapidly that it looked as though he was going to break into a run.

The silence was now definitely over, for the frogs never stopped their croaking, with which they filled all the night.

The pace was getting still hotter. By marching in step with the boy, Maigret even became conscious of his frame of mind.

Yes, Cornelius was afraid. He was hurrying because he was afraid. He was itching to be back on board, or wherever it was he was going to. But each time he passed the shadow of a bush, a dead tree, or a pile of timber, there was a slight vacillation in his step.

There was a bend in the canal. A hundred yards further on towards Liewens's farm was the little space that was lit up by the lighthouse. And it seemed to make the young man vacillate still more. He cast a glance over his shoulder, then ran past the place, after which he looked back once again. *

He was now well beyond it, and it was Maigret's turn to enter the lighted area. Cornelius looked back a third time.

This time it was impossible for him not to notice the inspector, who marched through the intermittent beams of light with all his stature, with all his breadth, with all his weight. Cornelius stopped, but only just long enough to take a breath. Then he was off again.

The light was behind them. In front, a lighted window, one of

the windows of the farm. The song of the frogs seemed to be following them. They had walked a considerable distance since it first started, yet it was now as close as ever. In fact, it seemed as though the frogs were all round them, hundreds of them, escorting them on their way*

When Cornelius stopped next, it was no hesitation, but a decisive halt. He was barely a hundred yards from the house. A figure emerged from behind a tree-trunk. A voice spoke in a whisper.

Maigret did not want to turn back. It would have been too ridiculous. Nor did he want to hide. Besides, it was too late to hide, now that he had passed through the rays of the lighthouse. They knew he was there. He walked forward slowly, disconcerted that his steps had no longer an accompaniment.

It was very dark here, as leafy trees hemmed in the road on either hand. But a white glove was visible. Was it holding something? Or rather, pressing something to him? . . .

Yes, they were embracing. Cor's arm was round Beetje's waist.

He was only fifty paces from them. Maigret halted, felt for his matches, and struck one, ostensibly to light his pipe, but really to give official notice of his presence.

Then he went on. The couple stirred. When he was ten yards away, Beetje's figure detached itself from Cor's. She came forward and stood in the middle of the road, looking in Maigret's direction as though waiting for him. Cor remained leaning against the trunk of the tree.

Maigret had almost reached them. The window in the farm was still lit up. A simple rectangle of reddish light.

Suddenly a cry—raucous, indescribable—a cry of fear, of exasperation—one of those cries which ushers in a fit of sobbing or a flood of tears.

It was Cornelius. His head was in his hands as he stood cowering against the tree. He was sobbing.

Beetje was right in front of Maigret now. She was wearing an overcoat, but the inspector noticed that beneath it was her nightgown. Her bare feet were in slippers.

"Don't take any notice of him."

For her part, Beetje was perfectly calm. In fact, she even threw Cornelius a reproving, impatient glance.

Turning his back on them, the latter tried to pull himself together. He was ashamed to be seen in such a state, yet he could not control it.

" He's upset.... He thinks ... "

" What does he think? "

" That he's going to be accused of ... "

The young man kept his distance. He was drying his eyes. Was he on the point of taking to his heels? His attitude certainly suggested it.

" I haven't yet accused anybody," said Maigret, for the sake of saying something.

" Exactly _____ "

And turning towards the boy she said something in Dutch, the purport of which Maigret could only guess.

" You see! ... The inspector's not accusing you. For heaven's sake calm down. It's childish to go on like that.. . . "

She broke off abruptly, standing still with her ears pricked. Maigret had heard nothing, but a few seconds later he thought he could make out the faintest of footfalls in the direction of the farm.

It was enough to bring Cornelius to his senses. He looked about him, his face haggard, his faculties keyed up.

No one spoke.

" Did you hear? " asked Beetje, under her breath.

The young man was on the point of advancing to the spot from which the sound seemed to come. All at once he was game as a fighting-cock. He was breathing deeply.

He was too late, however. The enemy was much closer than anyone had supposed. Only a few yards off, a figure emerged from the darkness, a figure that was immediately recognizable as the farmer Liewens. He was shod in nothing but his socks.

"Beetje! "he called.

She did not dare answer at once. But when he repeated the name she tamely answered:

" Ya. . . . "

Liewens came closer. First of all he passed Cornelius, whom he ignored. Perhaps he had not yet noticed Maigret.

Nevertheless, it was in front of the latter that he finally halted, his eye hard, his nostrils quivering with rage. He held himself in, however, standing perfectly still. When he spoke he turned towards his daughter. His voice, though subdued, was none the less rasping.

Two or three phrases, while she stood before him hanging her head. Then several times he repeated the same word in a tone of command, till finally Beetje said in French:

" He wants me to tell you ... "

Her father was watching her as though wanting to satisfy himself she translated his message faithfully.

"... that in Holland policemen are not in the habit of meeting girls at night in the dark/'

Maigret blushed. Such a blush as he rarely experienced. A flood of hot blood which fairly made his ears hum.

It was such an absurd accusation. So obviously malicious. For there was Cor, and her father must have known very well that it was for him that Beetje had left the house.

But he was helpless. What could he answer? . . . Particularly when everything he said had first of all to pass through an interpreter.

As a matter of fact, no answer was expected. At least, none was waited for. The farmer snapped his fingers, as one might to recall a dog, and pointed towards the path leading to the house. Beetje hesitated, turned towards Maigret for a moment, and finally walked away without daring to cast a glance at her lover. Liewens followed.

Cornelius had not moved. He did just raise a hand as though to stop the farmer, but it was a futile gesture and he let it fall again. Father and daughter disappeared into the darkness, and a moment later the front door slammed.

Had the frogs held their peace during this little scene? Maigret couldn't be sure. He had forgotten all about them. But now their croaking seemed all at once positively deafening.

" Do you speak French? "

Cornelius did not answer.

" Do you speak French? "

" *Petit peu.* . . . "

He looked daggers at Maigret, and was obviously reluctant to open his mouth. He stood sideways on, as though to offer less target to an attack.

" What is it you're so afraid of? "

Tears ran down the boy's cheeks again, though no sobs came. He blew his nose, taking a long time over it. His hands were trembling. He looked as though he might at any moment break down again altogether.

" Do you really think that you're suspected of having killed the teacher? "

And in a gruff voice Maigret added:

" Come on. Let's go. . . . "

He swept the boy off towards the town. When he started talking he did not economize his words, as he had the feeling that the boy understood barely the half of what he was saying,

" Was it on your own account that you were frightened? "

A mere boy! A thin face, with pale complexion and features that were still unformed. Narrow shoulders in the tightly fitting uniform. And his cadet's cap dwarfed him, making him look like a child dressed up in sailor clothes.

His face and every gesture showed mistrust and resentment. If Maigret had raised his voice, he would no doubt have raised an arm to ward it off.

The crepe armlet struck another and still more pathetic note. Wasn't it only a month ago that the kid had learned of his mother's death in India? . . . One evening perhaps when he had been in rollicking mood? Perhaps the night of the training-ship's annual ball?

In two years' time he would go out to rejoin his remaining parent, having attained the rank of third officer. And his father would take him to see a tomb already weathered . . . and perhaps introduce him to a new mother installed as lady of the house. . . .

Then his career would begin in a liner or a big cargo-boat. Watch-keeping. Rotterdam to Java. Java to Rotterdam. Ports of call. Two days in one place; in another only five or six hours. . . .

" Where were you at the moment Conrad Popinga was killed? "

The sob burst now. A terrible rending sob. With his white-gloved hands the boy caught hold of the two lapels of Maigret's coat. Hands which trembled convulsively.

" Not true! . . . *Pas vrai!* . . . " he repeated at least ten times. "*Nein!* . . . You don't understand. . . . *Pas . . . Non! . . . Pas vrai! . . .* "

Again they passed into the beam of the lighthouse, which blinded them—threw them sharply into relief, down to the smallest detail—then swept on, leaving them once more indistinguishable from the night.

" Where were you? "

" Not there."

Not there. " There " meant the Poppingas' house, and the little bit of canal which he used to jump across with the help of the tree-trunks.

This last was a detail that was certainly not unimportant. It might even be very serious. Popinga had been shot at five minutes to

twelve, and Cor had reported on board at five minutes past. Taking the ordinary way—that is to say, going round by the town—he would have needed nearly half an hour. But only six or seven minutes by taking his short cut from bank to bank.

Maigret walked on ponderously beside this flimsily built cadet who trembled like a leaf. The donkey brayed again, which only made things worse. He writhed from head to foot, and once more seemed to be on the point of taking to his heels.

"Do you love Beetje?"

An obstinate silence.

"You saw her come back, after Poppinga had seen her home, didn't you?"

"It's not true. . . . *Pas vraif . . . Pas vrai/ . . .*"

Maigret was tempted to shake him. That might have calmed him and brought him to his senses. Instead, however, he looked at him with an indulgent, almost affectionate eye.

"Do you see Beetje every day?"

Once more no reply.

"At what time are you supposed to be back on board?"

"Ten o'clock . . . except with special permission . . . when I went for private lessons . . . I could . . ."

"Get back later. But that evening you had no lesson, did you?"

They were on the bank of the canal, just where Cor had jumped across. In the most natural way, Maigret turned towards the canal and stepped on to one of the tree-trunks, nearly falling into the water as the latter rolled over under his weight.

Cornelius hesitated.

"Come on. It's nearly ten."

The boy was taken by surprise. He must have expected never to set foot on the training-ship again, to be arrested, thrown into prison. . . .

And now this redoubtable French detective was leading him home. They crossed together, jumped together when they came to the gap in the middle, splashed each other. On the other bank Maigret stopped to wipe his trousers with his handkerchief.

"Where is it?"

He hadn't yet been on this side. It was a nondescript stretch of land that lay between the Amsterdiep and the new canal which was wide and deep enough to carry ocean-going ships.

Looking back, the inspector saw a lighted window upstairs in the Poppingas' house. Silhouetted against the blind was Any's figure.

It must be Conrad's study. Maigret stared, but it was impossible to guess what Any was doing.

Cornelius was a little calmer now.

"I swear," he began.

"No, don't!"

That disconcerted him. He looked at his companion with such alarm that Maigret patted him on the shoulder as he said:

"Swearing doesn't do any good. Particularly in your position. . . . Would you like to marry Beetje?"

"Ya! ...Ya! . . ."

"Would her father give his consent?"

Silence. With lowered head Cor walked on, picking his way between the old boats that were lying scattered all over the place.

Then a large expanse of water came into sight. The Ems Canal. At a bend in it, a large black-and-white ship raised its masts into the night. The fore-castle was very high. All the port-holes were lit up.

It was an ancient Dutch man-of-war, at least a hundred years old, that had been moored in the canal to finish its days in peace and quiet as a training-ship.

Near by on the shore were dark figures and many glowing cigarettes. The distant sound of a piano came, no doubt, from the gun-room.

Suddenly a bell pealed out, and in a moment the dark figures, scattered about on the bank, had clustered into a swarm at the foot of the gangway. A few who had wandered further came up at the double.

They were just like a crowd of schoolboys, though they ranged in age from sixteen to twenty-two, and wore the uniform of officers in the merchant service. White gloves. A stiff gold-braided peak cap.

At the top of the gangway, leaning over the side rail, an old quartermaster watched them pass one by one as he quietly smoked his pipe.

The whole scene was alive with youthfulness and high spirits. Jokes were bandied to and fro, though naturally they were lost on Maigret. Cigarettes were thrown into the water as the cadets stepped on board, where they went on with their fun, skylarking, ragging, and chasing each other round the deck.

The last stragglers, panting, were going up the gangway. Cornelius, his features drawn, turned towards the inspector. His eyes were red and feverish.

" Get along with you! " growled Maigret. " *Allons, vaf* "

The boy understood the tone rather than the words. His hand went to his cap in an awkward salute. He opened his mouth to speak....

" That's all right. ... Go on. Run——"

For the quartermaster was already leaving the top of the gang-way. One of the cadets was taking over the watch.

Through the port-holes they could be seen unlashng their hammocks and chucking their clothes down on their sea-chests.

Maigret stayed where he was till he saw Cor join them. The boy went down the ladder shyly and awkwardly, his shoulders hunched and crooked, and threaded his way towards one of the end hammocks. Before he got to it, however, he had received a flying pillow full in the face.



The inspector had not taken ten steps towards the town when he caught sight of Oosting, who, like him, had been watching the cadets return on board. They were both of them getting on in years, both of them big, heavy, and placid. Wasn't it rather absurd that they should have been watching that crowd of young men and boys climbing into their hammocks and engaging in pillow-fights? Didn't it make them look like two old hens, watching over a too-adventurous brood of chicks?

They looked at one another. The Baes did not flinch. With a leisurely movement he touched the peak of his cap.

They knew perfectly well that all conversation between them was impossible. All the same, the Mayor of Workum couldn't help saying:

" *Goed avond.* ... "

" *Bonne nuit...*" echoed Maigret.

They were both taking the same road, a road which, after something like two hundred yards, became a street of the town.

They were walking practically abreast. To avoid doing so, one of them would have had deliberately to slacken his pace. And neither wanted to.

Oosting, in his sabots. Maigret, in his city clothes. One with a clay pipe between his teeth, the other with a briar.

The third house they came to was a caff, and Oosting went in after shaking the mud off his sabots, which, in any case, he left at the entrance according to the Dutch custom.

Maigret hardly hesitated a second. He too went in.

There were about ten men inside, sailors and bargees, sitting round the same table, smoking pipes and cigars, drinking beer and gin.

Oosting shook hands with some of them, then, seeing an empty chair, he sat down heavily and listened to the talk.

Maigret sat down too, though keeping his distance from the others. Though nobody ostensibly took any notice of him, he knew very well he was the centre of interest. The landlord, who was one of the group, waited a few moments before coming over to him to ask him what he wanted.

The schnapps was drawn from a porcelain tap with brass fittings. It was that which gave the place its pervading odour, as in every other cafe in Holland, and made it so different from any cafe in France.

Oosting's small eyes twinkled every time they alighted on the *inspector*.

The latter stretched out his legs, tucked them under his chair, then *stretched them* out again. He filled *his pipe*. *Anything to cover* his embarrassment. The landlord got up again on purpose *to give* him a light.

" *Mote veer /* "

Maigret frowned, and, with a gesture, showed he could not understand.

" *Mole veer,ya! ... Oost vind....*"

The others listened, nudged each other. One of them pointed through the window to the starry sky outside.

"*Mote veer/ ... Bel temps! ...*"

He was trying to explain that the wind was from the east, which brought good weather.

Oosting was choosing a cigar from a box that had been set before him. For all the world to see, he deliberately took a Manila black as coal, the end of which he bit off and spat on the ground.

He called the attention of the others to his new cap.

"*Vier gulden. ...*"

Four florins. Maigret worked out what that would be in French money. Oosting's eyes never stopped twinkling.

But someone entered, and, unfolding a newspaper, started talking of the latest prices on the Amsterdam Bourse.

The conversation which followed was animated. Indeed it sounded almost more like a quarrel on account of the loud voices

and the harshness of the Dutch tongue. Maigret was forgotten. He fumbled in his pocket and produced some small change, then went off to the *Hotel Van Hasselt*, where he went to bed.

5. *The Professor's Theories*

SITTING downstairs over his breakfast in the *Hotel Van Hasselt*, Maigret could watch through the window the Dutch police getting to work. They had not told him of their intentions, but they couldn't be blamed for that, considering how short a time he had given them the day before. If he had gone his own way, he could hardly complain if they went theirs.

It must have been about eight o'clock. The morning mist had not yet been dispersed, though there were signs of a bright sun somewhere behind it. A tug was towing a Finnish ship out of harbour.

At the corner of the quay, quite a crowd of men were gathered in front of a small cafe, talking in little groups. All wore sabots and peak caps.

They were the *schippers*, and it was apparently there that they did their business. Their barges and boats of every description, crawling with women and children, filled up one basin of the port.

Further on, another group, but only a handful: the Quay Rats Club.

Two gendarmes in uniform had just arrived, and gone on board Oosting's boat. The latter had emerged from the cabin, for when he was at Delfzijl he always slept on board.

Another man in plain clothes joined the gendarmes. It was Pijpekamp, the Groningen detective in charge of the case. He raised his hat and politely addressed the Baes, while his two men disappeared below.

The search began. All the *schippers* were conscious of what was going on. Nevertheless there was no crowding round, nor any other outward sign of curiosity.

Nor did the Quay Rats Club betray any excitement. A casual glance or two was all they conceded.

The work went on for a good half-hour. Then the gendarmes

reappeared, saluted their chief, and reported the results of their labours. Pijpekamp offered what looked very much like an apology.

The Baes seemed quite unmoved. Only he did not seem inclined that morning to join his acquaintances on shore. Instead of that he sat down on the coach-roof of the cabin and, crossing his legs, stared out to sea where the Finnish ship was slowly diminishing in the distance.



Maigret had been watching it all. When at last he looked back into the room, it was to see Jean Duclos coming down with an armful of books and papers and a fat brief-case, which he laid out on the table that had been set aside for him.

He did not trouble to say good morning, but merely asked:
" Well? "

" Very well indeed, thank you. And I hope it's the same with you."

The professor looked up with a movement of surprise, then shrugged his shoulders as though he had come to the conclusion that it really wasn't worth while taking offence.

" Have you found out anything? "

" Might I ask if you have? "

" You know very well that I can't set foot out of doors. Your Dutch colleague, however, has had the good sense to realize that my technical knowledge might be of service. I am accordingly kept informed of how the investigations are proceeding ... an example that might well serve as a lesson for the French police."

" Of course!..."

The professor jumped to his feet as Madame Van Hasselt entered the room, her hair in curlers. He bowed to her in his best drawing-room manner, and though he spoke in Dutch, Maigret could have betted anything he was inquiring after her health.

The inspector looked at the papers spread out over the professor's table. There were fresh plans and diagrams, not only of the Popingas' house but of practically the whole town. There were arrows which no doubt indicated the route followed by some person or persons.

The sun which streamed through the stained-glass window-panes threw patches of green, red, and blue light on to the varnished wpodwork. A brewer's dray had drawn up outside, and throughout

the conversation that followed, two burly giants were rolling barrels across the floor, supervised by Mme Van Hasselt in her slippers. A smell of schnapps and beer lay thick on the air. This was Holland—and Maigret had never felt it so keenly.

"You've discovered the murderer?" he asked blandly, pointing to the papers.

A sharp, hostile look from Duclos, as he answered:

"I'm beginning to think that foreigners are right when they think French people incapable of being serious.... In the present circumstances, Monsieur, your playfulness is not in the best of taste."

Not in the least disconcerted, Maigret smiled serenely, while the professor went on:

"No, I have not discovered the murderer. But I have done something which is far more useful at the start than merely looking for the murderer. I've analysed the case. Dissected it, so to speak. I have all the elements neatly sorted out. And now ••"

"And now?"

"It will no doubt be someone like yourself who will reap the reward of my deductions."

He sat down. He was determined to discuss the case even in this hostile atmosphere, for which he had only himself to thank. Maigret sat down opposite him and ordered a glass of *Bols*,

"Fire away."

"First of all, please note the fact that I am not asking what you have done, nor what you think about the case.... And now I begin with the first suspect, that is to say, myself. I occupied the best strategic position, if I may so express myself, from which to kill Poppinga. Moreover, I was seen holding the revolver that had shot him, a few seconds after it had been fired.

"I am not rich, and if my name is known all over, or nearly all over, the world, it is by a small number of intellectual people. I live in quite a small way, and it is not always easy to make both ends meet. . . . On the other hand, there was no robbery, nor was I likely to benefit in any way from Poppinga's death. . . .

"But wait a moment. . . . That doesn't mean that I couldn't have committed the murder. There are people who can tell you that in the course of the evening, during a discussion of scientific police methods, I had been arguing that an intelligent man who, with a cool head, used all his ingenuity, could perfectly well elude detection by the police, half-educated as the latter are.... And it could quite well be maintained that I had a bee in my bonnet as regards this

subject to the extent of wanting to prove my theory in practice. On the other hand, you will perhaps appreciate the fact that, had I committed a perfect crime and gone unsuspected, I should have proved my point to no one but myself. And you'll admit when you know me better that I'm not the man to do anything so foolish. . . ."

"Here's luck," said Maigret, lifting his glass, at the same time watching the bull-necked brewer's men as they rolled their casks across the floor.

"On the other hand, supposing I didn't commit the crime, but that it was committed—as everything seems to indicate—by another member of the household.... In that case, one must come to the conclusion that everybody in the house is implicated.

"That surprises you, no doubt. But look at this plan. And there are various psychological considerations which I must explain to you, and which I hope you will be able to follow."

Maigret smiled more blandly than ever at the professor's patronizing tone.

"I expect you have heard of Madame Poppinga's family. The Van Elsts belong to the most austere sect of the Protestant church. In Amsterdam her father passes for an extreme conservative, and her sister Any, though she is only twenty-five, is already taking up politics and following in his footsteps.

"You've not yet been here twenty-four hours, and one can hardly expect you to understand the manners and customs of the place. There are many things that would surprise you. You would hardly guess, for instance, that an officer on the staff of the training-ship would be severely reprimanded if he were seen to enter a cafe—even a respectable place like this. One of them was dismissed because he persisted in taking in a newspaper which is considered rather advanced. . . .

"I only saw Poppinga that one evening. But it was enough, particularly after what I'd heard about him. . . . A good fellow, you'd call him, no doubt. That's the expression that's invariably used for people of his type. I don't say he hadn't his qualities. Of course he had. Suppose we put it this way. . . .

"He'd been a sailor, he'd been all over the world. Then he'd come to roost here, and they'd put him in a strait jacket. Only it was bursting at every seam.

"Do you understand? I expect you'll smile at what is to follow. A Frenchman's smile!... A fortnight ago he went to the weekly meeting of his club. Those who can't go to a cafe get round it by

forming clubs amongst themselves. A special room is reserved for them where they can play billiards or skittles....

" As I was saying, Popinga went to his club. And by eleven o'clock that evening he was drunk.... That same week his wife was getting up a collection to buy clothing for some natives or other. And Popinga, with his cheeks aflame and his eyes shining, was heard to say: ' What rot it all is! They're very well off as they are. Instead of buying clothes for them, we'd do better to follow their example, and go about naked too/

" You smile—I knew you would. You think it's trivial. But that doesn't alter the fact that his words made a scandal that hasn't yet died down, and if his funeral takes place at Delfzijl there will be a good many absentees.

" That's only a detail, but it's one of a hundred others, of a thousand others. As I said, it was every seam that was bursting, and through the cloak of respectability the real Popinga was showing.

" To drink a glass too much is by itself a matter of the utmost gravity. And don't forget Popinga's pupils used to see him in that state. That's why they adored him, of course.

" With that in mind, try to reconstruct the atmosphere of that house by the side of the Amsterdiep. Think of Madame Popinga, of Any. . . .

" And now look out of the window. With one sweep of your eye you can take in the whole town from one end to the other. Delfzijl is a very small place. Everybody knows everybody else. The least little scandal, and there's not a soul that doesn't know it. . . .

" Then who should Popinga choose to make a friend of but the Baes? A man who, if the truth be told, is nothing less than a brigand. They used to go out together shooting seal, and they drink schnapps together in the cabin. . . .

" Now don't jump to conclusions. But just bear in mind what I said—that if the crime was committed by anybody in the house except myself, then we're all implicated.

" There remains that stupid little Beetje whom Popinga never failed to see home. I'll only mention one detail: her bathing-dress. Everybody else's has a kind of skirt at the bottom. But hers—oh, no! As tight fitting as it's possible to be, and red into the bargain!

" And now I leave you to pursue your own investigations. I merely wished to make you aware of a few factors, which are of the kind the police usually ignore. . . .

" As for Corn&ius Barens, I consider him as one of the family, and if I am not mistaken, he belongs to the Van Elst side of it,

" The characters in this case range themselves naturally into rival teams, so to speak.... On the one hand, Madame Popinga, her sister Any, and Cornelius. On the other Popinga, Oosting, and Beetje.

" Think it over, and perhaps you may even come to some useful conclusions."

" One question ... " said Maigret gravely.

" Yes? "

" You're a Protestant, too, I think? "

" I certainly belong to the Reformed Church, though not to the same branch as Madame Popinga."

" Which side of the barrier are you on? "

" I didn't care for Popinga! "

" So you ... ? "

" I deplore the crime, regardless of the victim."

" He played jazz and danced, didn't he, while you were talking to the ladies? "

" Yes, that was characteristic of him, though I didn't take it as a personal affront."

Maigret was magisterially serious as he got up, saying :

" All in all, whom would you advise me to arrest? "

The professor bridled.

*' I didn't speak of arresting anybody, I have simply given you certain guiding lines. We have been dealing with generalities."

" Admittedly____But in my place ... ? "

" I am not a member of the police! I pursue truth for truth's sake, and the fact that I have come under suspicion myself doesn't affect my judgment in the slightest."

" So I oughtn't to arrest anybody? "

" I didn't say that either.... I. .."

" Thank you," said Maigret, offering his hand.

He wanted to pay for his *Bols*, and to call attention he struck his glass with a coin. Duclos looked at him disapprovingly.

" That's not done here," he murmured. " At least, not if you wish to pass for a gentleman."

They were closing down the trap-door, through which the barrels of beer had been lowered into the cellar. The inspector paid, and throwing a last look at the plans, he said:

" So it comes to this: either it's you, or all the family."

" I didn't put it quite like that.... Listen ... "

But Maigret was already at the door. Now that his back was turned, he allowed his features to relax from the gravity he had assumed during the last part of the conversation. If he didn't actually laugh, he certainly went out beaming.

The quay outside was bathed in sunshine, gentle warmth, and peacefulness. The ironmonger was standing on his threshold. The little Jew who kept the chandler's shop was counting his anchors and marking them with signs in red paint.

The crane was still busy unloading coal. The *schippers* hoisted their sails, not because they were putting to sea, but to dry the canvas. Some white, some brown, they hung flapping lazily among the crowd of masts.

Oosting smoked away at his short-stemmed clay pipe, sitting in the stern-sheets of his boat. The Quay Rats Club went on with their leisurely discussions.

But if one turned one's back on that scene to study the town, one was faced by well-built, well-painted houses, windows beautifully clean, curtains spotless, cactuses on every window-sill. What was behind those windows?

Certainly they looked different now after the conversation Maigret had had with Jean Duclos. The latter was no fool, for all his pedantry. There were, indeed, two worlds here.

On the one hand, the salt-water world. Men in sabots, boats, sails, the smell of tar . . . and schnapps.

On the other, the world of respectability. Houses that seemed hermetically sealed, in whose rooms, with their well-polished furniture and sombre wall-papers, they had for the last fortnight been shaking their heads over a certain officer of the training-ship who had had one or two glasses too many.

The same sky hung over them, a sky limpid as in a dream. But that didn't make any difference. The two worlds were separated by an almost impassable frontier.

Maigret had never seen Popinga, nor even his body, but it was not difficult to picture him. A man with a jolly, rubicund face which betrayed human appetites.

And he could see him standing, so to speak, astride of this frontier, looking enviously at Oosting's boat—at the five-master whose crew had been having a fling in every Soudi American port—or at the Dutch liner home from China, where you could find whole junk-loads of girls, pretty as hell....

While all he was allowed was an English dinghy, well varnished, with fittings of polished brass, in which he might on summer evenings go paddling on the flat waters of the Amsterdiep, threading his way between the tree-trunks which had come from the far North or from equatorial forests.

The Baes was now looking at Maigret, and the latter could not help thinking that the man would have liked to come up to him and speak to him. But it was out of the question. They had not half a dozen words in common.

Oosting knew how hopeless it would be, and remained sitting where he was, his eyes half closed on account of the brightness of the sun. The only sign of his frustration was that he smoked a trifle more quickly.

Cornelius Barends would, at that hour of the morning, be sitting in a class-room trying to grasp some lesson on spherical trigonometry. He probably looked like a washed-out rag.

The inspector was about to sit down on a bronze bollard, when he noticed Pijpekamp coming towards him, holding out his hand.

" Did you find anything in the boat this morning? "

" Nothing. ... But we had to carry out the search as a matter of form."

" Do you suspect the Baes? "

" There's the cap_____ "

" And the cigar! "

" No. The Baes only smokes a pipe. If he does smoke a cigar once in a way, it's never a Manila."

Pijpekamp drew Maigret further on, so as to be out of range of Oosting's eye.

" The compass on board once belonged to a Swedish ship and, the life-buoys to an English collier. ... It's like that with practically everything on board."

" Stolen? "

" Not exactly. At any rate, not stolen by him. When a ship arrives there's generally somebody, an engineer, a third officer, a deck-hand, or even sometimes the captain, who's got something to sell.... Do you see? ... The things are logged as washed overboard or broken.... In one way or another almost anything can be written off, even navigation lights! Of course, with a boat it's easy...."

" So there's nothing unusual about it? "

" Nothing at all. The Jew who has that chandler's shop there gets half his stuff that way."

" So where does that bring us to? "

The Dutchman looked the other way. He seemed embarrassed.

" I told you that Beetje Liewens did not go straight indoors, but followed Poppinga back.... Am I making myself clear? You must tell me when I make mistakes. . . ."

" Yes, yes. . . . Go on. . . ."

" Though of course that doesn't necessarily mean she fired the shot_____"

" A h ! "

Pijpekamp was certainly very far from being at ease. He drew Maigret still further on, to a part of the quay that was deserted. Then, lowering his voice, he went on:

" You know that pile of timber, don't you? . . . The *timmerman* - — I suppose you'd call him a carpenter . . . well . . . the carpenter says he had already seen Beetje and Monsieur Poppinga that evening . . . together. . . ."

" Having a kiss in the dark, I suppose? "

" Yes . . . and it seems to me . . ."

" What? "

" If one person saw them, others might. . . . That young man from the training-ship, for instance—Cornelius Barends. He wants to marry Beetje. We found a photograph of her amongst his kit_____"

" Really? "

" And then Liewens . . . Beetje's father. . . . He's a very influential man, who does cattle-breeding in a big way, exporting even as far as Australia. He is a widower, and she is his only child. . . ."

" So he might have killed Poppinga? "

The Dutchman was so ill at ease that Maigret almost took pity on him. It obviously cost the man a colossal effort to harbour any suspicions against such an influential man, who could export cattle all the way to Australia.

" If he saw them . . . mightn't he have .. , ? "

But Maigret was merciless.

" I f he'd seen what? "

" Seen them by the pile of timber . . . Beetje and Poppinga "

" A h U see"

" Of course this is absolutely confidential."

" Naturally_____And Barends? "

" He could have seen them too. And he could hardly help being jealous.... Still, there's no doubt about one thing, he was back on board ten minutes after the crime. That seems to clear him all right. Ijut still—all the same ... "

•* So it comes to this," said Maigret, with the same gravity as when he had spoken to Jean Duclos, " your suspicions are centred on Beetje's father and this boy Cor."

An awkward silence.

" Though you also suspect Oosting, who left his cap in the bath_____"

Pijpekamp looked discouraged.

" And then, this unknown man who left the stump of a Manila cigar in the dining-room. .. How many tobacconists are there in Delfzijl?"

" Fifteen."

" That certainly doesn't help matters. .. And, lastly, you suspect Professor Duclos."

" With that revolver in his hand ... I really couldn't let him go. .. You understand, don't you? "

" Oh, yes, I understand."

They walked on for fifty yards without anything further being said.

" What do you think about it? " muttered the Groningen detective at last.

" Ah! That's just it. And that's just the difference between us. You've got an idea, in fact a lot of ideas, while I don't as yet think anything at all."

A sudden question:

" Does Beetje Liewens know the Baes? "

" I don't know. I don't think so."

" Does Cor know him? "

Pijpekamp drew his hand across his forehead.

" Perhaps — perhaps not. .. On the whole, I think not. .. But I could find out."

" Do. Try to find out if they had anything to do with each*, other before the crime took place."

" You think . . . ? "

" I tell you I don't think anything. But here's another question ^ Has the Baes a wireless set on that island of his? "

" I've no idea."

" It might be worth while finding out."

It was difficult to say how it had come about, but the case seemed already to have slipped out of the Dutchman's hands and into Maigret's. At all events, the look which Pijpekamp turned on the inspector was very much like a subordinate's.

" You might go into those two points.... I've someone I must go and see. ... "

Pijpekamp was too polite to ask who it was, though his eyes betrayed his curiosity.

" Beetje Liewens," said Maigret. " Which is the shortest way from here? "

" Along the Amsterdiep."

The Delfzijl pilot-boat, a fine steamer of five hundred tons,, turned in a wide circle on the Ems, then headed towards the port. The Baes was on his feet now, pacing up and down his little deck with slow heavy strides that none the less betrayed an inward tension. A hundred yards from him the Quay Rats Club basked lazily in the sun.

6. *The Letters*

ALONG the Amsterdiep, Pijpekamp had said; but for no particular reason Maigret didn't follow his instructions. Instead, he went across the fields.

In the eleven o'clock sun, the farm reminded him strongly of his first visit there, the girl in her shiny black boots in the up-to-date cow-shed, the well-furnished sitting-room, and the teapot standing under its cosy.

The scene was just as quiet today. The limitless horizon breathed peace. It was uninterrupted save by one big red-brown sail. He gazed at it across the meadow. It seemed altogether unreal, floating in the sky, almost as though it were sailing over an ocean of grass.

The dog barked at him, just as it had the first time. It was a good five minutes before the door opened, but even then it was only opened an inch or two, just enough for him to catch a glimpse of the servant's florid face and her check apron.

She was on the point of shutting it again when Maigret hastily asked :

" Mademoiselle Liewens? "

The door opened a little wider. And the servant's head emerged. The garden was between them, as Maigret had remained standing at the gate. In the middle stood the dog, baring its teeth and keeping a watch upon the intruder.

The servant shook her head.

" Isn't she here? .. *Niet hier?* .. "

Maigret had managed to pick up one or two words of Dutch. But the servant only shook her head more emphatically.

" And the master? . . . *Mijnheer?* . . . "

One more head-shake, and the door was shut. But Maigret did not go, and as he stood staring at the house he saw the door move again, though this time only a fraction of an inch. The old servant was no doubt peeping at him.

But what really made him stay there was that he had seen one of the *ciiTtains* move, and he knew that that curtain belonged to Beetje's room. It was difficult to see through the curtain^ but there was certainly a face there. What Maigret saw more clearly was a slight movement of a hand, a movement which might have been no more than a greeting. But Maigret thought it meant more:

" I'm here . . . don't insist. . . look out! . . . "

Three pairs of eyes were upon him. The old servant's behind the door, Beetje's through the curtain, and the dog's. The latter jumped up against the gate, barking. Around them, in the fields, the cows stood so still it was difficult to believe they were alive.

Maigret thought he'd try a little experiment. He was standing two or three yards from the gate; and now he suddenly took two paces forward, exactly as though he was going to jump over it. He couldn't help smiling, for not only was the door closed hurriedly, but the dog slunk back towards the house with its tail between its legs.

With that, the inspector went, taking the path along the Amsterdiep. All he could gather from¹ the welcome he had received was that Beetje was shut up in her room, and that orders had been given that he was not to be admitted.

Thoughtfully he puffed away at his pipe. He looked for a moment at the piles of tree-trunks and timber under the shadow of which Beetje and Conrad Poppinga would stop—often, no doubt—and^ holding their bicycles with one hand, would embrace with the other.

And over all hung this even calm. Such quiet, such serenity—it was almost too perfect, so perfect that it was difficult for a French*

man to believe that life here was life at all. Was it? Or was it all as flat and artificial as a picture post-card?

Everything seemed strange to Maigret. For instance, turning round suddenly, he saw only a few yards from him a high-stemmed boat which he had not seen arriving. He recognized the sail, which was broader than the canal, as the one he had seen only a little earlier far away towards the horizon. It seemed hardly possible that it could have covered the distance in so short a time.

At the helm was a woman who steered with a hip against the tiller, while she held a suckling baby to her breast. A man was sitting astride of the bowsprit, his legs dangling down towards the water, fitting a new martingale.

The boat passed in front of the Wienands's and then the Poppingas'. The mast reached higher than the roofs, and the sail completely blotted out each house in turn.

Maigret stopped again. He hesitated. The Poppingas' servant was scrubbing the doorstep, her head down, her stern in the air. The door was open.

Suddenly realizing that Maigret was behind her, she scrambled hastily to her feet, so nervous that her hand trembled.

" Madame Poppinga? " he asked, pointing towards the interior of the house.

She wanted to go in first, but she hesitated, not knowing what to do with the wet cloth she was holding, which was dripping dirty water. Maigret took advantage of her embarrassment and went straight in. Hearing a man's voice through the drawing-room door, he knocked.

The voice broke off abruptly. Dead silence in the room. As a matter of fact, it was more than silence—suspense would be the better word.

At last there were steps, and a hand touched the handle of the door, which then slowly opened. The first person Maigret saw was Any. It was she who had opened the door, at the same time fixing him with a hard stare. Next he made out the figure of a man standing near the table. He wore fawn-coloured spats, and his suit was of thick broadcloth. Liewens, the farmer.

Lastly, Madame Poppinga, leaning on the mantelpiece, her face buried in her hands.

It was obvious that the new-comer was interrupting some important conversation, perhaps a tense discussion, or even a dispute*

The table was covered by an embroidered table-cloth, on which

letters lay scattered as though they had been flung down in anger or indignation.

The farmer's face showed every sign of animation. But he quickly got his feelings under control, and his features set into a cold hostile reserve.

"I'm afraid I am interrupting you ..." began Maigret.

No one answered. No one said so much as a word. Only Madame Popinga, after a wild look round her, rushed out of the room, and hurried off to the kitchen.

"I am really very sorry to have broken in upon you like this..."

At last Liewens spoke. Turning to Any, he rapped out a few phrases in Dutch, and the inspector could not help asking:

"What does he say?"

"That he'll come back another time. ... That it's high time ..." She broke off, not knowing quite how to put it.

But Maigret came to her rescue.

"That it's high time the French police were taught manners! Something like that, wasn't it? We've run into each other before—this gentleman and I."

The farmer was trying to understand the gist of Maigret's words by watching his features and listening to his intonation.

Meanwhile the inspector's eye had wandered to the letters on the table. He caught sight of the signature at the bottom of one: *Conrad*.

The atmosphere became more tense than ever. The farmer went over to a chair, and picked up his cap that was lying on it. Then he paused. He couldn't, after all, make up his mind to go.

"I suppose he's brought you the letters that your brother-in-law wrote to his daughter?"

"How do you know?"

Good gracious! Wasn't it obvious enough? One could hardly imagine a scene that was easier to reconstruct. The atmosphere was thick and heavy with it... Liewens arriving panting, trying to hold in his fury. Liewens shown into the drawing-room, politely asked to take a seat by the two frightened women... But instead of sitting down he would burst out with all his pent-up wrath, flinging the letters down on to the table...

And Madame Popinga, not knowing what to say, not knowing what to do, hiding her face in her hands, inwardly refusing to believe the evidence that was spread out under her eyes. ...

And Any, feebly arguing, trying to hold her own against the angry farmer.

That was where they'd got to when Maigret had knocked and they'd all stood, still as statues, till Any had walked stiffly over to open the door.



But the inspector's reconstruction was not so accurate as all that. On one point he was wrong. Madame Poppinga had more fight in her than he supposed. He had imagined her collapsed in the kitchen, a nerveless wreck. But the next moment she was back in the room, in a state of outward calmness such as is possible to some people when they are strung up to the highest pitch of emotion.

Slowly she too laid some letters on the table. She did not throw them down. She laid them down. She looked at the farmer and then at the detective. Two or three times she opened her mouth before she was able to utter a sound, but when at last she did, she spoke quietly, gravely:

"Someone must judge. . . . You must read these letters. . . ."

Instantly the farmer's face flushed scarlet. He was too controlled to pounce upon the letters, but he seemed almost giddy with the effort to hold himself back.

A woman's writing. . . . Elegant blue paper. . . . Unmistakably they were the letters Beetje had written to Conrad.

One thing struck the eye at once. The disproportion in number between hers to him and his to her. The latter could hardly have amounted to more than ten. They were written on a single sheet, and were generally no more than four or five lines in length.

Beetje's letters must have been quite three times that number. They were long and closely written.

Conrad was dead. There remained this unequal correspondence, and the stacks of wood that had witnessed their meetings along the banks of the Amsterdiep.

"We must take it quietly," said Maigret. "There's no use reading these letters in anger."

The farmer looked at him so acutely that Maigret felt sure he understood. He took a step towards the table.

Maigret leant over it too. At random he picked out one of Conrad's letters.

"Will you be kind enough to translate it for me, Mademoiselle Any?"

But the girl didn't seem to hear. She merely stared at it, till finally her sister took it from her hands.

"It was written from the training-ship/" she said, gravely and with dignity. "There's no date, only the time, six o'clock, and then:

"My little Beetje,—It would be better if you did not come this evening because my chief is coming for a cup of tea with us.

"Till tomorrow. Love."

Madame Poppinga looked round her with an air of calm defiance. She picked up another letter. Slowly she read:

"Pretty little Beetje,—You must calm yourself. Life is long and there's lots of time ahead. I've a lot of work on hand just now because of the exams. I shan't be able to come this evening.

"Why are you always accusing me of not loving you? You don't expect me to chuck up the training-ship, do you? What could we do?

"Don't get excited. We've plenty of time before us. With an affectionate kiss ..."

Maigret waved his hand as much as to say that they had heard enough. But Madame Poppinga took up another.

"There's this one," she said. "I think it must be the last he wrote.

"My Beetje,—It's quite impossible. Do please be reasonable. You know I have no money and that it might take ages to find a post abroad.

"Don't let yourself get so worked up. You must have confidence in the future. Everything will come right.

"Don't be frightened. If what you fear happened, I wouldn't let you down.

"I'm afraid I am rather irritable as I have so much work to do, and when I think of you, work goes badly. Yesterday I was hauled over the coals about something, and I'm rather upset about it.

"I'll try and get off tomorrow evening on some pretext or other."



Madame Poppinga looked from one to the other of the people standing round her. Her eyes were dim. She looked tired, dead

tired. But she stretched out her hand towards the other pile of letters, the ones she had brought in herself. The farmer winced.

She picked up the first one she touched, and opening it, read:

" Dear Conrad, whom I love,—Here's some good news for you. As a birthday present Papa has put another thousand florins into my banking account. That's enough to take us to America, for I have looked in the paper to see how much it costs. We could go third class, couldn't we?

" But why aren't you more anxious to be off? I live for nothing else. Everything in Holland is suffocating to me. And I can't help thinking that the people in Delfzijl already look at me in a disapproving way.

" At the same time I'm immeasurably happy and so proud to belong to a man like you.

" We absolutely must be off before the holidays, as Papa wants me to spend a month with him in Switzerland, and I don't want to. If we don't get off soon we'll be stuck here till the winter.

" I've bought some English books, and I already understand quite a lot of words.

" Quick! Quick! There's a marvellous life for the two of us. Don't you think so? I'm sure of it. . . . We can't stay here any longer. It would be worse than ever now. I think Madame Popinga hates the sight of me, and I am bothered to death by Cornelius, who won't leave me alone. Try as I will, I can't shake him off. He's a nice boy—such good manners. But what a fool! . . .

" Besides, he's only a boy. So different from you who have been all over the world and know so many things. . . .

" Do you remember—it's just a year ago now—when we met for the first time? and you didn't even look at me.

" And to think that now I may be going to have a baby—and it will be yours . . . at any rate I could . . .

" But why are you so cool? You're not getting tired of me, are you?"



The letter was not yet finished, but Madame Popinga's voice had become so weak that finally she broke off. She fumbled for a moment amongst the pile of letters, apparently looking for a particular one.

Having found it, she plunged straight into the middle of it, reading out:

"... and I am beginning to think that you're fonder of your wife than of me. I'm beginning to be jealous of her, to hate her. ... Otherwise, why do you refuse to take me away at once? ..."

All this was translated into French, of which the farmer did not understand a word, but his attention was riveted so closely on what she was reading that he seemed to guess the sense.

Madame Popinga swallowed, then picked up another sheet. Her voice was firmer as she went on:

"I've heard it said that Cor was more in love with Madame Popinga than with me. Indeed, they seem to hit it off perfectly together. ... If only things could develop along those lines! Wouldn't that be a magnificent solution? Our consciences would be clear ..."

The sheet of paper slipped from her hand, gliding down to rest on the floor at Any's feet.

The latter stared at it vacantly, and once more there was a silence in the room. Madame Popinga was not weeping. She was none the less a tragic figure, tragic with controlled suffering, with dignity purchased at the price of intense effort—made tragic too by the high feelings which governed her.

She was defending her husband's good name. She waited for a further attack, bracing herself to meet it.

"When did you discover those letters?" asked Maigret, not without embarrassment.

"The day after he was ..."

She choked. She opened her mouth to gasp. Her eyelids swelled.

"The day after..."

"Yes, I understand."

Maigret looked at her with pity. She was not beautiful, though she had quite good features, without any of the blemishes that ruined Any's looks.

She was tall, full in the figure without being stout. A fine head of hair framed the face that, like so many Dutch women, was high in colour.

But many an ugly face had more charm, more piquancy. For all over her face an immense dullness was written. In it was no trace

of impulsiveness. Her smile was a wise, measured smile, and if she ever experienced joy, it could only be a wise and measured joy.

At the age of six she must have been a model child. At sixteen she must have been just what she was today—one of those women who seem born to be sisters or aunts, nurses or nuns, or widows busying themselves with charities.

Conrad was gone, yet Maigret had never been so conscious of his vitality, his ruddy jovial face, his eagerness to taste all the good things of life—and yet with his timidity, his fear of hurting anybody's feelings. Conrad turning the knobs of his wireless set, wistfully switching from Parisian jazz to Hungarian gypsy music or Viennese musical comedies, or even picking up messages in Morse from ships on the high seas. . . .

Any came up to her sister, as though the latter was in need of comfort or support. But, waving her aside, Madame Popinga took two or three steps towards the inspector.

"It had never entered my mind . . ." she said, hardly above a whisper. "Never! . . . I was living . . . in such peace . . . and then at his death to find . . ."

He guessed from the way she was breathing that she suffered from some disease of the heart. The next moment she confirmed it by standing motionless for quite a time with a hand pressed to her chest.

Someone moved. It was the farmer, a hard wild look in his eye, who had come up to the table and was gathering up his daughter's letters, nervously, as a thief who fears to be interrupted.

But Madame Popinga did not attempt to stop him. Nor did Maigret.

Even when he had them, he did not turn to go. He began speaking, though he did not seem to be addressing anybody in particular. More than once Maigret caught the word *Frav[ose]*, and it seemed to him that he could at that moment understand Dutch, just as Liewens had apparently been understanding those letters that had been translated into French.

What he heard, or thought he heard, was:

"Do you really think it's necessary to tell all this to a Frenchman? "

His cap dropped to the floor. He stopped to pick it up, bowed to Any, who was between him and the door—but to her only—then went out, muttering a few words that probably no one heard.

The maid must have finished washing the doorstep, for they could hear the front door open and shut, then steps fading away into the distance.

In spite of her sister's presence, Maigret began questioning Madame Poppinga again, speaking with a gentleness of which he would hardly have thought himself capable.

" Had you already shown those letters to your sister? "

" No. But when that man —"

" Where were they? "

" In a drawer of his desk.... A drawer I never opened. Only, I knew he kept his revolver there."

Any said something in Dutch, and Madame Poppinga, speaking listlessly, translated:

" My sister tells me I ought to go to bed. I haven't had a wink of sleep these last three nights. . . . He would never have gone. . . . Perhaps he lost his head for a moment, but it was never more than that. He liked to laugh; he loved games.... All sorts of things come back to me that I took no notice of at the time. Everything looks different now. Beetje coming with fruit and cakes she'd made herself. I always thought they were for me. . . . Then she'd come and ask us to play tennis. Always at a moment when she knew I'd have something else to do. I didn't see it. I didn't want to think evil, and I was so glad for Conrad to have a bit of fun. . . . You see, he worked so hard and I knew he must find Delfzijl rather dull. . . . Last year she nearly came to Paris with us. And it was I who was pressing her to."

She spoke simply, with such lassitude that there was hardly room for any rancour.

" He didn't want to leave me. You understood, didn't you? .. He never wished to hurt anyone. Never. . . . More than once he got into trouble by marking too generously in exams.... My father was always holding that up against him."

She adjusted the position of an ornament on the mantelpiece, a trivial homely gesture, which seemed altogether incongruous under the circumstances.

" And now, all I want is to know it's finished. They haven't yet given permission for him to be buried.. .. You understand, don't you? I don't know how to explain it Let them give him back to me, and God can punish the murderer...."

She was getting worked up. Her voice rang out more clearly.

" Yes. . . . That's what I believe. . . . Things like that—what can

we know about them? ... All we can do is to leave them to God....

She shivered as an idea suddenly struck her. Pointing outside, she went on breathlessly:

"Perhaps he'll kill her. ... He's capable of it... That would be awful. ..."

Any looked at her with even a touch of impatience. No doubt she considered all this a waste of words. In a calm voice she intervened:

"What do you think about the case now, Inspector?"

"Nothing!"

She did not pursue the question, but she looked put out.

"You see," went on Maigret, "there's Oosting's cap. We mustn't forget it. You've heard Professor Duclos's views, haven't you? And you've no doubt read the works of Grosz, which he talks about... One rule above all others; never let yourself be lured away by psychological considerations. Keep to the material evidence and follow wherever it may lead you, right to the end. ..."

It was impossible to tell whether he was sneering or serious.

"And there they are: a cap, and the stump of a cigar. Someone brought them here, or threw them in from outside..."

"I can't believe that Oosting..." began Madame Poppinga, speaking more to herself than the others.

Then, suddenly looking up, she went on:

"That reminds me of something I had forgotten. ..."

But she broke off as though fearing to have said too much, and afraid of the effect her words might have.

"What is it?"

"Nothing. ... Nothing of any importance...."

"Do tell us. Please."

"When Conrad used to go seal-shooting on the sandbanks of Workum ..."

"Well? ..."

"Beetje would go with them. She was always ready for anything like that. And here in Holland we allow girls lots of liberties. ..."

** Were they away for the night?"

"Sometimes a night, sometimes two...."

She waved a hand as though trying to drive the vision away.

"No! ... I mustn't think of it. ... It's too awful... too awful. ..."

And now the tears came welling up. The sobs were there ready to rend her. But before they came, Any placed her hands on her sister's shoulders and pushed her gently out of the room.

7. *Pijpekamp's Luncheon*

WHEN Maigret arrived at his hotel he sensed at once that something unusual was afoot.

The evening before, he had had dinner at the table next to the professor's. But now three places had been laid on the round table in the middle of the room. The table-cloth was snowy white and the creases had not yet gone flat. Moreover, three glasses had been set for each person, and that was a thing which in Holland was only done on grand occasions.

As soon as he crossed the threshold the inspector was greeted by Pijpekamp, who came forward to meet him with outstretched hand. The smile on his face was that of a man who has a pleasant surprise in store.

He was dressed in his very best. A collar that must have been three inches high. A morning-coat. He was closely shaved, and appeared to have come straight from the barber's hands, as the place reeked of violet hair-lotion.

The Dutchman's flamboyancy was not shared by Jean Duclos, who stood behind him looking ill at ease.

"You must excuse me, Inspector," said Pijpekamp, glowing. "I ought to have let you know beforehand. . . . I should have liked to invite you to my home, but Groningen is some way off. Besides, I'm a bachelor. So I thought we'd better have it here. Nothing formal, of course. Just a little *dejeunet* together . . . the three of us. . . ."

As he spoke he looked at the table with its nine glasses. Obviously he was expecting Maigret to make some protest.

But no protest came.

"I thought that, as the professor was a countryman of yours, you would be glad to . . ."

"Of course! Of course!" said Maigret. "Just a moment, while I wash my hands. . . ."

He washed them slowly, with a sulky look on his face. From the lavatory, he could hear people bustling about in the kitchen, and the clatter of plates and saucepans.

When he rejoined the others, Pijpekamp himself was pouring out some port. With an ecstatic smile on his face he murmured modestly:

"Just what you do in France, isn't it? . . . *Prosit !* . . . or rather I should say, *Sante mon cher colleague*. . . ."

He was quite touching. He meant so very well. He trotted out the most elegant phraseology he could find in French, anxious to show himself a man of the world to his finger-tips.

"I ought to have invited you yesterday.... But I was so ... what shall I say? ... so upset by this business. ... Have you found out anything? "

"Nothing!"

There was a little sparkle in the Dutchman's eye, and Maigret thought:

"Ah, my fine fellow! You've got a trump up your sleeve, and you're going to play it over the dessert. ... That is, if you can hold yourself in that long."

He wasn't wrong.

First came tomato soup, and with it *Saint-Emilion*. The wine had certainly been faked for export, and was so sweet as to be positively sickly.

"*Sante!* " toasted Pijpekamp once again.

Poor Pijpekamp! He was doing his utmost to play the host properly. More than his utmost. Yet Maigret didn't seem to appreciate it. Didn't even seem to notice it!

"In Holland we never drink with meals . . . only afterwards. ... In the course of the evening—that is, at grand receptions—they serve a small glass of wine with the cigars. . . . Another point on which we differ from you: we never put bread on the table_____"

He looked proudly at the chunks of bread he had had the foresight to order, and equally proudly at the bottle of port, which stood in the centre of the table. He had chosen it with great pains, to take the place of the native schnapps.

What more could he have done? He had left no stone unturned to provide all the requisites for gaiety. Looking tenderly at the *Saint-Emilion*, he grew quite pink. Jean Duclos ate in silence, his thoughts apparently elsewhere.

Really it was a shame these two Frenchmen couldn't enter **into** the spirit of it. Pijpekamp had looked forward to this lunch as one that would be sparkling with wit, with *verve*, with *d'an*, **and** all the other things he could think of as being pre-eminently Parisian.

He had, nevertheless, considered that a national dish would be proper to the feast. So the *hutschpot* was brought on, the meat swimming in an ocean of sauce. With an arch expression he said:

" You must tell me what you think of it."

But no! Maigret was not in the right mood. As a matter of fact, he was genuinely preoccupied, trying to guess what it was all about. Certainly there was a mystery somewhere.

Of one thing he felt pretty sure. There was some kind of secret understanding between the Dutch detective and Jean Duclos. Every time his host filled up his glass he seemed to cast a significant glance at the professor.

The Burgundy was warming beside the stove.

" I expected you to be much more of a wine-drinker. Don't you drink much wine? "

" It all depends____ "

Another thing that was certain was that Jean Duclos was far from feeling happy about it. He took little part in the conversation. He sipped rather nervously at his mineral water, having refused the wine on the grounds that he was dieting.

Pijpekamp was finding it very hard work, though not so much to keep the ball rolling—for the wine helped him there—as to prevent its rolling too far. It would spoil the effect if he played his trump too soon. It was hard to wait, but he held out quite a long time. He spoke of the beauty of the harbour, of the amount of traffic carried by the Ems, of the University of Groningen, where the greatest scholars in Europe came every year to lecture.

Then at last:

" By the way," he said, trying to sound casual, " I've some news for you.... "

" Really? "

" Your health, Inspector!. .. And a health to the French police force!. . Yes, there's some news to tell you. In fact, I might say that the mystery is practically solved.. . ."

Maigret looked at him stolidly with glaucous eyes, eyes in which there was not the faintest trace of either excitement or curiosity.

" At ten o'clock this morning I was told that someone wanted to see me. Who do you think it was? ... "

" Cornelius Barens.... Go on."

It was too bad! Pijpekamp was thoroughly crestfallen to see his trump producing so little effect upon his guest. And after all the trouble he had taken!

" How did you know? ... I suppose someone told you? "

" Nothing of the sort! . . . What did he want? "

" You know him, don't you? ... A shy boy. Secretive, I should think. He couldn't look me in the face, and he seemed all the time on the verge of tears.... He confessed that when he left the Poppingas' house he did not return at once on board the training-ship."

Pijpekamp was regaining confidence with the sound of his own voice. He looked knowingly at Maigret, and in a more confidential tone went on :

" Do you see? . . . He's in love with Beetje. And he was jealous,, because Beetje had been dancing that evening with Poppinga. And he was annoyed with her for drinking a glass of cognac....

" He watched them leave together. He even followed them a bit, though of course, as he was on foot, they soon outdistanced him* Then he hung about waiting for Poppinga to return. • . ."

Maigret was merciless. He knew perfectly well that the Dutchman would give anything in the world for some sign of astonishment or admiration. But his face betrayed neither.

" Cornelius took a little coaxing, as he was afraid, but finally he told me everything. And here it is. . . . Immediately after the shot was fired, he saw a man running towards the stacks of timber, behind which he took cover. ... "

" I suppose he described the man minutely? "

" Yes."

Pijpekamp's recovery had been short-lived. He looked dejectedly at Maigret, having lost all hope of seeing him taken aback. His well-prepared surprise was nothing but a damp squib.

" A sailor. A foreigner.... A tall, thin, clean-shaven man* . . ."

" And there was a boat, no doubt, that left next morning? "

" Three have left since then," said Pijpekamp, struggling on as bravely as he could. " It really clears the case up, as far as we are concerned. There's no longer any point in looking for the murderer at Delfzijl. . . . Some foreigner killed him. Probably a sailor who had known Poppinga when he was at sea, perhaps

somebody who served under him, and who had an old score to pay off."

Jean Duclos looked woodenly at the opposite wall, avoiding Maigret's eye. Madame Van Hasselt, in her best clothes, was sitting at the cash-desk. Pijpekamp made a sign to her to bring another bottle.

The meal was not over. On the contrary, its crowning triumph was only now brought on, a cake garnished with three different sorts of creams, the final touch being given by the name of Delfzijl in chocolate letters.

The Dutchman modestly lowered his eyes.

" Perhaps you would like to cut it "

" Did you arrest Cor? "

Pijpekamp started, staring at Maigret as though the latter was taking leave of his senses.

" But . . . What for? . . . "

" If you've no objection, we might question him together presently."

" It can easily be arranged. I'll telephone to the training-ship."

" And while you're about it, you might also arrange for Oosting to be brought along. We'll have some questions for him too."

" About the cap? . . . That's easily explained now. A sailor, passing his boat, saw the cap lying on the deck. It wouldn't take him a second to pinch it."

" Of course not. . . . "

Pijpekamp could have wept. Maigret's sarcasm, though it wasn't laid on thick, was unmistakable. In his agitation, Pijpekamp bumped into the side of the doorway as he went into the telephone box.

The inspector was left alone with Jean Duclos, whose eyes were now glued on his plate.

" While you were about it, you might have told him to slip a few florins discreetly into my hand."

The words were spoken quite gently, without any bitterness at all. Duclos raised his head, and opened his mouth to protest.

" Come, come! . . . We've no time to argue about it. . . . You told him to give me a good dinner and plenty to drink with it. You told him that was the way to get round officials in France . . . Please don't interrupt me And that after that he could do just as he liked with me."

" I assure you . . . "

But Maigret, lighting his pipe, turned round towards Pijpekamp,

who was returning from the telephone box. Looking at the table, the latter stammered:

" You won't refuse a little glass of cognac, will you? They've some good stuff here."

" If you don't mind, it's my turn now," said Maigret, in a tone that tolerated no opposition. " Only, as I don't speak Dutch, I must ask you to order it for me. A bottle of cognac and some glasses."

Pijpekamp meekly interpreted:

" But those glasses won't do," went on Maigret as Madame Van Hasselt came bustling up.

And he got up and went himself to fetch some bigger ones. Placing them on the table, he filled them right up to the rim.

" A toast for you, gentlemen," he said gravely. " The Dutch police! ... "

The stuff was so strong it brought tears to Pijpekamp's eyes. But Maigret, with a smile on his face, gave no quarter. Again and again he raised his glass, repeating:

" Your health, Monsieur Pijpekamp!... To the Dutch police! ... "

And then he added:

" At what time are you expecting Cor at the police station? "

" In half an hour's time... . May I offer you a cigar? "

" Thanks, I'd rather smoke my pipe."

Once more Maigret filled up the three glasses, doing it with such authority that neither Pijpekamp nor Duclos dared say a word.

" It's a lovely day," he said two or three times over. " I may be greatly mistaken, but somehow I've got the impression that before the day is out poor Popinga's murderer will be under lock and key."

" Unless he's steaming across the Baltic," answered Pijpekamp.

" Oh! Go on! . . . You don't think he'd be as far as all that? "

Duclos turned a pale face on the inspector.

" Is that an insinuation? " he asked acidly.

" What should I be insinuating? "

" You seem to suggest that, if he isn't far, he might be very close indeed."

" What an imagination you have, Professor! "

It might easily have degenerated into a quarrel. Perhaps the large glasses of brandy had something to do with it. Pijpekamp was scarlet, his eyes glistening.

It took Duclos another way, its effect upon him showing outwardly in a morbid pallor.

"A final glass, gentlemen, and then we'll go and put that wretched boy through the hoop."

He picked up the bottle again. With each glass he poured out, Madame Van Hasselt moistened the point of her pencil, and jotted them down in her book.



Leaving the hotel, they plunged into an atmosphere heavy with calm and sunshine. Oosting's boat was in its place. Pijpekamp seemed to find it necessary to hold himself much more stiffly than usual.

They had only some three hundred yards to go. The streets were deserted. So were the clean, well-stocked shops, which looked like the booths of some international exhibition which was just about to open its doors.

Pijpekamp summoned all his faculties in a last despairing effort* Turning to Maigret, he said :

" It will be practically impossible to find the sailor, but it's a good thing we know it's him, for it clears everybody else of suspicion. ... I shall be making a report, and as soon as that's done there ought to be no objection to the professor's going on with his lecture tour."

He strode into the Delfzijl police station with more than a suspicion of a stagger, bumping against a table and then sitting down far too emphatically.

Not that he was actually drunk. But the alcohol had bereaved him of that smoothness and gentleness which characterize the majority of Dutchmen.

He waved an arm, pressed a button, then tilted back his chair. The bell was answered by a policeman in uniform, to whom he gave some brief orders in Dutch. The man disappeared, returning a moment later with Cornelius.

Pijpekamp received him with an almost exaggerated cordiality, but that did not in any way reassure the boy, who, the moment he caught sight of Maigret, felt the ground sink from beneath his feet.

" There are a few little points we'd like to get cleared up," said Pijpekamp in French, " and my colleague would like to ask you one or two questions."

Maigret was in no hurry. He walked quietly up and down the room, puffing away at his pipe, before saying:

"Look here, Barends my boy!... What was it the Baes was talking to you about last night?"

The cadet turned his thin face this way and that, like a frightened bird.

"I . . . I think . . ."

"Good! Perhaps I'd better help you. . . . You've got a father, haven't you? Somewhere out in India, I think. . . . It would be a fearful blow to him if anything happened to you, if you got into trouble in any way. . . . I don't know what it might be, but, in a case like this, perjury, for instance, would be a very serious offence. . . . It would mean prison. . . ."

Cornelius stood rigid now, not daring to move, not daring to look at anybody, hardly daring to breathe.

"Oosting was waiting for you last night by the Amsterdiep. . . . And now, confess that it was he who put you up to it, who told you to tell the police what you've told them... . Come on! Out with it! You never saw a tall thin man near the Poppingas' house, did you?"

"I. . . I. . ."

But he had not the strength to go on. He crumpled up, burst into tears.

And Maigret looked first at Jean Duclos, then at Pijpekamp, with that ponderous impenetrable stare which sometimes led people to take him for a fool. For it was a stare that was so utterly stagnant as to seem empty.

"You think . . . ?" began Pijpekamp.

"What can one think? Look at him!"

The contrast between Cor's unformed figure and the uniform he was wearing made him appear almost childish. He was blowing his nose and trying to hold back the sobs. At last he succeeded in stammering:

"I haven't done anything. . . ."

No one spoke for a moment. All eyes were watching Cornelius struggling to get control of himself.

"I never said you'd done anything," said Maigret at last. "Oosting asked you to pretend you'd seen a stranger round the house. . . . I expect he told you that was the only way to save some person.. . . Who?"

"I swear . . . by all that's holy . . . he didn't say who. . . . I don't know. I haven't the least idea. . . . I wish I were dead."

" Of course you do. At eighteen one often wishes one was dead. ... Have you any further questions, Monsieur Pijpekamp? "

The latter shrugged his shoulders in a way which showed he was quite out of his depth.

" That's all right, little one! You can run along now."

" It's not Beetje, anyhow... ."

" I dare say you're right, but now be off with you and get back on board."

And he pushed him roughly, but not unkindly, out of the room.

" And now for the other," he growled. " Is Oosting here? ... If only he could speak French! "

The bell was rung again, and a little later the policeman brought in the Baes, who held his new cap in one hand and his pipe in the other.

He threw a look, a single look, at Maigret. And, strangely enough it was a look of reproach. Then he walked up and stood in front of Pijpekamp's desk.

" If you wouldn't mind asking him . . . Where was he when Poppinga was killed? "

Pijpekamp translated. Oosting replied with a long rigmarole, which Maigret could not get the hang of at all. But that did not prevent him cutting in with:

" No. Stop him! I want an answer in three words."

When that was translated there was another reproachful look from the Baes.

" He was on board his boat," said Pijpekamp, translating the reply.

" Tell him it isn't true."

And Maigret went on pacing up and down, his hands clasped behind his back.

" What does he say to that? "

" He swears he was."

" All right. In that case he can tell you how his cap was stolen."

Pijpekamp was now merely an interpreter. He was docility itself. He hadn't much choice. Maigret gave such an impression of power that there was no question of taking the lead out of his hands.

"Well?"

" He was in his cabin. He was doing his accounts. Looking through the port-holes in the coaming of the coach-roof, he saw the legs of someone standing on deck. Trousers. Sailor trousers... •"

" Did he follow the man? "

When that question reached him, Oosting hesitated with half-closed eyes. Then he started speaking volubly, impatiently.

" What's he saying? "

" He admits he wasn't telling the truth at first. But now he wants to tell everything. He knows his own innocence is bound to be established . . . When he came up on deck, the sailor was already making off. He followed, keeping his distance. The man led him along the Amsterdiep to the neighbourhood of the Poppingas' house, where he hid among the stacks of timber. Wondering what it was all about, Oosting hid in turn."

" And later, he heard the shot fired? "

" Yes.... But he couldn't catch the man, who ran away."

" He saw him enter the house? "

" Into the garden, at any rate. . . . He thinks he must have climbed up to the first floor by means of the drain-pipe."

Maigret smiled. A vague happy smile of a man who has dined well and whose digestion is excellent.

" Would he recognize the man again? "

Translation. A shrug of the shoulders from the Baes.

" He's not sure."

" Did he see Barens spying on Beetje and Poppinga? "

" Yes."

" And as he was afraid of being accused himself, he thought the best way to put the police on the right track was to get Cor to tell them? "

" Exactly. That's what he says. . . . But I oughtn't to believe him, ought I? . . . Of course he's guilty—I can see that now."

Jean Duclos was fidgeting with impatience. Oosting, on the other hand, was perfectly calm, like a man who is prepared for the worst. He spoke again, and the Dutch detective promptly translated.

" He says we can do what we like with him now, but he wants us to know that Poppinga Was his friend and benefactor."

" And what are you going to do with him? "

" I shall have to detain him. . . . He admits he was there. . . ."

The effect of the cognac had not worn off. Pijpekamp's voice was louder than usual, his gestures more jerky, his decisions more abrupt. He wanted to appear a man who knew how to make up his mind. He was no longer the docile interpreter. Now that the case was obvious, he would show this foreigner what the Dutch police was worth.

His face lengthened. He looked important. Once more he rang the bell.

When the policeman hurried in, he gave orders sticcinctly, at the same time tapping on the table with his paper-knife.

" Arrest this man. . . . Loci him up. . . . I'll see him again later."

The orders were given in Dutch, but there was no need for translation now.

With that he got up, saying:

" It won't be long before we have the whole thing cleared up. I will certainly mention the assistance you've given us. . . . Your countryman is free to go, and I greatly regret h#tour should have been interrupted."

He spoke with the utmost self-assurance. It would have given him a shock to know what Maigret was thinking:

" You're going to regret this, my lad! You're going to regret it bitterly, when you've had time to cool down!"

Pijpekamp opened the door, but Maigret was in no hurry to take his leave.

" I'd like to ask you just one thing more," he began, in the sweetest of tones.

" Certainly, my dear fellow. What is it? "

" It's not yet four. . . . Perhaps this evening we might reconstruct the crime, with all the people present who were directly or indirectly mixed up in it. . . . You might jot down the names, will you? . . . Madame Popinga, Any, Monsieur Duclos, Barens, the Wienands, Beetje, Oosting, and lastly Monsieur Liewens, Beetje's father."

" What do you want to do? "

" I want to go through the evening step by step, from the moment the professor finished his lecture at the *Hotel Van Hasselt*"

A pause. Pijpekamp was thinking it over.

" I must telephone to Groningen," he said finally, " and ask them whether it's all right. . . . But I'm afraid there'll be one person missing—Conrad Popinga. . . ."

Then, fearing the joke was in bad taste, he shot a furtive glance at the two Frenchmen. But Maigret took it quite seriously.

" Don't bother about that," he said. " I'll take Popinga's part myself."

Then, as he turned to go, he added:

" And many thanks for the excellent lunch."

8. *Beetje and Her Father*

INSTEAD of going "through the town from the police station to the *Hotel Van Hasselt*, Maigret went round by the quays, accompanied by Jean Duclos, whose face and whole demeanour* radiated bad temper.

"I suppose you know," he said at last, "that you're making yourself most objectionable?"

As he spoke his eyes were fixed on the crane, whose hoist swung only a foot or two above their heads.

"In what way."

Duclos shrugged his shoulders and took several steps before answering.

"Is it possible you don't understand? Perhaps you don't want to. . . . You're like all French people. . . ."

"I thought we were both French."

"With this difference, however, that I have travelled widely. In fact, I think I could justly call myself a European rather than a Frenchman. Wherever I go I can fall into the ways of the country. While you . . . you simply crash straight through everything regardless of the consequences, blind to everything that requires a little discrimination...."

"Without stopping to wonder, for instance, whether or not it's desirable that the murderer should be caught!"

"Why shouldn't you stop to wonder?" burst out the professor. "Why shouldn't you discriminate? . . . This isn't a dirty crime. It isn't the work of a professional killer or any other sort of regular criminal. The question of robbery hasn't arisen.... In other words, the person who did it is not necessarily a danger to society...."

"In which case . . . ?"

Maigret was smoking his pipe with obvious relish, striding along easily, his hands behind his back.

"You've only got to look about you—" said Duclos, with a wave of the hand which embraced the scene around them. The tidy little town where everything was arranged as neatly as in a good housewife's cupboard. The harbour too small to have any of the grimness that so often belongs to ports. Happy, serene people clattering along in their yellow sabots.

Then he went on:

"Everybody earns his living. Everybody's more or less content.

Everybody holds his instincts in check because his neighbour does the same, and that's the basis of all social life. . . . Pijpekamp will tell you that theft is of rare occurrence here, partly because when it does occur it's severely punished. For stealing a loaf of bread you don't get off with less than a few weeks in prison.... Do you see any signs of disorder? ..". None. No tramps. No beggars.... It's the very embodiment of cleanliness and order. . . ."

" And I've crashed in like a bull in a china-shop! Is that it? "

" Look at those houses over there on the left, near the Amsterdiep. That's where the best people live. People of wealth, or at any rate of substance. People who have power or influence in the locality. Everybody knows them. They include the Mayor, the clergy, teachers and officials, all whose business it is to see that the town is kept quiet and peaceful, to see that everybody keeps to his proper place without damaging his neighbour's interests. . . . These people—as I've told you before—don't even allow themselves to enter a cafe for fear of setting a bad example. . . . And now a crime has been committed—and the moment you poke your nose in, you sniff some family scandal... ."

Maigret listened while watching the boats whose decks were higher than the quay, for it was high tide.

" I don't know what Pijpekamp thinks about it. He is a very respected man, by the way. All I know is that it would have been far better for everybody if it had been given out that Poppinga had been killed by a foreign sailor and that the police were pursuing their investigations. . . . Yes. Far better for everybody. Better for Madame Poppinga. Better for her family, particularly for her father, who is a man of considerable repute in the intellectual world. Better for Beetje and for her father. Above all, better for the public welfare, for the people in all these other houses who look respectfully at all that goes on in the big houses by the Amsterdiep, looking for an example... . Whatever is done over there, they'll want to do the same. .. . And you . . . you want truth for truth's sake, or rather for the personal satisfaction of unravelling your little mystery."

" You're putting it in your own words, Professor, but in substance what you say is what Pijpekamp said to you this morning. Isn't that so? . . . And he asked your advice as to the best method of calming my unseemly zeal.... And you told him that in France people like myself are disposed of with a hearty meal, or even with a tip."

" We didn't go into details."

" Do you know what I think, Monsieur Duclos? "

Maigret had stopped and was looking round him at the harbour. A little bumboat, its motor making a noise like a fusillade, was plying from ship to ship, selling bread, spices, tobacco, pipes, and schnapps.

" What is it? "

" I think you're lucky to have come out of the bathroom holding the revolver in your hand."

" What do you mean by that? "

" Nothing. . . . But I'd like you to assure me once more that you saw nobody in the bathroom."

" I saw nobody."

" And you heard nothing? "

Duclos looked away. Maigret repeated the question.

" I didn't hear anything definite. . . . It's only a vague impression, but there might have been a sound coming from under the lid of the bath. . . ."

" Excuse me, I must be off. . . . I think that's somebody waiting for me."

Maigret strode off towards the entrance of the *Hotel Van Hasselt*. On the pavement in front of it Beetje Liewens was walking up and down, obviously waiting for his return.



She tried to give him her usual smile, but without much success. She was obviously nervous, throwing glances up and down the street as though fearing to be surprised.

" I've been waiting for you nearly half an hour."

" Won't you come in? "

" Not in the café. Could we go somewhere else? "

In the corridor Maigret hesitated a second. He couldn't very well take her up to his room. So he pushed open the door of the long empty room which served for balls and other festivities, the room where the professor's lecture had taken place the week before.

By the light of day it looked dusty and prosaic. The piano was open. A big drum stood in one corner. Chairs were stacked one on top of the other reaching to the ceiling. The walls were hung with paper garlands which must have served for some subscription dance.

Maigret took Beetje in and closed the door behind him. Their

steps echoed in the emptiness. In spite of her nervousness, Beetje looked as seductive as ever in a blue tailored suit and a white blouse.

" So you've managed to escape? "

She didn't answer at once. Evidently she had a lot to say and didn't know where to begin.

" Yes, I got out," she said at last. " I couldn't bear it any longer. I was afraid. The servant came and told me that my father was furious. She thought he was in such a state he might even kill me. . . . Last night we went into the house together without speaking. He led me to my room and locked the door without saying so much as a word. He's always like that when he's angry. . . . This afternoon the servant came and talked to me through the keyhole. She told me he had been out and come back about twelve o'clock, white in the face. He had his lunch, then he'd walked round the farm, striding like a man possessed. . . . Finally he went and visited my mother's grave. . . .

" He always goes there whenever he's got an important decision to make. . . . Then I got out by the window. . . .

" I don't want to go back. . . . I'm afraid to. . . . You don't know my father."

" One question . . . " interrupted Maigret.

And he looked at the little bag in Maigret's hand that she was holding.

" How much money did you bring away with you? "

" I don't know. . . . Something like five hundred florins."

" Which you had in your room? "

She reddened, stammering:

" They were in the bureau. . . . I thought of going to the station. But there's always a policeman there. . . . Then I thought of you_____ "

They were standing there, much as they might have stood in a station waiting-room. It was a place where ease and intimacy were impossible. They didn't even think of taking two chairs down from the stack.

If Beetje was nervous, she was nevertheless not the one to lose her head. Perhaps it was for that reason that Maigret looked at her with a certain hostility. It showed in his voice as he asked suddenly:

" How many men have you asked to elope with you? "

The question staggered her. She looked down, muttering:

" What do you say? "

" First of all, Poppinga.... At least, was he the first? "

" I don't understand."

" I asked if he was the first...."

A long pause. Then:

" I didn't think you'd be so horrid to me,... I came ..."

" Was he the first? You've been with him for the last year, but before that... ? "

" I . . . I did flirt a tjit with the gymnastics teacher at the *lyeie* in Groningen. ..."

"Flirted?"

" It was he ... he who . . ."

" Right! So he was your lover before Poppinga came on the scene. Have you been anybody else's mistress as well? "

" Never! " she exclaimed indignantly.

" What about Cor? "

" Not with him. On my honour ..."

" Yet you've been meeting him at night."

" Because he was in love with me. He had to pluck up all his courage to kiss me. There was nothing more in it than that."

" Nothing more? Just think! The last time you saw him—the time I interrupted you—weren't you asking him to run away with you? "

" How do you know? "

He almost burst out laughing. Her simplicity was really disarming. She was recovering her self-possession. She spoke of these matters with quite remarkable candour.

" What did he say to you? That he didn't want to? "

" He was frightened. He said he had no money."

" And you told him you would see to that. . . . For a long time now you have been thinking of getting away. In fact, your whole aim in life is to leave Delfzijl and see the world, and you don't care very much whom you go with."

" I wouldn't go with anyone," she said snappily. " You're being horrid again. You don't want to understand me."

" Oh, yes, I do. But it doesn't require any great effort. You love life, and want to get the most out of it."

She looked down, fidgeting with her bag.

" Your father's model farm bores you to distraction. That's not at all the life you've mapped out for yourself. But it's difficult to get away unless someone takes you. So you start scheming.. . . First of all, the gymnastics teacher. But he wasn't having any.. . . At Delfzijl you pick on Poppinga as the most likely. He's not quite so sober-minded as the others. He's knocked about the world. He

too loves life and finds the restrictions and prejudices of a provincial town irksome.... So you cast your net...."

"You've no right to say such things."

"Perhaps I exaggerate a little. I oughtn't to put *all* the responsibility on to your shoulders. You're as pretty as the devil, and it may be that he came part of the way to meet you. But I can't think he came very far, for he was too frightened of complications, frightened of his wife, of Any, of his superiors, perhaps even of his pupils."

"Of Any more than anyone."

"We'll come to her later. ... As I said before, you cast your net. Not a day passes but what you cross his path. You bring fruit and home-made cakes—to his wife, of course. And before long it's an accepted thing that you pop in and out of the house almost like a member of the family. ... And then you get him to see you home. ... After a while you get on kissing terms. And a little later you're writing letters to him full of plans for your escape."

"Have you read them?"

"I know what's in some of them."

"And you're convinced that he didn't begin it?"

Her anger was rising.

"Right from the start, he told me he was unhappy, that Madame Poppinga didn't understand him, and that all she thought about was what the neighbours would say. He said Delfzijl was a rotten hole, and that the life he was living wasn't life at all, and that. ..."

"Yes, yes. I know."

"So you see ..."

"Sixty married men out of a hundred say all that to the first pretty young thing they meet. Only Conrad Poppinga had the misfortune to say it to a girl who took him at his word, and meant business."

"You're talking like a cad."

She stressed the word with a little stamp of her foot. She could have cried with vexation.

"And then at last, as he kept putting off the grand day of departure, you began to realize that it was never going to come off. ..."

"It's not true."

"Oh, yes, it is! And it's proved by the fact that you were already putting a second iron in the fire. ... If not Poppinga, then Cor would have to do. Only, of course, you went warily about it. He's a shy, well-brought-up young man, and it wouldn't do to frighten him."

"You brute!"

"I don't think I'm far out, am I?"

"You hate me. I know you do."

"Good gracious, no. Not in the slightest."

"Yes, you do. You've no pity, and I'm so unhappy.... I loved Conrad. ..."

"And Cornelius too? .. And the gymnastics teacher?"

This time she really did cry.

"I tell you..."

"That you loved them all! Perhaps you did in your own way. You loved them because they represented escape to another life. Life in the great world, the life you've all along been dreaming about. ..."

She was no longer listening. With a sigh she said:

"I oughtn't to have come. ... I thought.. ."

"That I would take you under my protection? ... Isn't that just what I'm doing? .. Only I can't look upon you as anybody's victim, nor as a heroine. You're greedy for all the good things in life, and beyond that, you're rather stupid, rather selfish, and that's about all. ... And there are plenty of odiers who are neither better nor worse than you are."

She looked at him with wet eyes in which there was actually a ray of hope.

"Everybody hates me," she groaned.

"Whom do you mean by everybody?"

"Most of all Madame Poppinga, because I'm not like her. She'd like me to be spending all my days knitting for the poor, or making clothes for the natives of the South Sea Islands. I know she holds me up to other girls as an example, an example of what one oughtn't to be like! ... In fact, she even said that I'd come to a bad end if I wasn't married soon. ... I know she did. They told me so..."

Through her words, Maigret caught the stale perfume of a provincial town. Sewing-meetings. The young ladies of the best families gathered round the local Lady Bountiful. Whispered gossip. Heart-to-heart talks with an undercurrent of cattiness.

"Then there's Any. She's even worse. ..."

"She hates you?"

"Yes. She even goes so far as to leave the room when I arrive. ... I'm sure she's guessed the truth for a long time. .. Madame Poppinga is, after all, a good woman. If I couldn't stand her, it was because she wanted to make me change my ways, dress dowdily,

and read dull books. But that doesn't alter the fact that she's a good woman, far too good to be suspicious about her husband. In fact, it was she who used to tell him to see me home."

A queer smile flitted across Maigret's face.

"Any's quite different. I don't need to tell you she's ugly, do I? You've seen her. With those teeth of hers she never had a chance; and what's more, she knows it. . . . That's why she's taken up law—so as to have a profession. She makes herself out to be a man-hater, and belongs to feminist leagues and all that sort of thing...."

Beetje was working herself up again. This was obviously an old grudge.

"And she thought it was her business to keep an eye on Conrad. Since she has no choice but to remain virtuous herself, she takes it upon herself to see that others are. . . . You see what I mean? . . .

"She guessed—I'm sure she did. And she wanted to get Conrad away from me . . . Cor too for that matter. . . . It didn't escape her notice that men were always looking at me. Even Wienands, who blushes every time I speak to him. . . . And she's another who's got her knife into me—Madame Wienands. . . . Any may not have said anything about us to her sister. But I dare say she did. In fact, I shouldn't be surprised if it was she who found my letters."

"Then perhaps it's Any who killed Conrad?" asked Maigret bluntly.

Beetje began to hedge at once.

"I didn't say that. I really don't know. All I know is that she's a snake in the grass.... Is it my fault that she's ugly? "

"Are you sure there's never been a man in her life? "

A smile from Beetje, or rather a little laugh. Such a laugh! The triumphant sfhirk of a girl who knows her charms, and who gloats over the other's lack of them. Had Any a man in her life? She might have answered something tarter, but all she said was:

"Nobody round here, at any rate."

"Did she hate her brother-in-law too? "

"That I don't know. Perhaps not. Anyhow, that's different. He was one of the family, and so she could regard him as being to some extent her property. And she could easily persuade herself it was her duty to protect him from all temptations."

"But not kill him? "

"What's in your mind? Why are you always harping on that? "

"Don't bother about what's in my mind. Just answer my

questions. . . . But we'll let that go. Here's another one: Did Oost-ing know of your relations with Conrad? "

" What have they told you about that? "

" You used to go on their seal-shooting trips on the Workum sandbanks. And you used to sleep on board . . . "

" Sometimes."

" And the Baes left you two to share the cabin? "

" It was quite natural. In any case, he preferred to sleep on deck so as to be able to keep a look-out."

" Quite so. And have you seen him since . . . since the murder? "

" No. I can swear to that."

" Has he ever made a pass at you? "

A nervous titter.

" Him? "

Was she giggling with satisfaction? It didn't look like it. On the contrary, she seemed once more as though she might cry with exasperation. Madame Van Hasselt, who had heard voices, put her head round the door, then quickly withdrew, muttering excuses.

A pause. . . . Then:

" Do you really think your father's capable of killing you? "

" Yes. I know he is."

" In that case he was capable of killing Conrad for carrying on with you."

Her eyes opened wide. She looked scared.

" No," she protested. " It isn't true. It wasn't Papa. . . ."

" Yet when you arrived home on the night of the crime he wasn't there."

" How do you know? "

" He got home a little after you, didn't he? "

" Directly after____ But. . . ."

" In your last letters you seemed to be losing patience. You were beginning to realize that Conrad would slip through your fingers, that he was too frightened of his wife to run off with you, or perhaps that he didn't really want to."

" What are you driving at? "

" Nothing. I was just getting things clear in my own mind. . . . I don't suppose it'll be long before your father's here."

She looked anxiously round her as though seeking a way of escape.

" You needn't be afraid. I'll see nothing happens to you, I need you tonight/'

" Tonight? "

" Yes. We're going to reconstruct the crime, and I want everybody to play his part."

" He'll kill me."

" Who will?"

" My father."

" I'll be there. You've nothing to worry about."

" But..."

The door opened. Jean Duclos came in, shut it quickly behind him, and turned the key in the lock. He looked worried.

" Look out! . . . Liewens is here. . . . He ... "

" Take her upstairs to your room."

" To my . . . ? "

" To mine, if you'd rather."

There were steps in the passage. There was a door at the other end of the room, leading to the servants' quarters and the back stairs. The two made a hasty exit through it; then Maigret, unlocking the door, found himself face to face with the farmer. The latter, looking over the inspector's shoulder, called:

"Beetje!"

Once more Maigret had the baffling experience of having to deal with a man to whom he could not speak. All he could do was to use his bulk to obstruct the way, thus giving the others time to make good their escape. He tried, however, not to do it too obviously, as he didn't want to enrage the man.

A moment or two later Jean Duclos came downstairs again, trying, without much success, to look unconcerned.

" Tell him his daughter will be handed back to him tonight. And tell him that we shall need him too for the reconstruction of the crime."

" Must I? "

" Do what I tell you, *sacrebleu* "

Duclos translated in his most coaxing voice. The farmer looked from one to the other of them.

" And now tell him that this very evening the murderer will be under lock and key."

Again the professor translated. As the last word was pronounced, Maigret just had time to pounce on Liewens, who had whipped out a revolver and was lifting it towards his own temple.

The struggle was short. Maigret had sprung with all his weight and all his strength. In a second Liewens was on the floor, and the

revolver wrenched out of his grasp, while a pile of chairs they had bumped into came hurtling down with a crash, the leg of one scratching Maigret's forehead on its way.

"Lock the door," shouted Maigret to Duclos. "We don't need any spectators."

He rose to his feet, panting for breath.

9. A Dreary Gathering

IT was exactly half-past seven. The Wienands were the first to arrive. In the dance-hall of the *Hdtel Van Hasselt* they found three men waiting, each standing by himself in silent preoccupation. Jean Duclos was walking nervously up and down from one end of the room to the other; Liewens was sitting on a chair, a glum, set look on his face; lastly Maigret, his pipe between his teeth, was leaning against the piano.

A single electric lamp, high overhead, shed a bleak but inadequate light, but no one seemed to think of switching on the others. The chairs were still stacked at the end of the room, except for the few that Maigret had taken and set in a row, which was intended to represent the front row of seats at the lecture.

On the empty platform, a chair and a table, the latter covered by a green cloth.

The Wienands were in their Sunday best. They had carried out their instructions to the letter, bringing their two children with them. It wasn't difficult to guess that they had rushed away from a hasty meal, leaving the dining-room in disorder.

Monsieur Wienands took off his hat as he came into the room and looked round for someone to speak to. He made a move towards the professor, but then thought better of it. Finally he drew his family into a corner, where they all stood in silence. His collar was too high for him, his tie crooked.

Cornelius Barens was the next, pale and fidgety, looking as though the least thing would send him fleeing for his life. He too, like Wienands, wanted to join up with somebody, but as no one gave him the least encouragement, he edged away to the back of the room and stood leaning against the stack of chairs.

Oostmg, fed in by Pijpekamp, gave Maigret a heavy, searching.

look. Behind him came Madame Poppinga, then Any, who walked in briskly, stopped for a second, and then went straight towards the row of chairs.

Maigret turned to Pijpekamp:

" You can bring down Beetje. Put one of your men to look after Liewens and Oosting. They weren't here on the night of the crime, and we shan't be wanting them till later. They'd better sit right at the back."

Beetje entered the room shyly, looking thoroughly uncomfortable, but the sight of Any and Madame Poppinga was enough to pull her together. Her whole body stiffened and she gave a little toss of her head.

A pause. No one spoke. In fact, it hardly seemed as though anyone was breathing. Not that the atmosphere was in any way tense or dramatic. It wasn't. To say it was sordid would be nearer the mark.

A pathetic handful of people in that big room, silent under the bleak light that hardly reached into the corners.

It required quite an effort to realize that only a few days before, all the notables of Delfzijl had been there. They had paid for the right to sit in those chairs that were now stacked at the end of the room. In their best clothes they had sailed in, posing to the gallery, smiling, bowing, shaking hands, taking their seats, and then clapping heartily as Jean Duclos appeared upon the platform.

Tonight it was as if the same scene was being viewed through the wrong end of the telescope.

Everybody waited. No one had the least idea what was going to happen. Yet for the most part it was not anxiety and pain that were written on their faces. Gloomy looks, bereft of any sparkle of intelligence. Features drawn, not by emotion, but by lassitude. And the light made everyone's complexion grey. Even Beetje looked dull and plain.

There was nothing impressive about these proceedings, not even anything comic. A wretched, half-hearted rehearsal by a rotten company!

Outside, people were gathered in silent groups. By the end of the afternoon the news had gone pretty well round the town that something was going to happen at the *HStel Van Hasselt*. Certainly none of them imagined that the spectacle inside was so unromantic.

At last Maigret moved, turning to Madame Poppinga.

" Will you sit in the same seat as you had the other night? "

A few hours before, she had been strung up to tragic pitch. There was nothing left of it now. She looked older. Her coat was so badly made that one shoulder looked broader than the other. One couldn't help noticing her big feet, and also a scar on her neck below the ear.

Any cut a still poorer figure. Her features had never been so irregular. Her clothes were absurd, and there was even something mean about them.

Madame Poppinga took her place in the middle of the front row. The place of honour. The last time she had sat there, widi all Delfzijl behind her, she had been pink with pride.

" Who sat beside you? "

" The captain of the training-ship."

" And on the other side? "

" Monsieur Wienands."

The latter was requested to take his place. He still had his overcoat on. He sat down awkwardly, trying not to catch anybody's eye.

" And Madame Wienands? "

" At the end of the row, because of the children."

" Beetje?"

The girl took her seat before Madame Poppinga could answer. She was two places away from Any, the chair between them being the one Conrad Poppinga had sat in.

Pijpekamp stood in the background. He was uneasy and altogether out of his depth. Jean Duclos was dejectedly waiting to be called upon to play his part.

" Go up on to the platform," said Maigret.

Of all the people in the room he was perhaps the most pitiable. Standing on the platform, thin, badly dressed, lifeless, it was impossible to imagine him having been the great attraction a few nights before.

Another pause. The silence was as bleak as that miserable light which fell from the high ceiling. Four or five times Oosting coughed at the back of die room.

Even Maigret could hardly have been called comfortable. He looked mournfully at the spurious drama which he was staging, his eye resting on one character after the other, taking in the smallest details—the way Beetje sat in her chair, Any's skirt, which was too long, the professor's dirty fingernails as he stood drumming on the table, trying not to look too silly.

" How long did you speak? "

" Three-quarters of an hour."

" Did you read the lecture? "

" Certainly not. This was the twentieth time I had given it. I didn't once have to glance at my notes."

" In that case, you were looking at your audience."

Maigret sat down for a moment between Any and Beetje. The chairs were close together, and he was literally wedged in between them, his knee pressing against Beetje's.

" At what time did the show finish? "

" Just before nine. We began with some music."

The piano was still open, a *polonaise* of Chopin still on it. Madame Poppinga was chewing the corner of her handkerchief. Oosting shuffled his feet on the sawdust-covered floor at the end of the room. Maigret left his chair and started walking about.

" Monsieur Duclos, will you kindly run through the principal points of your lecture? "

But Duclos was incapable of speaking, or rather incapable of doing what he was asked. He hesitated, coughed, and then began word for word from the beginning:

" I will not insult the intelligent audience I have before me tonight by . . ."

" Excuse me! You were speaking, I think, of crime. What was the exact subject? "

" The responsibility of criminals for their actions."

" And you were maintaining? "

" That it is really society itself which is responsible for all the faults of its members, including those faults which go by the name of crime.... Life is organized for the greatest possible welfare of everybody... We have created social classes, and it is essential that every individual should be properly brought up to take his place in one of them. . . ."

He stared at the green table-cloth as he spoke. His voice was faint and lacked all authority.

" That's enough," groaned Maigret. " I know that story: * There are some individuals who for one reason or another cannot be fitted into any social class. They are fundamentally inadapted, or, if you prefer it, diseased. It is they who provide what we call criminals and who must therefore be placed in a class of their own' . . . Something of that sort, wasn't it? We've heard it many times before... Conclusion: ' Do away with prisons and build more hospitals.' "

The professor's only answer was a sulky look.

"So you spoke in that vein for three-quarters of an hour, illustrating your points with striking examples. You quoted Lornbroso and a host of others, finishing up with Freud."

He looked at his watch and, speaking to the row of seated people who represented the audience, said:

"I must ask you to wait just a few minutes more."

The moment was chosen for one of the children to set up a howl. Her mother, whose nerves were on the stretch, shook her to make her keep quiet. As that didn't work, her father took her on his knee and tried coaxing. That didn't work either, so he pinched her arm.

You had to look at the empty chair between Any and Beetje to realize that, after all, something serious was going on. And even then—wasn't it all rather a common-place affair? Was Beetje with her healthy but insipidly pretty face worth all the trouble she had caused?

The bleak and feeble light had the virtue of showing up the naked truth, by destroying all the glow and glamour that generally concealed it. It did its work very effectively with Beetje. Insipidly pretty, was she? Hardly that. What had she, then, that entitled her to play a star's part in the drama? To put it crudely, she had two things; and two things only: two fine round buxom breasts that were sufficiently outlined by her silk blouse to make them all the more alluring. Eighteen-year-old breasts in which the slightest quiver made them seem palpitating with life.

A little beyond her, Madame Popinga, who neither now nor at eighteen ever had such breasts as those. Madame Popinga dressed in layer upon layer of sober clothing which was not in bad taste but rather in no taste at all.

And Any, angular, ugly, flat-chested, whose only piquancy lay in being enigmatic.

Popinga had had the ill luck to cross Beetje's path, Popinga the *bon vivant*, a seafaring man who'd come home to roost too soon, who still had a sweet tooth for the world's more sensuous pleasures. Had he ever really looked at Beetje's face and her glassy, china-blue eyes? If he had, he had certainly not seen behind it, seen the grappling-irons she had ready to hook on to any man who could take her off somewhere—anywhere that wasn't Delfzijl.

He had merely glanced at the rest. All his eyes had really rested on was that young, seductive, supple body. . . .

As for Madame Wienands, she could hardly be called a woman at all. Just a mother! Just a housewife! She was wiping the nose of her little girl whose tears were gradually petering out.

"Do you want me to stay here?" asked Jean Duclos from the platform.

"Please."

And Maigret, going up to Pijpekamp, whispered a few words in his ear. The Groningen detective left a moment later with Oosting.

In another room people were playing billiards, and every few seconds the clack of ivory balls could be heard.

In the lecture-room the atmosphere was now thoroughly oppressive. It was something like a spiritualist stance. Everybody expected something uncanny to happen. Everybody was cowed, except Any, who suddenly got up and, after a considerable effort to find her voice, said:

"I can't see what all this is leading to. . . . It's . . . it's . . ."

"It's time," cut in Maigret shortly. "Hallo! Where's Barends?"

He had forgotten all about him. He found him far from the others, leaning with his back to the wall.

"Why didn't you take your proper place?"

"You said we were to be where we were the other evening . . ."

His eyes darted here and there nervously. The words came jerkily.

" . . . And the other evening I was with my shipmates in the fifty-cent seats."

Maigret took no further notice of him, but went and opened a door which led through a porch directly on to the street and enabled people to come and go without passing through the cafe. He glanced outside. The people who had been gathered there seemed for the most part to have dispersed, for there were only three or four silhouettes visible in the darkness.

Turning back towards the room, he said:

"I imagine that, as soon as the lecture was over, people crowded round the platform to congratulate the speaker...."

No one answered, but the words sufficed to recall the scene. A general bustle, the scrape of chairs on the floor, the bulk of the audience streaming slowly through the exit, while the more important people gathered round the platform to shake the professor's hand and compliment him on his success... The room slowly emptying. . . . The last group finally moving off towards the door. . . . Barends joining the Poppingas.. . .

" You can step down now, Monsieur Duclos."

Everyone rose, but then stood still, uncertain of what was expected of them. All eyes were on Maigret. Any and Beetje, though standing almost shoulder to shoulder, ignored each other's presence. Wienands carried the youngest of the children.

" This way, please."

And as they started towards the door:

" We're going to walk to the house in the same order as last week. . . . Madame Poppinga and Monsieur Duclos. . . ."

They looked awkwardly at each other, hesitated, then went through the door together and out into the darkness.

" Next, Mademoiselle Beetje. . . . You were walking with Poppinga. You follow the others. I'll be joining you in a moment."

She didn't like walking alone. She was still frightened of her father, though he was in a far corner of the room with a policeman standing over him.

" Monsieur and Madame Wienands. . . ."

They stepped off with less embarrassment than the others. Having the children to look after made it easier.

" Mademoiselle Any and Barends. . . ."

The latter almost broke down. Biting his lips, however, he pulled himself together, passed in front of Maigret, and went out with Any.

The inspector then turned to the policeman who was standing by Liewens.

" At this time, on the night of the crime, he was at home. . . ."

But the policeman looked at him blankly, and he had to call Duclos back to act as interpreter.

" Tell him to take Liewens to the farm, and make him do exactly what he did before."

Having said that, Maigret sent the professor back to his place in the procession. If there'd been a hearse in front, it would have been rather like a funeral procession, one, however, that was going off badly. There were halts and hesitations, and the leading pair kept glancing round to make sure they were being followed.

Madame Van Hasselt, standing in the hotel entrance, watched them pass through, without ever stopping her conversation with the billiard-players within.

All the shops were shut, in fact three-quarters of the town was already in bed and asleep. Madame Poppinga and the professor led the way along the quay. Duclos was talking, and it wasn't hard to guess that he was trying to reassure his companion.

There were alternations of light and darkness, as the lamp-posts were too far apart for one circle of light to reach to the next. The black water was just visible, and the dark hulls of the boats. Beetje, with Any behind her, tried to walk with easy grace. But walking alone made her self-conscious.

Several yards separated each couple. A little further on, Oosting's boat was clearly visible. It was all the easier to distinguish for being the only one to be painted white- No light came through the port-holes. The quay was deserted.

" Will you all stop, please, exactly where you are? " called out Maigret, loud enough to be heard by everybody.

They halted and stood stiffly where they were. The beam of light from the lighthouse swept by over their heads without lighting them up.

Maigret spoke to Any.

" Were you in exactly the same place in the column the other night? "

" Yes."

" And you, Barends? "

" Yes ... at least I think so. ... "

" Are you sure of it? . . . You were walking side by side with Mademoiselle Any? "

" Yes. That is, up to this point. It was about ten yards further on that Any pointed out that one of the children's coats was trailing on the ground."

" And you ran forward to catch the Wienands up and let them know? "

" I told Madame Wienands."

" It only took a few seconds, I suppose? "

" Yes. Then the Wienands went on, while I waited for Any."

" You didn't notice anything peculiar? "

" Nothing."

" Will everyone please take ten steps forward," ordered Maigret, and then:

" Another five, please."

This brought Any exactly abreast of Oosting's boat.

" Now go up to the Wienands, Barends. ... "

And to Any:

" Take that cap which is lying on the cabin roof."

To do so she had only to take three steps, and then one on to

the deck, from which position it was within easy reach. It was clearly visible, a dark thing against a light background. A metallic glint even showed the position of the badge.

" Why do you ask me to do that? "

" Go on! Taken! "

They were not speaking loudly, and the people in front were straining their ears, wondering what was going on.

" But I didn't. . . "

" No matter whether you did or you didn't. There's one person missing tonight, and it may be that others have to play his part. . . . Don't forget this is only an experiment. "

She took the cap without more ado.

" Hide it under your coat. "

Maigret himself jumped on board and called out:

" Pijpekamp. "

" Ya. '

The detective's head emerged from the cabin. Standing inside it, his head just under the coach-roof, he had been able to see everything through one of the port-holes in the coaming. He came on deck, the Baes following.

" Did you see? " asked Maigret.

Pijpekamp nodded.

" Good. . . . And now take Oosting off, where he went the other night. . . . Any! Overtake Barends, will you? And will everybody please go on towards the house . . . ? "

Maigret stepped back on to the quay.

" I'm taking Poppinga's place. "

Hurrying forward, he joined the procession by Beetje's side. In front were Madame Poppinga and Duclos, behind were the Wienands followed by Any and Cornelius. From behind them again came the sound of steps: Oosting and Pijpekamp were bringing up the rear, though keeping their distance.

The last lamp-posts were left behind, and from now on the walk was in darkness—skirting the harbour, passing the lock-gates which separated sea and canal, then on to the towing-path, flanked by trees, with the Poppingas' house five hundred yards ahead.

Beetje murmured:

" I can't understand what. . . . "

" Not so loud. . . . It's a calm night, and the people in front and behind can hear us as easily as we can hear them. . . . And it was calm the other night. . . . So Poppinga would be speaking to you

in his ordinary voice, talking about everyday matters, perhaps discussing the lecture...."

" Yes."

" And at the same time you were whispering reproaches ... !"

" How do you know? "

" Never mind. . . . And now for another question. Sitting next him during the lecture you wanted to hold his hand—and he repulsed you, didn't he? "

" Yes, he did at first."

" But you persisted? "

" Yes. . . . It was perfectly safe, and he never used to be so cautious. Even in his own house he used to kiss me as soon as we were alone. In fact, once we were talking to Madame Popinga from the drawing-room to the dining-room, where she was putting some things away—and all through the conversation he had me in his arms. But lately he was always telling me to be careful. . . ."

" So, while you made a show of talking about the lecture, you were throwing him reproaches under your breath? And you tried once more to persuade him to run off with you. . . ."

The night was indeed still. Steps rang out clearly in front and behind, and Maigret could even hear an occasional snatch of what Duclos was saying.

" I can assure you this has nothing whatever to do with any real police methods. . . ."

Behind him Madame Wienands was scolding a child in Dutch. . . . Suddenly the Poppingas' house emerged from the darkness. There was no sign of any light. Madame Popinga stopped on the doorstep.

" You stopped like that, didn't you, because your husband had the key? "

" Yes."

" Your servant was in bed? "

" Yes.... The same as today."

The successive couples had by this time been telescoped into a single group.

" Open the door, will you? " said Maigret.

She opened the door and switched on the light, which showed up the passage and the bamboo hat-stand on the left.

" From now on, Popinga was in very high spirits, wasn't he? "

" Very. But it didn't seem altogether natural. Just a trifle forced."

Hats and coats were being removed and hung up in the hall.

" Just a moment! Did everybody take their things off here? "

" All except Any and me," said Madame Popinga. " We went up to our rooms to tidy ourselves up a bit. "

" You went straight up? Who switched on the light in die drawing-room? "

" It must have been Conrad. "

" Go upstairs then, will you? "

He followed them up.

" Any had to go through your room to get to hers. Did she stop on the way? "

" No. I think she went straight through. "

" Take off your things, just as you did last time.. .. Leave your things in your own room, Mademoiselle Any, and the cap too. . . . What did you do next? "

Madame Popinga's lower lip quivered.

" A little dab of powder," she said. " And I hastily brushed my hair. . . . But . . . I . . . I can hardly stand it. . . . It's dreadful. . . . I have the feeling I can hear him now. Downstairs. Talking about the wireless. Trying to pick up *Radio-Paris*. . . . "

Madame Popinga threw her coat on to her bed. She was weeping, though without tears. Any stood stiffly, right in the middle of Conrad's study, which was still serving as her bedroom.

" You went down together? "

" Yes. . . . Or rather no. . . . I can't be quite sure. I think Any came down a little later. . . . I hurried down to see to the guests. "

" In that case, will you please go down now? "

He remained alone with Any. Without saying a word he took the cap out of her hand, looked round the room, and finally hid it under the divan.

" Come. . . . "

" Do you really think . . . ? "

" No. Come. . . . Did you powder your face too? "

" Never! "

There were dark rings under her eyes. Maigret led her out of the room. The stairs creaked. Not a sound came from below. In fact, when they entered the drawing-room the whole scene looked quite unreal—more like an exhibition of waxworks. No one had dared sit down. Madame Wienands, who was fussing about the children's ruffled hair, was apparently the only one who dared to move at all.

" Take your places, please. The same places.. •. Where's the wireless set? "

He found it himself before anyone answered. He switched it on and, turning the knobs, suddenly filled the room with alternate whistlings, cracklings, bursts of voices and snatches of music. Finally he left it on a station which was broadcasting a recorded music-hall turn in French.

Le colon disait au capiston . . .

Again there were cracklings. Maigret adjusted one of the knobs. Suddenly the voice came twice as loud as before:

. . . et c'est un bon type le capiston. . . . Mais le colon, mon vieux. . . .

The thick sonorous voice resounded in the neat, staid drawing-room in which everyone stood as though turned to stone.

" Sit down," thundered Maigret through the din. " Sit down and talk. What about the tea? . . ."

He tried to look through the window, but the shutters were closed. Going to the front door, he opened it and called:

"Pijpekamp!"

" Yes," answered a voice from the darkness.

" Is he there?"

" Yes. Behind the second tree."

Maigret came back into the room. The front door slammed behind him. The music-hall turn was finished and the announcer was saying:

Disque Odion numiro vingt-huit mille six cent soixante~quin{e.

More cracklings; then jazz. Madame Popinga flattened herself against the wall. There was interference from another station, and under the jazz a nasal voice could just be made out, whining in some foreign language. Sometimes there was a whole series of splutterings, after which the music would start again.

Maigret looked round for Beetje. She had collapsed into an arm-chair. Hot tears ran down her cheeks, while between her sobs she stammered :

" Conrad! . . . Poor Conrad! . . ."

Cornelius Barens, looking like death, was biting his lip.

" What about the tea? " Maigret asked again.

" It wasn't yet . . . " answered Any. " First of all they rolled back the carpet——They'd started dancing. . . ."

Beetje was shaken by a more violent sob than ever. Maigret looked at the carpet, at the oak table with its embroidered cloth, at the window, at Madame Wienands still preoccupied with her children . . .

10. *The Evening Drags On*

MAIGRET'S bulky figure towered over everybody. The drawing-room was small, and as he leant against the door he seemed altogether too big for it. His face was grey, though not stern, in fact his humanity had never been more obvious than when he went on, speaking slowly, quietly, in an almost muffled voice:

"The music goes on. . . . Barens helps Poppinga to roll up the carpet, while, in the corner there, Jean Duclos holds forth to Madame Poppinga and her sister. . . . Wienands and his wife hold a whispered consultation as to whether they hadn't better be going, as it's getting late for the children. . . . Poppinga has drunk a glass of cognac, and that's enough to get him going. He laughs. He hums to the music. He goes up to Beetje and asks her to dance with him. . . ."

Madame Poppinga stared at the floor. Any's feverish pupils never left Maigret as he pursued his monologue.

"The murderer already knows what he's going to do. . . . There's someone in this room who watches Conrad dancing, knowing that within a couple of hours this man who laughs a little too boisterously, not yet resigned to a quiet life, and still trying desperately to have a good time in spite of everything—that this man will be lying dead. . . ."

One could feel the shock of the words as they electrified the little audience. Madame Poppinga's mouth opened for a scream which, however, remained pent up. Beetje's sobs continued.

In a flash the atmosphere had changed. You could almost have thought Conrad was there in the flesh. Conrad dancing, dancing with two eyes fixed upon him, the eyes which knew he would soon be lying dead.

Jean Duclos was the only one who tried to pass it off lightly.

"Very clever!" he scoffed.

Nobody listened to him, and the words were in any case half-drowned by the music. But he nevertheless persisted:

"I see now what you're driving at. An old trick. Play on the murderer's nerves by bringing him back into the atmosphere of his crime. Get him thoroughly scared, in the hope that he will be so obliging as to give himself away. . . ."

His sneers came faintly through the jazz. But no one was interested any longer in what the professor thought.

Madame Wienands whispered something in her husband's ear

and he rose timidly from his seat. He was going to speak, but Maigret saved him the trouble.

" Yes. That's all right. You can go."

Poor Madame Wienands, so respectable, so well brought up. She wanted to take her leave properly, and see the children said good-night as good little children should. But the circumstances were too much for her, and all she could do was to give Madame Poppinga a lame and silent handshake, gather her brood about her, and make an ignominious exit.

The clock on the mantelpiece showed five past ten.

" Isn't it time for the tea yet? " asked Maigret.

" Yes," answered Any, getting up and going to the kitchen.

" Excuse me, Madame Poppinga, didn't you go to help her? "

" A little later."

" You found her in the kitchen? "

Madame Poppinga passed her hand across her forehead. She was making a great effort to concentrate. She gazed hopelessly at the loud-speaker.

" I . . . I really can't tell. Not for sure. At least—wait a moment! I think she was coming out of the dining-room . . . She'd been to fetch the sugar from the sideboard."

" Was the dining-room light on? "

" No. . . . It might have been, but I don't think so."

" Did you speak to her? "

" Yes, though it might have been in the kitchen. I remember saying, * I hope Conrad won't drink any more, or he'll be overstepping the mark.'"

Maigret went into the passage just as the front door closed behind the Wienands. The kitchen was brightly lit and spotlessly clean. The water was boiling on a gas-ring. Any was in the act of taking the lid off the teapot.

" Don't bother to make any tea."

Any looked Maigret in the eyes. They were alone.

" Why did you make me take the cap? " she asked.

" It doesn't matter. . . . Come. . . ."

In the drawing-room no one was speaking or moving.

" Have we got to listen to this music all night? " said Jean Duclos, feeling he must make a protest.

" Perhaps.... There's someone else I'd like to see, and that's **the** maid."

Madame Poppinga looked at Any, who answered:

" She's in bed. . . . She always goes to bed at nine."

" I see. Well, go and tell her to come down for a moment.... She needn't bother to dress."

And in the same quiet, monotonous voice as at the beginning he reiterated:

" You were dancing with Conrad, Beetje.... In the corner they were talking seriously... . And someone knew that there was going to be a murder. . . . Someone knew that it was Poppinga's last evening on this earth. . . ."



Noises overhead. Steps, then the shutting of a door somewhere on the second floor, which was only composed of garrets. Then more steps and a murmur of voices. Finally Any came back into the room, while the servant hovered in the passage.

" Come inside," growled Maigret. " Someone tell her to come in and not to be frightened."

She had a large flat face with ill-defined features. Though still bleary-eyed with sleep, she looked scared out of her wits. Over her cream-coloured flannelette nightgown, which reached to her feet, she had merely slipped on her overcoat. Her hair was tousled.

Maigret once more enlisted the professor's services as interpreter.

" Ask her whether she was Poppinga's mistress."

With a pained expression, Madame Poppinga turned her head away. The question was translated. The girl shook her head.

" Ask her again. . . . No! Ask her if her master ever tried to get round her. . . ."

Another vigorous denial.

" Tell her that she can be sent to prison if she doesn't tell the truth. Let's come down to details. Did he ever kiss her? Did he ever go into her room when she was there? "

The answer this time was a sudden gush of tears.

" I never did anything wrong," pleaded the girl in her nightgown. " I never did. . . . I promise. . . ."

Little as Duclos liked the job, he translated what she said. With her lips pursed, Any stared at the maid.

" And now come back to the first question: Was she his mistress? "

But the girl could no longer speak coherently. She wept, she wailed, she protested. She explained and asked forgiveness.

" I don't think she was," said the professor at last, " When he was alone in the house with her, he'd come and fool about with her in the kitchen—put an arm round her waist, kiss her, and that sort of thing. Once he went into her room when she was dressing. He used to give her chocolate surreptitiously. . . . But, as far as I can make out, it went no further than that.,.."

" She can go back to bed."

They listened to the girl's retreating footsteps as she climbed the stairs. Instead of their ceasing on the second floor there was a constant noise as she went hither and thither in her room, apparently moving things about. Turning to Any, Maigret said:

" Will you kindly go and see what she's doing? "

It wasn't long before Any reported:

" She says she's leaving the house at once. She won't stay a minute longer, as she could never look my sister in the face again. She'll go to Groningen or somewhere and never come back to Delfzijl again."

And in an aggressive tone Any added :

" I suppose that's what you wanted! "

The evening was dragging on. It was getting late. A voice from the loud-speaker announced the end of the programme :

Notre audition est terminee. Bonsoir, mesdames; honsoir, mesdemoiselles; bonsoir, messieurs....

Sudden silence. Then, dimly through the silence, faint music from another station. Suddenly it grew louder.

With a curt movement Maigret switched off, and the silence was now complete, an almost piercing silence. Beetje was no longer sobbing, but her face was still buried in her hands.

" I suppose the conversation went on? " asked Maigret, his voice sounding tired.

No one answered. Every face showed the strain.

" I must apologize for this painful evening . . ." said Maigret, turning towards Madame Popinga. " But don't forget that your husband was still alive.... He was here in this room talking and laughing. . . . Perhaps he'd had a second glass of cognac? "

" Yes."

" And he was a condemned man—do you understand that? . . . Condemned by someone who was watching him. . . . And others who are here at this moment are holding back what they know, and are thus making themselves accomplices. . . ."

Barens hiccupped. He was trembling.

" Isn't that so, Cornelius? " said Maigret to him point-blank.

" No ! . . . No ! . . . It isn't true! "

" Then what are you trembling about? "

" I . . . I "

He was on the point of breaking down again as he had on the way back from the farm.

" Listen to me! . . . We'll soon have reached the time when Beetje left, escorted by Popinga. . . . You left immediately after, Cornelius. You followed them for a moment., . and you saw something. . . . "

" No ! . . . It isn't true. "

" We'll see about that. . . . After those three had gone, the only people left were Madame Popinga, Mademoiselle Any, and Professor Duclos. They went upstairs. . . . "

Any nodded.

" And each of you went to his own room, didn't you? "

Then, once more rounding on Cor:

" Tell me what you saw. "

The boy squirmed and wriggled. But he couldn't escape from the grip of Maigret's stare.

" No! . . . Nothing! . . . Nothing! . . . "

" You didn't see Oosting hidden behind a tree? "

" No. "

" Yet you couldn't tear yourself away from the place. . . . That means you saw something. "

" I don't know . . . I won't. . . . No. . . . , It's not possible. . . . "

Everyone looked at him, but he avoided catching anybody's eye, and Maigret went on pitilessly:

" First of all you saw something on the road. The two bicycles were out of sight, but you knew they'd have to pass through the patch that was lit up by the beam of the lighthouse. . . . You were jealous. You waited. And you had a long time to wait. A time which didn't correspond to the distance they had to go. . . . "

" Yes. "

" In other words, they'd stopped somewhere under the shadow of a stack of timber. . . . But that wasn't enough to frighten you. It might have angered you or plunged you in despair. But you saw something else, which alarmed you so much that you stayed where you were, instead of going back to the training-ship. . . . You were over by the timber-yard. There was only one window which you could see from there. . . . , "

It was those last words that unnerved the boy. He looked wildly round him. Would he have the strength of mind to hold out?

"It isn't possible. You couldn't know that. . . I . . . I . . ."

"There was only one window you could see from there. Madame Popinga's. . . . Someone was at that window. Someone who, like you, saw the couple take much too long to pass into the rays of the lighthouse. Someone who knew that Conrad and Beetje had stopped by the way. . . ."

"I was at the window," said Madame Popinga firmly.

And now it was Beetje's turn to look round her wildly with frightened eyes.



To everyone's surprise, Maigret asked no further questions. Not that that brought any relief. On the contrary, it only added to the prevailing uneasiness. They seemed to have come to the climax, and the sudden pause only heightened the suspense.

The inspector went out into the passage, opened the front door, and called out:

"Pijpekamp! . . . Would you come here, please? Leave Oosting where he is."

And then, as the Dutchman approached:

"You saw the lights go on in the Wienands's? . . . I suppose they're switched off now?"

"Yes. They've gone to bed."

"And Oosting?"

"He's standing behind the tree."

The Groningen detective looked round him with astonishment. Everybody was calm now, unbelievably calm, but they all looked as though they hadn't been to sleep for nights and nights.

"Have you got the revolver?"

"Here it is."

Maigret took it and held it out to Duclos.

"Will you please go and put this in the place where you found it after the murder?"

There was no resistance left in the professor, and he meekly obeyed, rejoining them a moment later.

"Will you wait here a moment?" said Maigret to Pijpekamp. "I'm going out with Beetje Liewens, just as Popinga did. Madame Popinga will go up to her room. So will her sister

and the professor. . . • I want them to go through the same actions."

Then, turning to Beetje:

"Will you come? "

It was cold out of doors. Maigret led the girl round to the shed at the back of the house, where he found Poppinga's and two lady's bicycles.

"Take one of those."

They cycled off in the direction of the timber-yard.

"Which of you suggested stopping? "

"Conrad."

"Was he still in high spirits? "

"No. As soon as we were alone together, he seemed to droop."

They were already passing the stacks of wood.

"We'll get down here. . . . Did he make love to you? "

"Yes, and no. That is, half-heartedly. He was definitely depressed by this time. Perhaps it was the reaction after the cognac. It made him light-hearted at first, then left him flat as a pancake. He put his arm round me. We were standing just here. . . . He told me he was very unhappy and that I was a real good sort. . . . Yes, he did. Those were his very words . . . that I was a real good sort, but that I'd come into his life too late. Then he went on to say that we had to be careful, or something dreadful might happen."

"What had you done with the bicycles? "

"We'd leant them against the stack. . . . His voice was even tearful. He got like that sometimes when he drank. . . . Then he began saying that it wasn't on his account at all—that his life didn't matter—but that it would be criminal at my age to mess up my life by plunging into adventure. . . . He swore he loved me, but that he couldn't bring himself to ruin my life. He told me Cor was a nice boy, and that I'd be happy with him when I once settled down. . . ."

"And then?"

She was breathing hard, in obvious agitation. She burst out:

"I told him he was a coward. I tried to get on my bicycle."

"Did he stop you?"

"Yes. He seized the handle-bars and wouldn't let go. He said: 'Let me explain. . . . I'm only thinking of you... . It's ...'"

"What did he explain? "

"Nothing. I didn't give him a chance. I threatened to shout if he didn't let go. Then he let go, and I jumped on and cycled off as

hard as I could.... He followed, talking all the time. But he couldn't catch up with me, and all I heard was:

" ' Beetje! ... Beetje! ... Do listen _____ "

" Is that all? "

" When he saw that I'd reached the gate of the farm he turned round. ... I looked back at him and saw him riding off. He seemed to be hunched over his handle-bars. ... I thought he looked miserable."

" And you jumped on your bicycle again and rode after him? "

" No. I was too angry with him for trying to throw me into Cor's arms. And I could see why. He wanted to be left in peace. . . . It was only when I reached the front door that I noticed that I'd dropped my scarf. I was afraid it might be found by the wood-pile, so I went off to look for it. ... I saw nobody about. But I was surprised, when I finally got home, to find my father was still out. He came back a little later. He was pale and there was an ugly look in his eye. He didn't say good night to me, and I guessed he'd been watching us. He could easily have been hiding in the timber-yard too.. . .

" The next day he must have searched my room and found Conrad's letters, for I never saw them again . . . and then—well, you know the rest."

" Come along."

" Where? "

Maigret didn't trouble to answer, and they rode back in silence to the Poppingas' house. There was a light in Madame Poppingas' window, but there was no sign of her.

" Do you really think she did it? "

But the inspector was thinking of Poppinga.

He had retraced his steps, upset by the scene he had come from. Jumping off his bicycle, he had wheeled it round to the back. . . . He was tempted by Beetje, but incapable of taking the plunge.

Maigret alighted, saying:

" Stay there, Beetje."

He wheeled his bicycle along the path which ran down the side of the house. He crossed the yard towards the shed.

Jean Duclos's window was lit up, and it was just possible to make out his figure sitting at the little table. Two yards further on was the bathroom window, slightly open, but showing no light.

" I don't suppose he was in any hurry to get indoors," thought

Maigret, his mind going back once more to Poppinga. " He bent his head just as I am doing as he wheeled his machine in under the roof/'

Was he deliberately dawdling? He seemed to be waiting for something to happen. And, as a matter of fact, something did happen: a little noise above, coming from the bathroom window, a metallic sound, the click of an unloaded revolver.

It was immediately followed by a scuffle ... the thud of a body, perhaps two bodies, falling to the floor.

Maigret nipped into the house by the kitchen door, and dashing upstairs switched on the bathroom light.

On the floor two men were wrestling. One of them was Pijpekamp, the other Cornelius Barends. As Maigret entered the room the latter went limp, and his hand dropped a revolver.

It was the revolver Jean Duclos had been told to replace on the bathroom window-sill, the revolver that had killed Conrad.

11. *The Unwanted Solution*

" FOOL!... "

With that one word, Maigret grasped the boy by the collar and literally picked him up from the floor, holding him for a moment as, had he let go sooner, the limp body would merely have sunk down again. Doors were opening, steps approaching.

" Everybody in the drawing-room! " roared Maigret.

He picked up the revolver too. He did not need to handle it gingerly, as he had himself made arrangements for it to be loaded with dummy cartridges.

Pijpekamp was straightening his jacket and flicking the dust off his trousers with the back of his hand. Pointing to Barends, the professor asked:

" Was it him? "

The young cadet looked more piteous than ever. He didn't look like a criminal at all, but simply like a guilty schoolboy. He looked down, avoiding everybody's eye. He fidgeted, not knowing what to do with his hands.

They all went downstairs into the drawing-room. Any came in

last, Madame Poppinga wouldn't sit down, and it was not difficult to guess that under her skirt her knees were trembling.

And now it was the inspector's turn to look embarrassed. He filled his pipe, lit it, then let it go out. He sat down in an easy-chair, but almost immediately jumped to his feet again.

"I've got myself mixed up in an affair which is no business of mine," he began jerkily. "A Frenchman came under suspicion, and I was sent to look into the matter. . . ."

To gain time he lit his pipe again. Then he turned towards Pijpekamp.

"Beetje is outside, and so is her father and Oosting. You'd better tell them to go home . . . or . . . or to come in here. . . . It all depends. Do you want the truth to come out? "

Without waiting to consider the question, Pijpekamp disappeared. A minute later Beetje entered shyly, then Oosting, frowning, and lastly Lie wens followed by Pijpekamp. The farmer was white and nervous.

As soon as everybody was in the room Maigret slipped out. They could hear him in the next room opening the sideboard. When he came back, he had a glass in one hand and a bottle of cognac in the other. He drank alone. He appeared to be in the depths of gloom. Everybody was standing round him and he seemed almost overawed by their presence.

"Well, Pijpekamp? Do you want the truth? "

And as Pijpekamp didn't answer, he went on savagely:

"I don't suppose you do, and you may be right. But. . . . Never mind—it's too late now. Here it is, whether you want it or not. . . .

"You see, we belong to different countries, to different races . . . different climates, *too*... . And as *soon* as you scented a family scandal you pounced on the first bit of evidence which would enable you to pigeon-hole the case. A murder committed by some foreign sailor. . . . Perhaps you were right. Perhaps it would have been better that way. Better for public morals, better for the preservation of that good example which the upper classes are supposed to set the people. . . . But I, on the other hand, I couldn't help thinking of Poppinga. I couldn't help seeing him here in this room, playing about with the wireless, and dancing—dancing under the murderer's eye...."

Maigret sighed. He looked at nobody as he went on:

"The revolver was found in the bathroom. So there was never any serious doubt that the shot came from inside the house. For it's

ridiculous to think that the murderer, before making off, should have had the presence of mind and the coolness of judgment to throw it in through the window, which was only open a few inches . . . having previously burgled the house to put a cap in the bath and a cigar-end in the dining-room/'

He started walking up and down the room, still avoiding the eyes of his audience. Liewens and the Baes, who could not understand his words, stared at him intently, trying to divine their sense.

"That cap, the cigar-end, and, lastly, the revolver taken from Poppinga's desk—it was too much. . . . Do you see what I mean? . . . Somebody was overdoing it. Dragging too many red herrings across the trail. Oosting or someone else coming from outside might have left any one of those clues, two at the most, but certainly not all.

"We can proceed by elimination. . . . The first to drop out is the Baes. Are we really to suppose that he first went into the dining-room to throw a cigar-end on the floor, then upstairs to look for Poppinga's revolver, finally to leave his own cap in the bath? And all this without anybody seeing him?

"Next we can rule out Beetje. She never went upstairs during the evening, and thus could not have put the cap in the bath. Nor could she have taken the cap in the first place, since she was walking by Poppinga's side.

"Her father could have killed Poppinga, after seeing him with Beetje, in a sudden access of rage. But how could he have entered the house unnoticed either?

"That leaves only Barends, apart from the household. He didn't go upstairs either, and if he'd pinched the cap, wouldn't Any have seen him? . . . He might have been jealous of his teacher, but—well, you've only to look at the boy! Does he look the sort that can commit a murder and not confess it within twenty-four hours? "

Maigret paused, knocking out his pipe against his heel, oblivious of the carpet.

"That's about all, at least as regards outsiders. We are left with Madame Poppinga, Any, and Jean Duclos. What proof is there against any one of them? Jean Duclos came out of the bathroom with the revolver in his hand. Many would say that that proved his innocence. But it might also be a very cunning move. •• There remains the question of the cap. Neither he nor Madame Poppinga could have taken it without the other's complicity. ••

"As we've seen tonight, there's only one person who could have taken the cap. Any was left for a moment just as she was abreast Oosting's boat.

"As for the cigar, there's no need to go into that. Here in Holland one can pick up an old cigar-end at any time of the day.

* . . As regards leaving it in the dining-room, Any was apparently the only one to enter the room during the evening. . . .

"But at the time the shot was fired she had about as good an alibi as it's possible to have."

Still shunning the gaze of his audience, Maigret laid some plans on the table, the plans Duclos had made of the house.

"It was impossible for Any to reach the bathroom without passing through her sister's room or the professor's. A quarter of an hour before the murder, she was known to be in her room, and no one saw her leave it, though both the other rooms were occupied. How, then, could she have fired a shot from the bathroom window?

"Any's been through a legal training, and she's read books on criminology. She knows the value of material evidence. . . ."

The girl stood taught and rigid. She was obviously under great strain, but she did not lose her self-possession.

"To leave the crime for a moment, I must say something about Poppinga. I'm the only person here who has never seen him, but I've managed to form a pretty clear idea of the man he was. . . . If he was thirsty for the pleasures of life, he was none the less easily intimidated by social conventions and established rules of conduct. In a reckless moment he made a pass at Beetje, but their subsequent delations were as much her doing as his—if not much more. With the servant he didn't go so far, as he didn't receive any great encouragement.

"A weakness for the fair sex—could one really call it more than that? He commits little peccadilloes. He steals a kiss here and a kiss there. Sometimes more than a kiss.

"He has known life on the high seas and in foreign ports. An Unfettered existence. But he is now in a permanent situation and a servant of the State, and he holds on to his post, to his house, to his wife. . . . He's not in the least anxious to put his head in a noose. . . .

"He's torn both ways, and he strikes a compromise, the balance being heavily on the side of caution. . . .

"That's what Beetje never understood. Caution doesn't mean

very much at the age of eighteen, and she thought he'd chuck everything up to run away with her. •.

"As Madame Poppinga's sister, Any is soon on terms of easy familiarity with Conrad. She comes, so to speak, within his orbit. If she hasn't Beetje's looks, she is . . . well, she's a woman. I dare say Poppinga had never met anyone of her type before. She may have aroused his curiosity—a new line! . . . Or perhaps it began only in playfulness. It may have tickled him to think of stealing Any from her precious books! Anyhow . . ."

The voice plodded on through the painful silence.

"I don't say she was his mistress, but with her, too, he had been, shall we say imprudent. Sufficiently, anyhow, for her to have been taken in. She fell in love with him, though she was never altogether blind, like her sister, to the fact that he was a philanderer. . . .

"They were living in this house, a man and two women: Madame Poppinga, blind, serene, and confident; Any, shrewd, passionate, and jealous. . . . It didn't take *her* long to realize that Conrad was carrying on with Beetje. Perhaps she'd looked for letters. Perhaps she'd found them. . . . She had no resentment against her sister. The latter was Conrad's wife, and she was prepared to accept that. But with Beetje it was different. She wouldn't admit her right to Conrad's affections. She couldn't bear the thought that those two might one day go off together.

"Rather than that. . . Yes, rather than that, wouldn't it be better to kill him?"

After a moment Maigret began again:

"That's all. Love turned to hate. At least, that's the simple formula for something that's no doubt very complex. . . . She began to play with the idea of killing him. She began to wonder how she could do so without leaving the smallest clue that could point in her direction. . . .

"And that very evening the professor talked of unpunished crimes and scientific murder! . . .

"If she's a passionate girl, she is none the less exceedingly proud of her intelligence. And she certainly is intelligent. She planned it very well. . . .

"She decided on a cigar-end as a means of throwing suspicion on an outsider. The alibi was carefully planned. She knew Conrad would see Beetje home, and knew that a hint would suffice to pin her sister to the window, watching anxiously for them to pass the lighted patch—

" The cap was an after-thought, and, as I said before, it was just one thing too many. It spoilt the picture. But, seeing it lying there on board Oosting's boat, she was suddenly tempted to add a final clue. Getting rid of Cor for a second, she snatched it up.

" Even then, she was perhaps only toying with the idea of murder, getting a vindictive satisfaction out of the idea that she *could* kill him, that he was in her power. . . . But wasn't the whole evening conspiring to drive her forward?

" Conrad and Beetje holding hands during the lecture. Conrad and Beetje laughing, talking, dancing together. Conrad and Beetje riding off together. Always Conrad and Beetje! . . .

" Everything drifted on according to plan. The two rode off together. Madame Poppinga and the professor were in their rooms. The hint was dropped, and Madame Poppinga was peering out into the darkness, her heart standing still. . . .

" Then Any slips by in her combinations. . . . She has only to wait in the bathroom till Conrad comes round to the back with his bicycle. She waits. She shoots. She jumps into the bath and pulls down the lid. . . .

" Duclos dashes in, picks up the revolver, then runs downstairs, meeting Madame Poppinga on the way. And when Any joins them in her combinations isn't it obvious that she has rushed straight out of her room? In her combinations! Don't forget that. For her prudery has always been proverbial."



Drearily Maigret went on with the story:

" Only Oosting knew. He was standing in the cabin of his boat, looking through one of the port-holes at the people going by. He saw Any take the cap. . . .

" He was Conrad's friend. Wouldn't he be the first to avenge him? Not a bit of it! Respect for his dead friend. Respect for the name of Poppinga. No scandal must be allowed to come near it. And not only did he hold his tongue, but he even prompted Cor to make a false statement to the police, designed to throw the blame on some foreign sailor.

" As for the others, they all suspected different people. Liewens, for instance, after seeing his daughter's letters, began to suspect her. Thinking I was going to arrest her, he tried to shoot himself.

" For her part, Beetje suspected her father, who didn't return to the house till after the crime, and who had perhaps discovered Conrad's relations with her and inflicted a father's vengeance.

" Lastly, Cor, having seen Madame Poppinga peering out of the window towards the timber-yard, suspected her."

Maigret sighed. He still had a few more things to say.

" Now for tonight. . . . When I made Any take the cap, no one thought much about it. Her cast-iron alibi had once and for all removed her from the list of suspects. But Any herself—surely she must now have known that I knew. That's what I wanted. That's why I made her take it. . . .

" We were reconstructing the crime. I was playing Poppinga's part—I had openly announced it. Everybody was to do exactly what they had done before. If everybody did, wouldn't that give her her chance? In front of all, I told the professor to put the revolver on the bathroom window-sill.

" Why not get rid of me—the only person who could give her away? I'd be passing under the bathroom window, to put the bicycle away. . . . The only question was whether the revolver would be loaded. But if it wasn't, she had only to leave it where it was.

" My plan miscarried. Madame Poppinga didn't go to the window. . . .

" And someone else took Any's place. . .

" That's the one redeeming act in this sorry story. The chivalry of the boy who wanted to save the woman he suspected, the woman who'd been like a mother to him. He's eighteen. One has to be eighteen to do things like that. . . ."

Again Maigret sighed.

" Yes, my plan miscarried. Without it, is there really any evidence against Any? I really don't know. Nor do I care. . . .

" It's in your hands now, Pijpekamp. I've told you the truth. Do what you like about it."

The Dutch detective moved reluctantly towards Any. The hollows under the girl's eyes devoured half her face, but she managed to say firmly:

" I'll answer any questions in the presence of my lawyer."

Maigret turned and walked slowly out of the room, followed by a calm but reproachful look from Oosting. As he left the house, he heard a flustered voice:

"A doctor_____Quick! ..."

Madame Poppinga, no doubt, with a heart attack. . .



Early next morning Maigret took the 5.5 from the little station at Delfzijl. He was alone. Nobody had thanked him. Nobody had come to see him off. Duclos had even deferred his departure till the next train, so as to avoid travelling with him.

The day broke as they came to a bridge over a canal. Boats were waiting with their sails limp. A man in uniform stood watching the train pass. As soon as it was over he would turn the bridge on its pivot, and the traffic on the canal would be resumed.

It was nearly three years later that Maigret came across Beetje in Paris, where she was living with her husband, who dealt in electric-lamp bulbs of Dutch manufacture. She had grown stouter.

Though she reddened at the sight of the inspector, she was soon talking about herself and her two children. Maigret gathered their situation, though comfortable, was by no means brilliant.

"And Any? . . ." he asked.

"Didn't you hear about it? . . . The papers were full of it. She killed herself with a fork only a few minutes before she was due to appear in court."

And Beetje added:

"You'll come and see us, won't you? . . . Avenue Victor Hugo, No. 28. . . Only don't leave it too long or you won't find us. We're going to Switzerland for a fortnight's winter sports. . . ."

That day, at the *Police Judiciaire*, Maigret's subordinates found him unbearable.

THE SAILORS' RENDEZVOUS

Translated from the French :

Au Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas

by Margaret Ludwig

I. *The Man Who Ate Glass*

" HE'S the best lad in the place, and the mother, who has no one but him, may die of it. I am certain, as everyone is here, that he is innocent. But the sailors I've talked to say that he will be condemned, because Civil Courts have never understood anything about sea affairs. Do all you can, as if it were for me. I read in the papers that you have become a big noise in the *Police Judiciaire*> and .. ."

It was a morning in June. The windows were all open in the flat on the Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, and Madame Maigret was finishing packing some big basket-trunks while Maigret, collarless, was reading the letter half-aloud.

" Who's it from? "

" Jorissen. We were at school together. He became a teacher at Quimper. Tell me, are you very keen on spending our week's holiday in Alsace? "

She looked at him without understanding, the question was so unexpected. For twenty years they had invariably spent their holidays with relations in the same village in the east.

" Suppose we went to the sea instead? "

He re-read half-aloud some passages from the letter:

" You are in a better position than I am for getting accurate information. Briefly, Pierre Le Clinche, a young man of twenty who was a pupil of mine, sailed three months ago on the *Ocean*, a Fecamp trawler which fishes cod in Newfoundland. The boat came back to port the day before yesterday. A few hours later, the captain's body was found in the dock, and all the evidence points to murder. Now Pierre Le Clinche has been arrested. ... "

" Fecamp would be no worse for a holiday than anywhere else," sighed Maigret, without enthusiasm.

But there was opposition. Madame Maigret was at home in Alsace, she helped with the jam and the plum-wine. The idea of living in a hotel in the company of other Parisians scared her.

" What shall I do all day? "

In the end she took some sewing and crochet-work.

" Well, don't ask me to bathe. I warn you of that now."



They arrived at the *Hotel de la Plage* at five o'clock, and Madame Maigret immediately began rearranging their room to her taste. Then they dined.

And now Maigret, all alone, was pushing open the frosted glass door of a harbour cafe, *Au Rendezvous des Terre-Neuvas*.

Just opposite, the trawler *Ocian* was moored to the quay near a line of trucks. Acetylene lamps hung from the rigging, and in the harsh light people were moving about unloading the cod, which was passed from hand to hand and piled up in the trucks after being weighed.

There were ten of them working there, men and women, dirty, ragged, saturated with salt. And in front of the weighing-machine, a very clean young man, with a sea-cap over one ear and a note-book in his hand, was checking the weights. A rank, nauseating smell, which did not get less as you went away from it, and which the heat made heavier still, seeped into the bar.

Maigret sat down on a bench in an empty corner. The atmosphere around him was one of hubbub and excitement. The bar was full of sailors, some standing, others sitting, with their glasses on the marble tables.

" What will you have? "

" Beer."

The proprietor came up after the barmaid*

" You know, I've another room across there for visitors. Here they make such a noise. ..."

He gave a wink.

" After three months at sea one can understand, eh? "

" They're the crew of the *Ocian*? "

" Most of them*. ... The other boats haven't come back yet. . . . You mustn't mind them. There are some chaps who haven't been sober for three days. Are you staying here? You're a painter, I bet. . . . They come every now and again and sketch. Look! One of them did my head there, above the cash-desk."

But the inspector gave so little encouragement to his chatter that he went off, quike put outs.

" A copper! Who has a copper coin? " cried a sailor who was hardly as tall or as broad as a boy of sixteen. He had a grizzled head, with irregular features. Some of his teeth were missing. Drink had made his eyes shine, and he had a three days' growth of beard on his cheeks.

Someone gave him a copper. He bent it with his fingers, then put it between his teeth and snapped it in two.

" Whose turn next? "

He was showing off. He felt that he had caught the general attention, and was ready to do anything to hold it.

A bloated-looking engineer seized a coin, but he interrupted him:

" Wait! Here's something else you must do."

He picked up an empty glass, took a big bite out of it and chewed up the bits, with every sign of satisfaction.

" Ha! ha! You might be able to do that some day. . . . More drinks, Leon! "

His glance roved round the room, like a second-rate actor's, and stopped at Maigret. He frowned. For a moment he was taken aback. Then he came forward, but he was so drunk that he had to support himself on the table.

" Come for me? " he said with a swagger.

"Steady, P'tit Louis!"

" Still the business of the pocket-book? Listen, you guys! . . . You wouldn't believe me just now when I told you those stories about the Rue de Lappe. . . . Well, here's a big noise from the police going out of his way just because of this baby. . . . Will you let me have another drink? "

Now all eyes were on Maigret.

" Sit down here, P'tit Louis! Don't be a fool! "

But it was too much for P'tit Louis.

" You offer me a drink! No! It's not possible! What do you think, boys? The inspector is offering me a drink! •.. A double dram, *Leon!*"

" You were on the *Ocean?* "

This was another matter. P'tit Louis's face grew so dark that it seemed as if his drunkenness had vanished. He withdrew a little, defiantly, along the bench.

" So what? "

" Nothing. . . . Your health! . . . How long have you **been on** the binge? "

" We've been at it for three days. Since we came ashore, you know. I gave Leon my money ... over nine hundred francs.... I hope there's some left!... How much have I still got, L6on, you old cheat? "

" Certainly not enough to go on paying for drinks all round until morning. About fifty francs. Isn't it a shame, Inspector? Tomorrow he won't have a sou left, and he will have to sail on any old boat as a bunker-hand. . . . And it's the same every time. Not that I press them to drink. On the contrary.. . ."

"Shut up!"

The others had become dispirited. They talked in low tones, and kept turning towards the inspector's table.

" They're all from the *Ocian*? "

" Except the big chap in the cap, who is a pilot, and the red-haired one, who is a ship's carpenter. ... "

" Tell me what happened."

" I've nothing to say."

"Listen, P'tit Louis! Don't forget the pocket-book business when you are doing your glass-eating act in the Bastille."

" I won't get more than three months for it, and I'm just needing a rest. If you feel like that, we can go at once."

" You worked in the engine-room? "

" Of course. As usual, I was second stoker."

" You saw the captain often? "

" Perhaps twice altogether."

" And the radio operator? "

"Don't know!"

" Leon, fill up the glasses."

P'tit Louis gave a contemptuous laugh.

" I could drink until I burst and still I would only say what I wanted to. But while you're at it you might offer the boys a drink. After a foul trip like that.... "

A sailor who couldn't have been twenty edged up and pulled at P'tit Louis's sleeve. Then they both began talking in Breton.

" What's he saying? "

" That it's time I went to bed."

" Is he your friend? "

P'tit Louis shrugged his shoulders, and as the other tried to take his glass from him he emptied it defiantly at one gulp.

The Breton had thick eyebrows and wavy hair.

" Sit down beside us," said Maigret.

But the sailor went off without answering, and sat down at another table, where he continued to stare fixedly at the two men.

The atmosphere was heavy and salt-laden. You could hear the voices of the summer visitors, playing dominoes in the next room, where it was cleaner and airier.

"Much cod?" asked Maigret, who followed up an idea with the relentlessness of an electric drill.

"Filth! It arrived half-rotten."

"Why was that?"

"Not salted enough.... Or too much! . . . What muck! Not a third of the men will sail next week. . . ."

"You're off again?"

"*Parbleu!* What are engines for? Sailing-ships make only one trip, from February to September. But trawlers have time to go twice to the Banks."

"Will you go back?"

P'tit Louis spat on the ground and shrugged wearily.

"I'd sooner go to Fresnes. . . . A lousy business! . . ."

"The captain?"

"I've nothing to say."

He had picked up the butt-end of a cigar and lit it. Suddenly he rushed into the street, where they saw him vomiting, standing on the edge of the pavement, where the Breton joined him.

"Poor devil!" sighed the proprietor. "The day before yesterday he had nearly a thousand francs in his pocket. Today it's a near thing if he doesn't owe me money. Oysters and lobster! Without reckoning that he pays for drinks for everyone as if he didn't know what to do with his money."

"You knew the radio operator on the *Ocian*?"

"He lodged here. Look! He used to feed at that table, then he would go and write in the other room to have more peace."

"Whom did he write to?"

"It wasn't only letters. Poetry or novels, as you might say. He was an educated, well-mannered boy. Now that I know you're from the police I can tell you they've made a great mistake."

"It doesn't alter the fact that the captain was killed!"

A shrug of the shoulders. The proprietor sat down in front of Maigret. P'tit Louis came in, made for the counter and ordered a drink. And his companion went on urging him in Breton to keep quiet.

"You mustn't pay any attention. Once they're ashore they're

always like this, drinking, shouting, fighting, breaking windows. On board ship they work like demons. Yes, even P'tit Louis. . . . The chief engineer of the *Ocian* told me only yesterday that he does the work of two men. . . . At sea a boiler feed-pipe exploded. . . . It was dangerous to repair. . . . Nobody wanted to go. . . . It was P'tit Louis who took it on. . . . Once they stop drinking . . ."

L6on lowered his voice and looked mistrustfully at his customers.

"This time they've maybe got other reasons for putting away their liquor. They won't tell you anything because you're not from the sea.... But I hear them talking. . . . I'm an old pilot. . . . There are things . . ."

"Things?"

"It's difficult to explain. . . . You know there aren't enough fishers in Fecamp for all the trawlers. . . . They get them from Brittany. . . . These chaps have queer ideas, and they're superstitious. . . ."

He lowered his voice until it was scarcely audible.

"It seems that this time it was the evil eye. It began even in port when they were getting off. A sailor climbed up a derrick to wave to his wife. He was holding on to a rope and it broke, and there he was on the deck with his leg smashed. They had to take him ashore in a dinghy. . . . And there was a cabin-boy who didn't want to go, and howled and wept! Well, three days later there was a wireless message to say that he'd been swept overboard by a wave! A kid of fifteen . . . a little thin fair-haired kid with a name like a girl's . . . Jean-Marie. . . . And then . . . Give us some Calvados, Julie. The bottle on the right. . . . No! not that one . . . the one with the glass stopper. . . ."

"The evil eye went on working? "

"I don't know anything definitely. You'd think they were all afraid to speak. All the same, if the radio operator was arrested it was because the police had heard that he and the captain hadn't spoken a word the whole trip. . . . They were like cat and dog! "

"And then what? . . ."

"Things . . . things that meant nothing. . . . Listen! The captain made them take the boat to a part where no cod had ever been seen. And he roared at them because the head-fisher refused to obey! He took out his revolver • .. they were mad about it! They didn't take a ton in a whole month. Then suddenly the fishing became good. . . . All the same, the cod had to be sold at half-price because it was badly salted. Everything! Even coming into port they made two

false manoeuvres, and sank a boat. As if they'd had a curse on them! ... The captain sent everyone on shore that evening, without leaving anyone on guard, and stayed on board himself all alone.

" It must have been about nine o'clock. They were all here getting tight. The radio operator had gone up to his room. Then he went out. ... He was seen going towards the boat. ...

" It was then that it happened. ... A fisher who was getting ready to go out at the lower end of the harbour, heard the sound of something falling into the water. ...

" He ran up with a customs man he met on the way. They lit lanterns. There was a body in the dock, caught on the chain of the *Ocians* anchor.

" It was the captain. ... They got him out dead. ... They applied artificial respiration. They couldn't make it out, because he'd only been ten minutes in the water. ...

" It was the doctor who explained. ... It seems he'd been strangled beforehand. D'you see? ... And they found the operator in his cabin, which is behind the funnel—you can see it from here. ... The police came here to search his room, and found his papers burnt. ...

" What do you make of it? ... Two Calvados, Julie! ... Your health!"

P'tit Louis, who was getting more and more worked up, seized a chair between his teeth and, in the middle of a circle of sailors, raised it horizontally with a defiant look at Maigret.

" The captain is from these parts? " asked the inspector.

" Yes! A queer chap! Scarcely bigger or broader than P'tit Louis. And always polite and pleasant. And as neat as a new pin! I don't think he's ever been seen in the cafe. He wasn't married. But he lodged with a widow, the wife of a customs official, in Rue d'Etretat. They used to say he'd end up by marrying her. He'd been going to Newfoundland for fifteen years ... always for the same firm: *La Morue Franfaise*. Captain Fallut, that was his name. They're in a bit of a jam about sending the *Ocean* back to the Bank. No captain! And half the crew not wanting to sign on again. ..."

" Why?"

" You mustn't look for reasons. It's the evil eye, as I've told you. They're considering laying up the boat until next year. Apart from the fact that the police have asked the crew to hold themselves at their disposal. ..."

" Is the radio operator in prison? "

" Yes; they took him off that evening, bracelets and all. I was at the door, and I don't mind telling you my wife cried about it . . . and I myself. And yet he wasn't a particularly good customer. I gave him special prices . . . and he hardly drank anything. . . . "

They were interrupted by a sudden uproar. P'tit Louis had fallen on the Breton, probably because he insisted on keeping him from drinking. They were both rolling on the ground. The others were getting out of the way.

It was Maigret who separated them by literally hauling them up, one with each hand.

" Well . . . do you want to bite each other's noses off? "

The whole thing happened quickly. The Breton, who had his hands free, drew a knife from his pocket, and the inspector saw it just in time to kick it spinning two yards with a movement of his heel. His boot hit the Breton on the chin, which began to bleed. And then P'tit Louis threw himself on his companion, still in a drunken daze, and began to cry and beg his pardon.

Leon came up to Maigret, watch in hand:

" It's closing time. Otherwise we'll have the police here. Every evening it's the same story. Impossible to get them out. . . . "

" Do they sleep on board the *Ociarii* " "

" Yes. Except when, as happened yesterday with two of them, they stay in the gutter. I found them there this morning when I opened the shutters. . . . "

The barmaid was collecting the glasses off the tables. The men went out in threes and fours. Only P'tit Louis and the Breton made no move.

" D'you want a room? " Leon asked Maigret.

" Thank you! I'm putting up at the *Hotel de la Plage!* " "

" I say . . . "

" What? " "

" It's not that I want to interfere. It's none of my business. Only we were fond of that operator. Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea to *chercher la femme*, as they say in novels. I've heard whispers. . . . "

" Had Pierre Le Clinche a mistress? " "

" Him? Oh, no. . . . He was engaged to a girl in his own part of the country, and every day he used to send a six-page letter to her _____ " "

" Then who . . . ? " "

" I don't know at all. Perhaps it's more complicated than one thinks. And then . . . "

" And then . . . ? "

" Nothing!... Be sensible, P'tit Louis! Go to bed...."

But P'tit Louis was in an advanced state of drunkenness. He was maudlin. He embraced his comrade, whose chin was still bleeding, and begged for forgiveness.

Maigret went out, his hands in his pockets, his coat-collar turned up, for the air was chilly.

In the entrance hall of the *Hotel de la Plage* he saw a girl sitting in a basket-chair. A man rose from another chair and smiled with a trace of embarrassment.

It was Jorissen, the teacher from Quimper. Maigret hadn't seen him for fifteen years, and the teacher wasn't quite sure how to address him.

" Excuse ... excuse me. I. . . we've just arrived, Mademoiselle L'Gonnec and I. . . I looked in all the hotels. They said that you . . . that you'd be back. This is Pierre Le Clinche's fiancée. She absolutely insisted. . . ."

A tall, rather pale girl, a little timid. But when Maigret shook hands with her, he realized that behind her provincial awkwardness and coquetry there was a will.

She said nothing. She was too impressed. So was Jorissen, the simple teacher, who found his old comrade one of the big noises of the *Police Judiciaire*.

" Madame Maigret was just pointed out to me in the drawing-room. . . . I didn't dare . . ."

Maigret looked at the girl. She was neither pretty nor plain, but her simplicity was rather touching.

" You know he's innocent, don't you?" she managed to say without looking at anyone.

The porter was waiting to get back to his bed. He had already unbuttoned his waistcoat.

" We'll see about that tomorrow. You've got a room? ..."

" The room next to yours, Maig—Inspector," the teacher from Quimper stammered in confusion. " And Mademoiselle Leonnec is on the floor above. I'm afraid I'll have to go back tomorrow on account of examinations.... Do you think . . . ? "

" Tomorrow! We'll see! " Maigret repeated.

As he was getting into bed, his wife murmured, half-asleep: " Don't forget to turn the light out."

2. *The Yellow Shoes*

THEY walked side by side without looking at each other, first along the beach, which was deserted at that hour, then along the quays.

And gradually the silences became rarer. Marie Leonnec managed to talk in an almost natural voice.

" You'll find that you'll like him straight away! You couldn't do anything else. And then you'll understand that. . . "

Maigret stole curious and admiring glances at her. Jorissen had gone back to Quimper in the early morning, leaving the girl alone at Fecamp.

" I don't insist on her coming back with me. She has a will of her own! " he had said.

The evening before, she had been as negative as a girl brought up in the calm of a little town can be. But in less than an hour after Jorissen's departure they were leaving the *Hotel de la Plage*, she and Maigret.

Maigret wore his most forbidding look. But she just wasn't impressed, refused to notice it, and smiled confidently.

" His only fault," she went on, " is that he is extremely sensitive. But how should he be anything else? His father was only a fisher. His mother mended nets for a long time so that he could be educated. Now it is he who supports her. He is educated. He has a fine future before him. . . . "

" Are your parents well off? " Maigret asked bluntly.

" They are the biggest makers of nets and metal cables in Quimper. That's why Pierre didn't even want to speak to my father. For a whole year we met secretly. . . . "

" You were both eighteen? "

" More or less. . . . It was I who told my family. And Pierre swore he would only marry me when he was earning at least two thousand francs a month. You see . . . "

" Has he written to you since he was arrested? "

" Only one letter. A very short one! And he who used to write pages and pages every day! He said it would be better for me and my parents that I should announce in the district that everything had been broken off. "

They passed the *Ocian*, which was still being unloaded. At high tide her black hull dominated the wharf. On the fo'c's'le deck three

men, bare to the waist, were washing themselves. Among them Maigret recognized P'tit Louis.

His eye caught a movement: one of the sailors nudged his companion and pointed at Maigret and the girl. Maigret frowned.

"That's considerate, isn't it?" went on the voice beside him. "He knows what proportions a scandal assumes in a small town like Quimper. He wanted to give me back my freedom."

It was a clear morning. The girl in her grey tailored suit could have been a student or a teacher.

"It shows that my parents must have confidence in him too, for them to have let me come! And yet my father would prefer to see me married to a commercial traveller. . . ."

Maigret made her stay for a while in the waiting-room of the police station while he made some notes.

Half an hour later they both went into the prison.



It was a very grumpy Maigret who stood with hunched shoulders, his hands behind his back, his pipe gripped between his teeth, in a corner of the cell. He had told the authorities that he was not working on the case in any official capacity, but was only following it out of curiosity.

Several people had described the radio operator to him, and the mental image he had made corresponded in every detail to the lad before him.

A tall, thin young man in a crumpled but correct suit, his face at once serious and timid, like a boy who is top of the class. Clusters of freckles under his eyes, and hair cropped short like stubble.

He jumped up when the door opened, and for a long moment he held back from the girl as she came towards him. She had literally to throw herself into his arms and remain there by force while he cast distracted looks all round.

"Marie! . . . Who's that? . . . How . . . ?"

He was in a highly nervous state, but made every effort to conceal it. Only his spectacles were rather moist and his lip trembled.

"You shouldn't have come. . . ."

He looked at the unknown figure of Maigret, and then at the door, which had been left ajar.

He had no collar on and no shoelaces, but a reddish beard of several days' growth. Desperate as was his situation, all this troubled

him. He fingered his bare neck and prominent Adam's apple with embarrassment.

" Does my mother ... ? "

"She hasn't come! But she doesn't believe either that you're guilty."

Even the girl couldn't give free vent to her emotion. It was like a scene that hadn't come off, perhaps because the atmosphere was too crude.

They looked at each other and didn't know what to say, tried to find words. Then Marie Leonnec pointed to Maigret.

" This is a friend of Jorissen's. He's an inspector in the *Police Judiciaire*, and he's said he'll help us. ... "

Le Clinche started to hold out his hand but didn't dare.

" Thank you. . . . I . . . "

It was a mix-up all along the line, and the girl, realizing it, wanted to cry. She had counted on a moving interview that would convince Maigret.

She looked at her fiancé with vexation, with even a touch of impatience.

" You must say everything you can that will help in your defence."

Pierre Le Clinche sighed, awkward and bored.

" I've only a few questions to ask you," put in the inspector.

" All the crew is agreed in saying that during the course of the trip your relations with the captain were cold, to say the least of it. Now, when you went off you were on rather good terms. What caused the change? "

The operator opened his mouth, said nothing, and fixed a desolate eye on the floor.

" Was it a matter of routine? The first two days you fed with the second officer and the chief engineer. After that you preferred to eat with the men. ... "

" Yes ... I know _____ "

" Why? "

And Marie Leonnec cried impatiently:

" Do talk, Pierre! It's to get you off! You must tell us the truth."

" I don't know _____ "

He seemed without any feelings or incentive, almost without hope.

" Did you have any arguments with Captain Fallut? "

" No "

" Yet you lived for nearly three months on the same boat without saying a word to him. Everyone noticed it. There are rumours that at certain times Fallut gave the impression that he'd gone mad. ... "

" I don't know _____ "

Marie Leonnec tried to keep from sobbing under the nervous strain.

" When the *Ocian* came into port, you went ashore with the others. In your hotel room you burned some papers... . "

" Yes. That was of no importance.... "

" You have a habit of keeping a diary of everything you see. Wasn't it the diary of this trip that you burned? "

He stood there hanging his head like a schoolboy who hasn't learned the lesson and stares fixedly at the ground.

" Why? "

" I don't know now. "

" And you don't know why you went back on board? But not straight away! . . . You were seen hiding behind a truck fifty yards from the boat. ... "

The girl looked at the inspector, then at her fiance, then back again at the inspector. This was beginning to be beyond her.

" Yes. . . . "

" The captain came down the gangway and set foot on the quay. It was at that moment that he was attacked. ... "

He still said nothing.

" Damn it, rrerfi, can't you answer? "

" Yes, answer, Pierre! It's to get you free. I don't understand. . . . I "

Tears welled up in her eyes.

" Yes. . . . "

" Yes what? "

" I was there! "

" Well, then, did you see? "

" Not very well. . . . There was a pile of barrels, and some trucks. There was a struggle between two men, then one of them ran off and a body fell into the water. ... "

" What did the man who ran away look like? "

" I don't know. "

" Was he in sailor's clothes? "

" No. "

" Well, then, you know how he was dressed? "

" I only noticed his yellow shoes when he was passing near a gas-light. . . . "

" What did you do next? "

" I went on board. . . . "

" Why? And why didn't you get help for the captain? Did you know he was already dead? . . . "

A heavy silence. Marie L[^]onnec clasped her hands in anguish.

" Speak, Pierre! Speak, I beg you! "

" Yes... . No. . . . I swear I don't know! "

There were steps in the corridor. The gaoler had come to say that the examining magistrate was waiting for Le Clinche.

His fiancée wanted to kiss him. He hung back. Finally he took her slowly in his arms with an absent-minded expression.

And he did not kiss her mouth, but the delicate little curls on her temples.

" Pierre!... "

" You shouldn't have come! " he said, his brow furrowed, and followed the gaoler with a weary step.

Maigret and Marie Leonnec got outside without saying anything. Then she sighed with an effort:

" I don't understand. . . . I. . . "

Then, straightening her head:

" But he's innocent, all the same, I'm sure! We don't understand, because we've never been in such a situation. For three days now he's been in prison, with everybody accusing him. . . . And he's a timid man! "

Maigret was quite touched by the way she did her best to put energy into her words, although she was quite discouraged.

" You'll do something, all the same, won't you? "

" On condition that you go back home to Quimper . . . "

" No! . . . Not that! Listen____ Let me . . . "

" Well, go down to the beach and sit with my wife and try to do something. She'll probably have some embroidery for you. . . . "

" What are you going to do? Do you think that the clue of the yellow shoes . . . ? "

People looked back at them because Marie L[^]onnec was so animated that it looked as if they were quarrelling.

" I repeat that I'll do everything that's in my power. . . . Listen! This street leads straight to the *Hotel de la Plage*, Tell my wife that I'll perhaps be a bit late for lunch. . . . "

And he turned and went down to the quay.

His irritated look was gone. He was almost smiling.

He had feared an emotional scene in the cell, with vehement protestations, tears and kisses. But it had gone off quite differently, it had been simpler, and at the same time more heart-rending and significant.

The man's personality pleased him, just because there was something distant and concentrated about it.

In front of a shop he met P'tit Louis with a pair of rubber boots in his hand.

"Where are you going?"

"To sell them! Like to buy them? They make much better ones in Canada. I bet you won't find the like of this in France. Two hundred francs. . . ."

All the same, P'tit Louis was a little uncomfortable and was only waiting to be allowed to go on his way.

"Has it ever occurred to you that Captain Fallut was a bit touched?"

"You don't see much in the bunkers, you know. . . ."

"But you hear things. . . . Well?"

"Of course there were some funny stories! . . ."

"What?"

"All kinds. . . . Nothing! . . . It's difficult to explain. . . . Especially once you're on shore!"

He still had his boots in his hand, and the ship-chandler, who had spotted him, was waiting at his door.

"Do you need me any longer?"

"When exactly did it begin?"

"Straight away. . . . A boat is either lucky or unlucky! The *Ocian* was unlucky. . . ."

"Bad seamanship?"

"That among other things! What do you expect me to say? . . . Things that don't make sense, but are there all the same. . . . The proof is that there was a feeling we wouldn't come back. . . . I say, is it true that I'm not going to be bothered about that pocket-book any more?"

"We'll see _____"

The harbour was almost empty. In summer all the ships were away in Newfoundland except the fishing-boats that catch fresh fish along the coast. There was only the gaunt profile of the *Ocian* in the dock, and from there came the strong smell of cod which filled the air.

Near the trucks was a man in leather gaiters and a braided cap.

"Is that the owner?" Maigret asked a customs man who was passing.

"Yes—that's the director of *La Morue Franpaise*. . . ."

The inspector introduced himself. The director gave him a suspicious look without interrupting his work of overseeing the unloading.

"What do you think about the murder of your captain?"

"What do I think? I think that here's eight hundred tons of damaged cod. And that if it goes on like this, the boat won't make a second trip. And it's not the police who settle up these matters or meet the deficit!"

"You had complete trust in Fallut, then?"

"Yes! . . . What next?"

"You think it was the operator? . . ."

"Operator or not, it's a wasted year. Not to mention the state the nets were in when they brought them back! Nets that cost two million francs, d'you hear? Torn as if they'd amused themselves fishing from the rocks. . . . And on top of that, a crew that talks about the evil eye. . . . Hi! down there. . . . What the hell are you doing? . . . Did I say, yes or no, that this truck was to be loaded before anything else? . . ."

And he began running along the boat, fulminating against the whole world.

Maigret stayed a few minutes watching the unloading. Then he went off in the direction of the jetty, among the fishers in their blouses of rust-coloured sailcloth.

Before long he heard a voice behind him:

"Sst! Sst! . . . Inspector! Inspector!"

It was Leon, the proprietor of the *Rende-Vous des Terre-Neuvas*, who was trying to catch up with him as fast as his little legs would carry him.

"Come and have something on the house. . . ."

He wore a mysterious look, which seemed to promise all manner of things. On the way he explained.

"Things are quieting down! Those who haven't gone home to Brittany or their own villages have spent nearly all their money. . . . This morning I'd only some mackerel fishers...."

They crossed the quay and entered the cafe, which was empty, except for the barmaid who was wiping the tables.

" Wait. . . What'll you have? . . . A small *apdritif*. It's nearly time for one. You see, as I told you yesterday, I don't press people to drink. On the contrary! And above all, when they've finished I don't charge them for more than what they owe me. Go and see whether I'm wanted in the kitchen, Julie! . . ."

He gave the inspector a knowing wink.

" Your health! . . . I saw you a long way off. So, as I'd something to tell you . . ."

He went to make sure that the girl wasn't listening behind the door. Then, with an increasingly enigmatic but delighted look, he drew something out of his pocket, a piece of cardboard the shape of a photograph.

" *Voila!* What do you say to that? "

It was a photograph all right, the photograph of a woman. But the head was scribbled all over with red ink. A furious attempt had been made to eradicate the face completely. The pen had scratched holes in the paper. There were lines in every direction so that not a square millimetre was left visible.

Below the head, however, the bust was left untouched. The bosom was opulent, the dress made of some shiny satin, very tight and low-cut.

"Where did you find this?"

More winks. . . .

"I don't mind telling you, as we're alone. Le Clinche's locker shuts rather badly. So he had the habit of slipping his fiancee's letters under his table-cloth."

" And you used to read them? "

" Oh, they were quite uninteresting. It was only by chance. . . . When they made a search they didn't think of looking under the cover. . . . The idea occurred to me in the evening, and this is what I found. Of course you can't see the head. But it's not the fiancee. She's not that build. I've seen her portrait too. So there is another woman in the background. . . ."

Maigret looked intently at the portrait. The line of the shoulders was alluring. The woman must be rather older than Marie Leonnec. There was something extremely sensual about the bust.

A bit vulgar, too! The dress looked like a* cheap copy of some fancy model.

" Is there any red ink in the place? "

" No! Nothing but green ink."

" Le Clinche never used red ink? "

" Never_____He had his own ink for his fountain-pen. Special ink, blue-black."

Maigret rose and made for the door.

" You'll excuse me? "

A few minutes later he was on board the *Ocian* rummaging in the operator's cabin, then in the captain's, which was dirty and disorderly.

There was no red ink on board, and the fishers had never seen any.

As he left the ship Maigret got a dirty look from the owner, who was still vituperating against the world.

" Is there any red ink in your offices? "

" Red ink? What for? We don't keep a school_____"

But, as if he remembered something, he added brusquely:

" Fallut was the only one who used red ink when he was at home in the Rue d'Etretat. Is it still this same story? . . . Mind the truck down there! . . . It just needs an accident. .. Well, what do you want with your red ink? ..."

" Nothing!_____Thank you_____"

P'tit Louis was coming back without his boots but with a pair of spectacles on his nose, a cadet's cap on his head, and old down-at-heel shoes on his feet.

3. *The Portrait Without a Head*

" *WHICH could not be said of me in any circumstances, as I have savings which are quite equal to a captains pay. . . .*"

Maigret left Madame Bernard on the doorstep of her little house in the Rue d'Etretat. She was a well-preserved woman in her fifties, and she had just talked for a solid half-hour about her first husband, her widowhood, the captain who had been her boarder, the rumours that had gone round about their relationship, and finally about the unknown who was certainly a " loose-living woman."

The inspector had been shown round the whole house, which was well kept but full of objects in bad taste. Captain Fallut's room was still as it had been arranged in preparation for his return.

Few personal possessions: some clothes in a trunk, some books—mostly adventure novels, and photographs of boats.

It all gave the impression of a placid, mediocre existence.

"There was no contract, but we had an understanding, and everybody knew that we'd end up by getting married. I supplied the house, the furniture, and the linen. . . . Nothing would have been altered and we should have been quite comfortable, especially in three years when he'd have had his pension...."

From the windows one could see the grocer's opposite, the sloping street and the pavement where children were playing.

"Then last winter he met that woman and everything was upset. At his age, too! . . . Is it possible to get so infatuated about a creature like that? And he made such a mystery out of it. He must have gone to Le Havre or somewhere to see her, because they were never seen together. I felt there was something in the wind. He bought thinner underwear . . . and even silk socks once! As there was nothing between us it was none of my business, and I didn't want to appear to be defending my own interests. . . ."

A whole side of the dead man's life was cleared up by this conversation with Madame Bernard. The little man, well on in years, who came back to port after a fishing trip and spent the winter living like a good bourgeois with Madame Bernard, who looked after him and waited for him to marry her.

He ate with her in the dining-room under the portrait of the first husband with the blond moustache. Then he would go to his room and read an adventure story.

And suddenly this peaceful existence was disturbed. Another woman appeared. Captain Fallut began to frequent Le Havre, to dress better and to shave more closely, even bought silk socks and hid from his landlady.

But he wasn't married or engaged. He was free, yet he never once showed himself at Fecamp with the stranger.

Was it *la grande passion*, life's great adventure arriving rather late? Or merely a sordid affair?



Maigret arrived at the beach and saw his wife sitting on a red-striped deck-chair, and beside her Marie L'onnec sewing.

Some people were bathing on the beach, which was white in the sun. A lazy sea. And over there, on the other side of the jetty, the *Ocian* lay in the dock, with her cargo of cod still in process of being

unloaded, and her sullen crew talking in phrases full of hidden meaning.

He kissed Madame Maigret on the forehead and bowed to the girl, answering her inquiring eyes with a "Nothing special."

His wife said in a placid voice:

"Mademoiselle Leonnec has told me her whole story. Do you think the boy is capable of doing such a thing?"

They went slowly back to the hotel, Maigret carrying the two folded deck-chairs. Just as they were sitting down at table a policeman in uniform came up looking for the inspector.

"I was told to show you this. It came in an hour ago. . . ."

And he held out a yellow envelope which had been opened and had no address. Inside was a sheet of paper with cramped, precise handwriting:

No one is to be accused of my death, and do not seek to understand my action.

These are my last wishes. I leave all that I possess to the widow Bernard who has always been good to me, and I charge her to send my gold chronometer to my nephew and to see that I am buried in the cemetery at Fecamp beside my mother. . . .

Maigret opened his eyes wide.

"It's signed Octave Fallut," he said softly. "How did this letter come to the police station?"

"We don't know. It was found in the letter-box. The signature seems to be quite genuine. The superintendent immediately informed the public prosecutor. . . ."

"But that doesn't alter the fact that he was strangled! And that it is impossible to strangle yourself!" growled Maigret.

Beside them the table d'hôte was clamouring to be eaten. There were red radishes on a dish.

"Wait a moment while I copy this letter. Because I expect you ought to take it back?"

"I haven't any special instructions, but I suppose . . ."

"Yes, it ought to be kept in the dossier."

A little later, Maigret, his copy in his hand, looked impatiently round the dining-room where he would have to waste an hour waiting for the various dishes. All this time Marie Leonnec hadn't taken her eyes off his face, but she had not dared to interrupt his sulky meditation. Only Madame Maigret, confronted with pale veal cutlets, sighed:

" All the same, we would have been better off in Alsace. ... "

Maigret rose before dessert, and wiped his mouth, in a hurry to see the ship, the harbour, and the sailors again. On the way he muttered:

" Fallut knew he was going to die! But did he know that he was going to be killed? Did he want to save his murderer in advance, or did he just want to commit suicide?

" Besides, who put the yellow envelope into the letter-box? It was neither stamped nor addressed."

The news had already gone round, for, when Maigret got near the ship, the director of *La Morue Franfaise* called out with aggressive irony :

" Well, it seems that Fallut strangled himself! Who found that out? "

" I'd rather you'd tell me which of the officers of the *Ocian* are still on board? "

" None of them! The second officer has gone off on a bust to Paris. The chief engineer is at his home at Yport and won't be back until the unloading is finished."

Maigret went back again into the captain's cabin. A narrow cabin. A bed with a dirty counterpane. A cupboard in the bulkhead. A blue enamel coffee-pot on a table covered with oilcloth. Boots wide wooden soles in the corner.

It was gloomy and pitchy, saturated with the acrid smell that reigned over the entire ship. Striped blue jerseys were drying on the bridge. Maigret nearly slipped as he crossed the gangway, which was greasy with fishes' entrails.

" Have you found anything? "

The inspector shrugged his shoulders, looked back again lugubriously at the *Ocean*, and asked a customs man how one could get to Yport.

Yport was a village at the foot of the cliffs, six kilometres from Fecamp. A few fishermen's cottages. A few farms scattered round about. Some villas, mostly let furnished during the summer season, and a single hotel.

On the beach more bathers, children, and mammas with their knitting or embroidery.

" Monsieur Laberge's house, please? "

" The chief engineer of the *Ocian* or the farmer? "

" The chief engineer."

He was shown a little house surrounded by a small garden. And

as he approached the green-painted gate, the sound of a dispute came to him from inside the house. Two voices, a man's and a woman's. But he couldn't make out the words, and he knocked.

There was a silence. Steps approached. The door opened and a tall thin man appeared, suspicious and surly.

"What is it?"

A woman in an overall quickly began to tidy her hair.

"I'm from the *Police Judiciaire*, and I should like to ask you some questions."

"Come in."

A little boy was crying, and his father pushed him savagely into the next room, where the end of a bed was visible.

"You can leave us!" said Laberge to his wife. Her eyes were red too. The quarrel must have broken out during the meal, for the plates were only half-empty.

"What do you want to know?"

"How long is it since you stopped going to Fecamp?"

"This morning.... I went there on my bike—it's not very amusing to hear the wife nagging at you the whole day. You spend months at sea until you could burst. And then when you get home . . ."

His anger had not subsided. To tell the truth, his breath reeked of alcohol.

"They're all the same. Jealousy and suspicion. They think your one idea is to go with tarts. Listen! There she is taking it out of the kid to soothe her nerves. . . ."

The child was certainly crying in the next room, and they heard the woman's voice raised:

"Will you be quiet? Stop it, will you!"

The words must have been accompanied by slaps or blows, for the sobs broke out louder than ever.

"Oh! It's a fine life...."

"Did Captain Fallut ever involve you in any kind of trouble?"

The man looked queerly at Maigret and moved uneasily.

"What makes you think that?"

"Have you been sailing long with him?"

"Five years."

"And on board you took your meals together."

"Except this time! He took it into his head to eat alone in his cabin. But I'd much prefer not to talk about that foul trip!"

"Where were you when the crime was committed?"

" At the cafe with the others. They must have told you. . . ."

" And you believe that the operator had a reason for attacking the captain? "

Laberge suddenly got angry.

" What are you getting at with your questions? What do you want me to say? I wasn't asked to be a police spy, d'you hear? I'm fed up! With this business and everything else! Up to the point when I wonder whether I'll sign on for the next trip! "

" Evidently the last one wasn't very brilliant! "

Another sharp look at Maigret.

" What do you mean? "

" That everything went wrong. A cabin-boy got killed. There were more accidents than usual. The fishing wasn't good, and the cod was damaged when it arrived at Fecamp."

" Is it my fault? "

" I don't say that! I'm just asking whether you took part in any incident which might explain the death of the captain. He was a temperate man, leading an orderly life. . . ."

The engineer sneered but said nothing.

" Did you ever know him to have an adventure? "

" I tell you I know nothing, and I'm fed to the teeth with the whole thing. Do you want to drive me mad? What do *you* want now? .. ."

It was his wife he was talking to. She had just come into the room and gone over to the stove where a pan was giving off a smell of burning.

She must have been about thirty-five, neither pretty nor ugly.

" One moment," she said humbly. " It's the dog's meat. ..."

" Hurry up! Isn't it ready yet? "

And to Maigret:

" Would you like me to give you a good tip? Leave all this alone! Fallut's all right where he is. And the less said about it the better. Now, I know nothing about it, and if you went on questioning me all night I wouldn't have another word to say. Did you come by train? If you don't take the one that goes in ten minutes you won't get another before eight o'clock in the evening. ..."

He had opened the door. Sunlight poured into the room.

" Whom is your wife jealous of? " the inspector asked softly, when he was on the doorstep.

Laberge clenched his teeth without saying a word.

" Do you know this person? "

And Maigret held out the portrait whose head had disappeared under the red-ink scribbles. But he held his thumb on the head. Only the satin corsage was visible.

Laberge cast a swift look at him and could hardly refrain from snatching the piece of cardboard.

" You recognize her? "

" How do you expect me to recognize her? "

And he again held out his hand, while Maigret put the portrait back in his pocket.

" You're coming to Fecamp tomorrow? "

" I don't know.... You want me? "

" No. I was just asking. Thank you for the information you were so good as to give me. "

" I haven't given you any information. "

Maigret had not gone ten steps when the door was kicked shut and the voices inside the house took up the quarrel again more fiercely than ever.



The chief engineer had told the truth: there wasn't another train back to Fecamp before eight in the evening, and Maigret, with nothing to do, was hopelessly stranded on the beach, where he established himself on the hotel terrace.

It had the commonplace atmosphere of holiday resorts: red sun-umbrellas, white dresses, flannel trousers, and a curious group round a fishing-boat which was being dragged up the beach by means of a windlass. White cliffs to left and right. In front the sea, pale green with a white fringe and the regular murmur of wavelets on the shore.

" Beer!... "

The sun was hot. A family was eating ices at the next table. A young man was taking snapshots with a kodak, and from somewhere came the shrill voices of girls.

Maigret let his glance wander round the scene. His thoughts strayed and his brain went into a torpid reverie of increasing inconsistency, revolving round Captain Fallut.

" Many thanks! "

These words were impressed in his mind, not because of their meaning but because of the way they were said, dryly, with bitter irony, by a woman behind him.

" But, as J've told you, Adele ... "

" Go to blazes!"

" You're not going to begin again? "

" I'll do what I like."

It certainly was a day of quarrels! That morning Maigret had come across a very prickly fellow, the director of *La Morue Franfaise*. At Yport there had been the domestic scene in the Laberges' home. And here on the terrace was an unknown couple exchanging decidedly sharp words.

" You'd better think it over."

" Go to blazes!"

" You think it's intelligent to answer like that? "

" Go to hell! D'you understand? . .. Waiter, this lemonade is tepid! Go and get me another! . . ."

Her accent was vulgar and she talked louder than was necessary.

" All the same, you must decide ... " the man went on.

" Go there all by myself? I've already told you! And leave me alone."

" You know it's pretty mean, what you are doing."

" What about you?"

" Me? You dare . . . My hat! If we weren't here, I don't think I d be able to restrain myself. ... "

She laughed. Far too loudly.

" Oh, go on, ducky! "

" Please be quiet! "

" And why should I be quiet? "

"Because!"

" I must say that's an intelligent answer. . . ."

" Are you going to be quiet? "

" I f I please___"

" Ad£le, I warn you that..."

" That what? .. . Are you going to make a scene in front of everybody? Well, you're getting on. ... People are listening already...."

" You'd better think it over, and then you'll see.. .."

She jumped up as if she'd had enough. Maigret had his back to her, but he saw her shadow lengthening on the flagstones of the terrace.

Then he saw her from behind, as she walked off towards the sea.

With the light behind her she was just a silhouette against a reddening sky. Maigret only noticed that she was well dressed, and

that she was not in beach costume but wore silk stockings and high heels.

This made walking difficult and ungraceful for her when she got on the sand. Every moment she nearly sprained her ankle, but she kept on, angry and obstinate,

"What do I owe you, waiter?"

"But I haven't brought madame's lemonade yet. . . ."

"Doesn't matter. How much is it?"

"Nine francs fifty. You're not dining here? . . ."

"I've no idea_____"

Maigret turned to look at the man, who showed a certain embarrassment, for he knew that the people round about had heard everything.

He was tall, with a flashy kind of elegance. His eyes were tired and his whole face betrayed extreme mental exhaustion. He stood up, undecided what direction to take, then, assuming an air of indifference, walked towards the young woman who was now following the sinuous line of the sea.

"Another unhappy couple, apparently!" said someone at a table where three women were crocheting.

"They might wash their dirty linen elsewhere! Such a bad example for children!"

The two silhouettes met at the edge of the water. Not a word could be heard, but the attitudes made it easy to guess what was going on.

The man implored and threatened, the woman proved obdurate. Once he took hold of her wrist and it looked as if it were going to degenerate into a fight. But no, he turned his back on her. He walked with long strides towards a near-by road where he started up a little grey car.

"Waiter, another half-pint!"

Maigret had just noticed that the young woman had left her handbag on the table. It was imitation crocodile, full to bursting, quite new.

A shadow advanced along the ground.

He raised his head and saw the face of the owner of the bag as she reached the terrace.

He got a slight shock. His nostrils quivered.

Of course he might be mistaken. It was an impression rather than a certainty. But he could have sworn that before him stood the original of the portrait without a head.

Discreetly he took it out of his pocket. The woman had sat down again.

" Well, waiter! Where's my lemonade?"

" I thought... The gentleman said . . ."

" I ordered a lemonade! "

It was the rather fleshy line of the neck, the bosom, full but firm, voluptuously resilient.

The same way of dressing and the same taste in glossy silks in loud colours.

Maigret dropped the portrait so that his neighbour couldn't help seeing it.

And she did see it. She looked at the inspector as if she were trying to place him in her memory. But if she was worried she did not show it.

Five minutes, ten minutes passed. Then the purr of a car came from far off and grew louder. The grey car approached the terrace, stopped and started again as if the driver could not make up his mind definitely to go away.

"Gaston!..."

She stood up and made signs to her friend. This time she seized her bag, and a moment later she was in the car.

The three women at the next table followed her with disapproving eyes. The young man with the kodak turned round.

The grey car was already disappearing with its engine throbbing.

" Waiter. . . . Where can one get a car? "

" I don't think you'll find one in Yport. There is one that sometimes takes people to Fecamp or Etretat, but just today I saw it going off with some English people...."

The inspector's large fingers drummed a rapid tattoo on the table.

" Give me a road map. And get me die Fecamp police station on the telephone.... Have you ever seen those people before? "

" The ones who were quarrelling? Nearly every day this week. They lunched here yesterday. I think they come from Le Havre...."

All the families had gone from the beach, which was now bathed in the stillness of a summer evening. A black boat gravitated imperceptibly towards the line of the horizon, went into the sun and came out at the other side as if through a paper hoop.

4. *Under the Sign of Mars*

"I MYSELF," said the Fecamp Superintendent of Police, sharpening a blue pencil, "must confess I haven't any illusions. It's very seldom that one clears up these sea affairs. Just suppose you try to find out the real truth about one of these common squabbles that break out every day in port. When my men arrive on the scene they're hard at it. But when they see the uniforms they all get together and turn on them. Question them; they all lie. They contradict each other. They complicate matters to such an extent that finally one just gives up. ..."

There were four of them smoking in the office, which was already filled with tobacco-smoke. It was evening. The superintendent of the Le Havre *Brigade Mobile*, who was officially in charge of the case, was accompanied by a young inspector.

Maigret was there in a private capacity. Seated in a corner beside a table, he had said nothing.

"But it seems quite simple to me!" ventured the young inspector, hoping to gain his chief's approval. "Robbery wasn't the motive. Therefore it was a case of revenge. Who was Captain Fallut most severe with in the course of the trip?"

But the superintendent from Le Havre shrugged his shoulders and the inspector relapsed into silence, blushing.

"And yet. ..."

"No, my boy, no. There's something else. First of all, this woman you've unearthed, Maigret. You've given full particulars so that the police can find her again? For instance, I can't quite place her role. . . . The boat was away three months. She wasn't even there when they went off, since no one notified us. . . . The operator is engaged to be married... . Captain Fallut, from all accounts, doesn't seem the sort of man to do anything foolish. . . . And yet he drew up his will just before he was murdered."

"It would also be interesting to know who took the trouble to bring the will here," sighed Maigret. "There's a little journalist, the one who always wears a beige mackintosh, who declares in the *Eclair de Rouen* that the *Ocdan* was sent by her owners on a mission quite other than cod-fishing...."

"They say that every time!" growled the Fecamp superintendent.

The conversation languished. There was a long silence in which

the sucking of Maigret's pipe could be heard. Then he suddenly rose with an effort.

"If you were to ask me what was characteristic about this affair," he said, "I should say that it stands under the sign of Mars. Everybody belonging to that boat is quarrelsome, irritable, short-tempered. At the *Rendezvous des Terre-Neuvas* the crew gets drunk and fights. When I take the operator's fiancée to him, he can scarcely conceal his impatience and gives her a very chilly welcome. He practically told her to mind her own business! At Yport, the chief engineer gives his wife hell and treats me like a dog. Finally I find two other people who seem to come under the same influence: the woman called Adele and her companion have a quarrel on the beach and only make it up so that they can get away."

"What conclusions do you come to, then?" inquired the Le Havre superintendent.

"Me? No conclusions at all! I'm just remarking that I feel as if I were moving in a circle of maniacs. . . . Well, good evening, gentlemen. Down here I am an amateur. My wife is waiting for me at the hotel. You'll let me know, Superintendent, if they find the Yport woman and the man in the grey car?"

"Of course! Good night. . . ."

Instead of going through the town, Maigret lounged along the quays, his hands in his pockets, his pipe between his teeth. The empty dock made a vast black rectangle reflecting the lights of the *Ocdan*, which was still being unloaded.

"... Under the sign of Mars!" he growled to himself.

No one paid any attention to him when he went on board. He walked apparently aimlessly along the bridge and saw a light in the fo'c's'le deck hatchway. He stooped down and was greeted by a warm breath of air, the smell of a barrack-room, a refectory, and a fish shop, all combined.

He went down the iron ladder and found himself face to face with three men who were eating out of mess-tins held between their knees. For light they had an oil-lamp hung from a swivel. In the middle of the fo'c's'le was a cast-iron stove encrusted with slag.

Along the bulkheads were four tiers of bunks, some still filled with straw, others empty. Boots and sou'-westers were hanging about.

The only one of the three who rose was P'tit Louis. The other two were the Breton and a Negro with bare feet.

" *Bon appetit!* " growled Maigret.

There were answering growls.

" Where are your pals? "

" In their homes, what do you think? " said P'tit Louis. " It's only when you've nowhere to go to, and not a cent *in* your pocket, that you stay here when the boat's in dock."

You had to get gradually accustomed to the semi-darkness, and especially to the smell. And you could imagine the same place when forty men lived there, unable to make a single movement without knocking into the others.

Forty men throwing themselves into their bunks with their boots on, snoring, chewing, smoking!

" Did the captain come here sometimes? "

"Never!"

And then the panting of machinery, the smell of coal and soot, the burning metal bulkheads, the battering blows of the sea. . . .

" Come with me, P'tit Louis."

And Maigret caught the sailor making signs behind his back to show off before the others.

But up above, on the shadowy bridge, all his swank had gone.

" What is it? "

" Nothing. . . . Listen. . . . Suppose the captain had died during the trip. Is there anyone who could have brought the ship into port?"

" Perhaps there isn't. . . . Because the second officer can't take the bearings. It's true they say that with the wireless the operator can always tell the position. . . ."

" Did you see him often, the operator? "

" Never! You don't think we wander about then as we're doing now? Each man has his place. You stay in your corner for days on end. . . ."

" And the chief engineer? "

" Oh, yes. We used to see *him* every day, so to speak."

" What was he like? "

P'tit Louis became evasive.

" How should I know, after all? . . . And what is it you're trying to get at? You ought to be there when everything goes wrong—a cabin-boy overboard, a boiler feed-pipe burst, the captain insisting on taking the boat where there's not a single fish, a man with gangrene, et cetera. . . . You'd swear yourself black in the face. And for the least thing you'd let fly with your fist at anybody's

mug! And when they say above that the captain up there is balmy ..."

" Was he? "

" I didn't go and ask him. . . . Then . . ."

"Then?"

" Well, after all, there can't be any harm... . There's sure to be someone who'll tell you.... It appears that the three of them, up there, were never without their revolvers. Three of them watching each other, frightened of each other. The captain hardly ever came out of his cabin, where he'd taken the map, the compass, the sextant, and all the rest. ..."

" And this went on for three months? "

" Yes! Have you anything else to ask me? "

" Thanks. . . . You can go. . . ."

P'tit Louis seemed to be sorry to go, and stayed a moment by the hatchway watching the inspector puffing away at his pipe.

They were still bringing cod out of the yawning hold by the light of acetylene lamps. But the detective wanted to forget trucks, dock-labourers, quays, jetties, and lighthouses.

He was in a world of sheet-iron, and with half-closed eyes he pictured the open sea, the even ground-swell through which the bow of the ship ploughed its way without respite, hour after hour, day after day, week after week.

" *You dorit think we wander about then as we're doing now?* "

Men at the engines. Men in the fore. And, aft in the poop, a handful of human beings: the captain, his second officer, the chief engineer, and the radio operator.

A little binnacle-lamp to light the compass. Maps spread out.

Three months!

When they got back, Captain Fallut had made a will in which he declared his intention of putting an end to his days.

An hour after the ship put into port, he was strangled and thrown into the dock.

And Madame Bernard, his landlady, was desolate because this made their admirably planned union for ever impossible! The chief engineer made scenes with his wife! A certain Adele gave an unknown man hell, but made off with him the moment Maigret put her portrait scored with red ink under her nose!

The operator, Le Clinche, in his prison, was like a bear with a sore head!

The ship moved slightly, just a very light motion like the rise

and fall of a bosom. One of the three men on the fo'c's'le deck was playing an accordion.

Maigret turned his head and saw on the quay two female silhouettes. He rushed forward and crossed the gangway.

"What are you doing here?"

He blushed because he had spoken harshly, more especially because he was conscious that he in his turn had been infected by this frenzy which had seized all the protagonists of the drama.

"We just wanted to see the ship," said Madame Maigret with disarming humility.

"It's my fault!" Marie L^onnec interrupted. "It was I who insisted."

"All right! All right! Have you had dinner?"

"Why, yes! It's ten o'clock. Have you?"

"Yes.... Thank you...."

The *Rendei-Vous des Terre-Neuvas* was almost the only place still showing lights. On the jetty one could just make out some silhouettes: summer visitors conscientiously taking their evening stroll.

"You've discovered something?" asked Le Clinche's fiancée.

"Not yet. At least, not much."

"I daren't ask you a favour. . . ."

"Goon!"

"I should like to see Pierre's cabin. Will you allow me?"

He took her there with a shrug of his shoulders. Madame Maigret refused to cross the gangway.

It was a regular metal box. Wireless apparatus. A sheet-iron table, a bench, and a bunk. On the bulkhead a portrait of Marie L^onnec in Breton costume. Old shoes on the floor and a pair of trousers on the bunk.

The girl took in this atmosphere with a mixture of curiosity and pleasure.

"Yes! .. It's not quite as I imagined. . . . His shoes haven't once been cleaned. Look! He always drank out of this glass without washing it. . . ."

A funny girl! A mixture of timidity, weakness, good education, **and** on the other hand, energy and audacity. She hesitated.

"And the captain's cabin?"

Maigret gave a faint smile, for he realized that in her secret heart she hoped to make some discovery. He led her to it. He even went **and** got a lantern which he found on the bridge.

" How can they live in this smell? ... " she sighed.

She looked attentively round her. He saw that she was rather timid and embarrassed as she asked:

" Why has the bed been raised up? "

He let his pipe go out. The observation was apt. All the crew slept in bunks which were somehow a part of the architectural scheme of the boat. Only the captain had an iron bedstead.

And under each foot a block of wood had been placed.

" Don't you find it strange? You'd think ... "

" Go on."

" You'd think—but you'll laugh at me!—that the bed had been raised so that someone could hide under it. Without the pieces of wood the mattress would be far too low . . . whereas like this . . . "

Every trace of ill-humour had vanished. He saw the girl's pale face strained with mental effort and excitement.

And before he could stop her she lay down on the floor, in spite of all the dirt, and slid under the bed.

" There is room! " she said.

" All right. . . . Come out. . . . "

" One moment, please. Pass me the lamp a moment, Inspector! "

She was silent. He couldn't think what she was doing. He began to get impatient.

" Well? "

" Yes. . . . Wait. . . . "

She got up suddenly, her grey suit all dirty, her eyes fevered.

" Pull out the bed ____ You'll see ____ "

Her voice was broken. Her hands trembled. Maigret pulled the bed savagely away from the bulkhead and looked on the ground.

" I don't see anything."

As she made no answer, he turned round and found that she was crying.

" What did you see? ... What are you crying for? ... "

" Here.. • • Read. • . "

He had to get right down and hold the lamp up against the bulkhead. Then he made out some words written on the wood with some pointed object, a pin or a nail.

" *Gaston . . . Octave . . . Pierre . . . Hen . . .* "

The last word was unfinished. Yet it had not been done in a hurry. Some of the letters must have taken over an hour! There

were the sort of strokes and flourishes one makes when one has nothing better to do.

The comic note was struck by two stags' antlers which had been drawn over the name " Octave,"

The girl sat on the edge of the bed, which had been dragged into the middle of the cabin. She was still weeping silently.

" Curious!" growled Maigret. " I should very much like to know whether ..."

She rose vehemently.

" Of course! That's what it was! There was a woman here! She hid. But it didn't keep men from finding her. . . . Wasn't Captain Fallut's name Octave? "

The inspector had rarely been so embarrassed.

" Don't draw hasty conclusions! " he said, without the slightest conviction.

" But it's written! The whole story's there! Four men who . . ."

What could he say to calm her?

" Take it from my experience. In police matters you must always wait before you jump to conclusions. You told me just yesterday that Le Clinche is incapable of killing anyone. ..."

" Yes! " she sobbed. " Yes! I believe it! That's true! "

She clung to this hope in spite of everything.

" But his name's Pierre! "

" I know. . . . Well? Every tenth sailor is called Pierre, and there were fifty men on board. . . . There is also the matter of a Gaston and a Henry ..."

" What do you think? "

" Nothing!"

" Are you going to show this to the magistrate? .. When I think that it was I who . . ."

" Keep calm! We have discovered nothing at all yet, except that the bed has been raised for some reason or another, and that someone has written those Christian names on the bulkhead. . . ."

" There was a woman. . . ."

" Why a woman? "

" But. .."

" Come along! Madame Maigret is waiting for us on the quay. . . ."

" That's true_____ "

She wiped her tears obediently between sniffs.

" I shouldn't have come, •.. And I thought. . . But it's not

possible that Pierre . . . Listen! I must see him as soon as possible. I'll talk to him, quite alone. . . . You'll do what's necessary, won't you? "

Before she set foot on the gangway she cast a look charged with hatred on the black ship which was no longer the same to her now that she knew that a woman had hidden on board.

Madame Maigret looked curiously at her.

"Come now don't cry! You know it will all turn out all right——"

"No! No! " She shook Her head in despair.

She could not speak. She was choking. She wanted to look back at the ship. And Madame Maigret, who didn't understand at all, looked inquiringly at her husband.

"Take her back to the hotel. Try to calm her. . . ."

"Has anything happened? . . ."

"Nothing definite. . . . I'll probably be a bit late. . . ."

He watched them as they went off. Marie Leonnec turned back a dozen times, and her companion had to drag her along like a child.

Maigret almost went back on board. But he was thirsty. There was still a light at the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas*.

At one table four sailors were playing cards. Near the bar, a young admirer had passed an arm round the barmaid's waist, and from time to time she gave a little laugh.

The proprietor was following the game and giving advice.

"Hello! It's you . . ." was his greeting to Maigret.

And he didn't seem particularly happy to see him again. On the contrary, he couldn't hide a slight embarrassment.

"Go on, Julie. . . . Serve the inspector. . . . What can I offer you?"

"Nothing at all. If you'll allow me, I'll order a drink like anyone else. . . ."

"No offence!... I . . . "

Was the day going to end under the sign of Mars? One of the sailors growled something in Norman patois, and Maigret managed to translate roughly:

"Well, well! Still snooping round . . ."

The inspector looked him in the eyes. He blushed and stammered:

"I'll bid a club!"

"You should have **bid spades !**" said Leon, for something to say.

5. *Adile and Her Companion*

THE telephone bell rang. Lion ran to answer it, and immediately called Maigret.

" Hello! " said a bored voice at the other end of the wire. " Inspector Maigret? This is the clerk at the Police Station. I've just rung your hotel and they said I would perhaps find you at the *Rendezvous des Terre-Neuvas*.... Sorry to bother you, Inspector. I've been on the line half an hour ... I can't get the chief. ... As for the superintendent of the *Brigade Mobile*, I'm wondering whether he's left Fecamp.. .. Well, I've got two queer cards here who have just come in, and it seems they've got some important statement to make ... a man and a woman.. .."

" With a grey car? "

" Yes. Are those the ones you were looking for? "

Ten minutes later, Maigret arrived at the police station. The offices were deserted, except for the inquiry office, which was divided in two by a rail.

The clerk was writing and smoking a cigarette. Seated on a bench, his elbows on his knees, his chin between his hands, a man was waiting.

And finally there was a woman walking up and down, stamping on the floor with her high heels.

When the inspector came in she marched up to him, and at the same time the man rose with a sigh of relief, muttering between his teeth:

" Well, you've kept us long enough! "

It was the Yport couple, even more ill-tempered than during the scene Maigret had witnessed.

" Will you follow me? ... "

And he took them into the superintendent's office, sat down on his swivel-chair and lit a pipe, watching them all the time.

" You can sit down. "

" Thank you! " said the woman, who was decidedly the more nervous of the two. " We've been doing nothing else for a long time. "

He now saw her face to face by the strong light of an electric lamp. It didn't need a long examination to place her. The portrait, with only the bust left, had been quite enough.

A fine figure of a woman, in the popular acceptance of the word.

A woman with an attractive body, sound teeth, a provocative smile, and an eye that was always animated.

In other words, a fine bitch, flighty, greedy, equally ready to make a scene or to burst into a great vulgar laugh.

Her blouse was pink silk, caught with a gold brooch the size of a hundred-centime piece.

" First, I insist on telling you ... "

" Excuse me!" interrupted Maigret. " Will you sit down as I asked you and answer my questions/ "

She frowned. Her mouth took on an ugly expression.

" Listen! You forget I'm here of my own free will.... "

Her companion made a face, bored with this attitude. They were well matched. He was just the sort of man usually found with that sort of woman.

He hadn't exactly a hang-dog look. He was dressed correctly, but in bad taste. He had big rings on his fingers and a pearl in his tie. But his ensemble wasn't right.

He was the sort of man seen in cafes and restaurants at all hours drinking champagne with women, and putting up at third-rate hotels.

" You first! Your name, domicile, and profession. ... "

He attempted to get up.

" Stay where you are! "

" I'm going to explain ... "

" Nothing of the sort! Your name. ... "

" Gaston Buzier. At the moment my business is selling and letting villas. I mostly live at Le Havre at the *Anneau <T Argent* hotel _____ "

" Are you an established estate agent? "

" No ... but... "

" Are you employed in any agency? "

" Well. .. "

" That's enough. In a word, you're a shyster. How were you employed previously? "

" I was representative of a make of bicycles.... I've also gone round getting orders for sewing-machines.. •. "

" How many convictions? "

" Don't answer, Gaston!" interrupted the woman. " This is a hell of a note! It's we who came to ... "

" Shut up! Two convictions. One, with delay of execution, on account of a rubber check. •.. Another for two months for not

having given the owner the full amount I'd received on a villa. . . ,
You see, they're mere nothings. . . ."

One felt that he, anyway, was used to facing the police. He remained at his ease, with a touch of malice in his expression.

"Your turn!" said Maigret, turning to the woman.

"Adele Noirhomme . . . born at Belleville. . . ."

"Registered?"

"They put me on the register at Strasbourg five years ago, because a woman had it in for me for vamping her husband. But since then...."

"You've managed to escape police control. . . . Fine! Will you tell me in what capacity you sailed on the *Ocean*?"

"I must first explain!" answered the man. "The fact that we've come here shows that we've nothing to reproach ourselves for. At Yport Adele came and told me you'd got her photograph and were sure to arrest us. . . . Our first idea was to get out to avoid any trouble . . . because we know the police racket. . . . At Etretat I saw gendarmes on the lookout and I knew we were going to be nabbed. So I preferred to come here of my own accord. . . ."

"Your turn, madame! I asked you what you were doing on the trawler. . . ."

"That's quite simple—I was following my lover!"

"Captain Fallut?"

"Yes, the captain! I've been with him, so to speak, since November. We met at a café at Le Havre. . . . He fell in love. . . . He came back two or three times a week. Right from the beginning I thought he was mad because he never asked for anything—but he was just struck on me. He took a nicely furnished room for me, and I thought that, if I set about it the right way, he'd end up by marrying me. Sailors aren't rolling in money, but they're regular and there's always the pension. . . ."

"You never came to Fecamp with him?"

"No! He forbade me. It was he who came over here. He was jealous. The sort of chap that can't have had much experience because at fifty he was as timid with women as a schoolboy... And yet, when he was mad about me . . ."

"Excuse me! You were already the mistress of Gaston Buzier?"

"Of course. But I introduced Gaston to Fallut as my brother."

"I understand. In short, both of you were living on the captain's money."

"I was working . . ." Buzier protested.

" I know! Every Saturday afternoon!—Who thought of taking you on board? "

" Fallut! The idea of leaving me alone during the entire trip was worrying him. . . . On the other hand, he was scared stiff, because the regulations are strict and he was a stickler for regulations. . . . Up to the last moment he hesitated. Then he came to get me. He made me go into his cabin the night before they sailed. The idea of a change amused me, but if I'd known how it was going to turn out I'd have dropped it like a hot coal! "

" Didn't Buzier protest? "

" He was a bit doubtful. But, you know, he didn't want to go against the old boy's ideas. He'd promised to retire straight away after the trip and marry me. A fine life he had in store for me! Shut up all day in a cabin stinking of fish! And what's more, when anyone came in I had to hide under the bed! . . . We'd hardly put out to sea when Fallut regretted having taken me. . . . I've never seen a man with such moods as he had. Ten times a day he'd come to see whether the door was properly locked. If I spoke, he made me shut up for fear anyone should hear me. He was sulky and irritable. He even used to give me dirty looks as if he were tempted to get rid of me by throwing me overboard. . . ."

Her voice became shrill and she waved her arms about

" Not to mention the fact that he got more and more jealous! He questioned me about my past. He tried to find out. For three days he didn't speak to me, just watched me like an enemy. . Then suddenly his passion would get hold of him again. There wafe times when I was afraid of him. . . ."

" Which of the members of the crew saw you on board? "

" It was on the fourth night. I wanted to go on the bridge for a breath of air . . . I'd had enough of being shut up. Fallut went to make sure there was no one about. He only just allowed me to take about five steps up and down. He had to go down to the deck for a moment, and it was then the operator came and talked to me. He was very shy, but in a fever. . . The next day he managed to get into my cabin. . . ."

" Did Fallut see him? "

" I don't think so—he didn't say anything. . . ."

" You became Le Clinche's mistress? "

She made no answer. Gaston Buzier sneered.

" Go on, tell him! " he snapped at her in a nasty voice,

" I'm free to do what I like! It's not as if you had kept off women

while I was away. Eh? What about the litde thing at die *Villa des Fleurs*? And that photo I found in your pocket. .. "

Maigret remained impassive as a graven image.

"I asked you whether you became the radio operator's mistress. • •

" And I say go to blazes! "

She was being provocative, with her moist smile. She knew she was desirable. She was reckoning on her full lips, her inviting body.

" The chief engineer saw you too? "

" What has he been telling you? "

" Nothing! I will sum up. The captain kept you hidden in his cabin. In turn Pierre Le Clinche and the chief engineer came secretly to see you. ... Did Fallut find out? "

" No! "

" All the same, he must have had his suspicions, for he kept prowling round you, only leaving you when it was strictly necessary.... "

" How do you know? "

" Did he still talk of marrying you? "

" I don't know—— "

And Maigret saw the ship, the stokers isolated in their hold, the kTien packed together in the fo'c's'le, the operator's cabin and the captain's aft, with the raised bed.

,And the trip had lasted three months!

And all this time three men had been prowling round the cabin where the woman was shut up.

" A damn silly thing I did! " she exclaimed. " I swear that if I could begin all over again . . . One should always mistrust those timid men who talk of marriage. .. "

" If you'd listened to me . . . " interrupted Gaston Buzier.

" You shut up! If Td listened to you, I know what kind of house, I'd be in at this time of day! . . . I don't want to speak ill of Fallut now that he's dead. But he was touchy, all the same. He got ideas about things . *. he would have thought himself dishonoured just because he'd broken the regulations. And it went from bad to worse. ... After a week he never opened his mouth except to make scenes—or else to ask whether anyone had been into the cabin! He was particularly jealous of Le Clinche and he used to say: ' That would please you, eh I A young m a n ! ... Confess that if he came in while I was away you wouldn't repulse him I'

" And he'd sneer until you felt quite ill. ... "

" How many times was Le Clinche together with you? " Maigret asked slowly.

" Oh, well, who cares anyway!... Once. On the fourdi day. couldn't even tell you how it happened. . . . Afterwards it wasn't possible because Fallut watched me too closely. . . ."

" And the engineer? "

" Never! He tried. . . . He'd come and look through the portiole. . . . Always with a dead pale face. . . . You can't imagine what life that was—I was like a beast in a cage. When there was a bit of a swell I used to be sick and Fallut didn't even bother to attend to me. For weeks he wouldn't touch me, then it would get hold of him. He would kiss me as if he wanted to bite me, and embrace me as if he'd like to stifle me. . . ."

Gaston Buzier had lit a cigarette and was smoking away with an ironical expression.

" You'll notice, Inspector, that I don't come into it All this time I was working"

" Will you please stop it? " she said impatiently.

" What happened when you got back? Had Fallut announced his intention of killing himself? "

" He? Certainly not! . . . When we got into port he hadn't spoken a word to me for a fortnight. What's more, I don't believe he'd spoken to anyone. He spent hours staring straight in front of him. I'd decided to leave him anyway . . . I was fed up, you see. I'd rather starve and have my freedom. . . . I heard that we were coming into port. He came into the cabin and just said these few words: ' You'll wait until I come and fetch you. . . . ' "

" Go on! "

" That's all I know. Or rather, Gaston told me the rest.... He was on the quay! "

" You tell me," Maigret said to him.

" I was on the quay, as she says. I saw the sailors going into the cafe. I was waiting for Adele. It was very dark. . . . Then the captain came off, quite alone. . . . There were some stationary trucks. . . . He took a few steps and then a man fell on him. . . . I don't know exactly what happened, but there was the noise of a body falling into the water. . . ."

" Would you recognize the man? "

" No! It was very dark and the trucks hid nearly everything."

" What direction did he take? "

" I think he went along the quay...."

" And you didn't see the operator? "

" I don't know . . . I've never seen him "

Maigret turned to the woman.

" Now you, how did you get out of the cabin? "

" Someone opened the cabin door where I was locked up. It was Le Clinche. He said to me: ' Get out quick!' "

" Is that all? "

" I wanted to question him. I heard people running on the quay, and saw a boat coming up the dock with a lamp. . . . But he said again: * Get out.' He pushed me on to the gangway. Everyone was looking in another direction. They didn't notice me. . . . I was pretty sure something dirty was going on, but I preferred to get away. . . . Gaston was waiting a little farther along. . . . "

" And what did you do after that? "

" Gaston was quite pale. We went and had some rum in a pub. We slept at the Railway Hotel. . . . The next day all the papers were talking about Fallut's death. . . . Then we started and got away to Le Havre, just as a precaution. We didn't want to get mixed up in that business. . . . "

" But that didn't prevent her from wanting to hang round here," snapped her lover. " I don't know whether it was for the operator or "

" You shut up! . . . That's quite enough. . . . Naturally I was interested in the business. As a matter of fact, we came three times to Fecamp. And so as not to be noticed, we slept at Yport. . . . "

" You didn't see the chief engineer again? "

" How do you know? One day at Yport. . . . Though the look he gave me made me quite frightened. He followed me for some time. . . . "

" Why were you quarrelling with your lover just now? "

She shrugged her shoulders.

" Because! Haven't you understood yet? He's convinced I'm in love with Le Clinche, that it's for me the operator did the murder, et cetera. . . . He's been making scenes and I'm fed up! I saw enough on that cursed boat. . . . "

" All the same, when I showed you your photo on the terrace "

" That was a dirty trick! Of course I realized you were from the police! I thought Le Clinche must have talked. I got the wind up and I told Gaston to get us out of it. . . . It was only when we'd gone that it occurred to us it was no good, that you'd get us in the

end. Not to mention the fact that we'd only two hundred francs in our pockets. . . . What are you going to do with me? You can't put me in prison? "

" You think it's the operator who did the murder? "

" How should I know? "

" Do you possess a pair of yellow shoes? " Maigret asked Gaston Buzier brutally.

" I . . . Yes___ Why? "

" Nothing. I was just asking. Are you sure you wouldn't be able to recognize the murderer of the captain? "

" I only saw a silhouette in the dark.. .."

" Well! Pierre Le Clinche was there too, hiding among the trucks, and he says that the murderer was wearing yellow shoes."

Buzier sprang up, his eyes hard, a sneer on his lips.

" He said that? You're sure he said that? "

He choked and stuttered with rage. He was quite transformed. He looked challengingly round the room.

" Take me to him. I insist! By God, I insist! And then we'll see who's lying! Yellow shoes! So it's me, eh? He takes my woman. . . , He takes her off die boat.... And he has the gall to say ..."

" Quietly___"

He couldn't get breath.

" You hear that, Adele? " he panted. " That's what they're like, your lovers! "

Tears of rage gushed from his eyes. His teeth chattered.

" My God! So it was me! Ha! ha! That's rich! That's better than the movies! And of course, as I'd two convictions, you knew I'd done it! I killed Captain Fallut. Because I was jealous of him, perhaps? And then what? Haven't I killed the operator as well? "

He passed a hand through his hair with a feverish gesture, rump-ling it up. It made him look thinner, deepened the shadows under his eyes and made his skin look duller.

" What are you waiting for? Why don't you arrest me? "

" Shut up! " muttered Adele.

But she was getting a bit desperate too, although it didn't prevent her from shooting keen glances at her companion.

Did she have her doubts? Or was she only bluffing?

" If you must arrest me, do it at once! But I demand that you let me meet the gentleman face to face. . . . Then we'll see! "

Maigret pressed an electric bell, and the superintendent's secretary put in a worried face.

" You'll lock up this lady and gentleman until the magistrate decides what is to be done."

" Swine! " cried Adele, and spat on the floor. " Catch me telling the truth again. And first of all, everything that I said I just made up—so there. And I won't sign any statement. Carry on with your scheme.... So that's what it was! "

Then, turning to her lover, she went on:

" Don't worry, Gaston! It'll be all right. And you'll see that in the end we'll come out on top! Only, of course, once a woman's had her name put on the register, she's only fit for locking up. . . . But wasn't it me, perhaps, who killed the captain? . . ."

Maigret went out without listening to any more. Outside he breathed down gulps of sea air and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. Before he'd gone ten steps he heard Ad&le's voice in the police station hurling all the foulest words in her vocabulary at the policemen.

It was two in the morning. The night was calm and unreal. The tide was high and the masts of the fishing-boats swayed above the roofs of the houses.

Over all was a rhythmic murmur, wave after wave breaking on the shore.

There were glaring lights round the *Ocdan*. Day and night the unloading went on and porters pushed the full trucks, bending their backs under the weight.

The *Rendei-Vous des Terre-Neuvas* was closed. At the *Hotelde la Plage* the porter, a pair of trousers over his night-shirt, opened the door to the inspector.

A single light was burning in the hall. That was why Maigret did not at first see the figure of a woman in a cane-chair.

It was Marie Leonnec. She was asleep with her head on her shoulder.

" I think she's waiting for you ... " whispered the porter.

She was pale, one might almost say anaemic. Her lips were colourless and dark circles round her eyes betrayed her fatigue. She slept with her mouth a little open, as if she couldn't get enough air.

Maigret touched her gently on the shoulder. She jumped up, pulled herself together and looked at him confusedly.

" I was asleep ... oh! "

" Why didn't you go to bed? Didn't my wife take you to your room? "

" Yes, but I crept down again. I wanted to know! Tell me ..."

She wasn't as pretty as usual. • . sleep had made her skin damp. And a mosquito bite had left a red spot in the middle of her forehead.

Her dress, which she must have made herself out of some durable serge, was crumpled.

" Have you discovered anything new? No? . . . Listen! Pve been doing a lot of thinking. I don't know how to say it to you. Before I see Pierre tomorrow, I'd like you to talk to him, to tell him I know all about this woman and that I'm not angry with him. I'm sure, you see, that he's not guilty. Only, if I speak to him first, he'll be embarrassed. You saw him this morning . . . he's letting it prey on his mind. After all, it's quite natural, if there was a woman on board, for him to . . ."

But it was beyond her! She broke out into sobs. She couldn't stop crying.

" Above all, this mustn't get into the papers in case my parents get to know. They wouldn't understand . . . they . . ."

She gulped.

" You *must* find the murderer! It seems to me that if/could only question people . . . Excuse me! I don't know what I'm saying. You know better than I do. Only you don't know Pierre. I'm two years older than him. He's like a child. And, if he's accused, he's capable of shutting up, from sheer pride, and saying nothing. He is very sensitive. He's often been humiliated...."

Slowly Maigret put his hand on her shoulder and stifled a deep sigh.

Adele's voice was still buzzing in his ears. He thought of her, provocatively animal, magnificently sensual.

And this girl, nicely brought up, anaemic, tried to stifle her sobs, to smile confidently.

" When you know him ..."

But what *she* would never know was that black cabin round which three men had prowled, for days, for weeks, there in the middle of the sea, while the men at the engines, the men in the fo'c's'le, dimly sensed drama, watched the sea, discussed bearings, became uneasy and talked of madness and the evil eye.

" I'll see Le Clinche tomorrow. •.."

" But shall I? "

" Perhaps. Probably. You must go and lie down! "

And a little later, Madame Maigret, half-asleep, murmured:

" She's very nice. Do you know, she has all her trousseau ready?"

All hand-embroidered. Have you any news? You smell of scent...."

A little of Adele's strong perfume must have clung to him. A perfume as common as the blue wine you get at a *bistro*. For months it had mingled on the trawler with the rank smell of cod, whilst three men prowled round and round a cabin, obstinate and surly as dogs.

"Sleep well!" he said as he drew the cover up to her chin.

And he imprinted a deep solemn kiss on his sleeping wife's forehead.

6. *Three Who Were Innocent*

THE scene was simple, the usual setting for such meetings, in this case the little prison office. Superintendent Girard of Le Havre, who was in charge of the case, occupied the only chair. Maigret leaned against the black marble mantelpiece. On the walls were diagrams, official announcements, and a portrait of the President of the Republic.

Standing in the glare of the light was Gaston Buzier with his yellow shoes on.

"Bring in the radio operator! "

The door opened. Pierre Le Clinche, who had been told nothing, came forward frowning like a man who is suffering and awaits fresh trials. He saw Buzier, but he did not take any notice of him. He looked round, wondering "where he should turn to.

Adele's lover, however, scrutinized him from head to foot, his lip curling.

Le Clinche looked rumpled, and his face was grey. He neither tried to carry off nor to conceal his dejection. He was as miserable as a sick beast.

"Do you recognize the man in front of you? "

He looked at Buzier and seemed to search his memory.

"No! Who is he?"

"Look him over carefully."

Le Clinche obeyed, and as soon as he came to his feet he raised his head.

" Well? "

" Yes _____ "

" What do you mean by ' yes'? "

" I see what you mean.... The yellow shoes.... "

" Exactly! " exploded Gaston Buzier, who had hitherto stood silent with a cantankerous expression on his face. " Repeat that it was me who bumped off your captain. Well? "

All eyes were fixed on the operator, whose head drooped while he made a weary gesture with his hand.

" Speak. "

" Perhaps it wasn't those shoes. . . . "

" Ha! ha! " Buzier was already exultant. " So you're climbing down? "

" You don't identify Fallut's murderer? "

" I don't know. . . . No. . . . "

" You are aware that you are in the presence of the lover of a certain Adele whom you know. He has himself confessed that he was in the neighbourhood of the trawler at the time of the crime. And he was wearing yellow shoes. "

All this time Buzier was challenging him with a look, trembling with rage and impatience.

" Yes, let him talk! But let him try to tell the truth, or I swear . . . "

" You be quiet! Well, Le Clinche? "

He passed his hand across his forehead, and literally grimaced with pain.

" I don't know! He can go and hang himself! "

" Did you see a man with yellow shoes attack Fallut? "

" I've forgotten. . . . "

" That's what you asserted the first time you were interrogated. And that's not so long ago. Do you stick to this statement? "

" Well, no, I don't! I saw a man with yellow shoes—that's all. I don't know whether he was the murderer. . . . "

As the interrogation proceeded, Gaston Buzier, also slightly the worse for wear after a night at the police station, recovered his self-assurance. He rocked from one foot to another, one hand in his trouser-pocket.

" You see, he's piping down! He doesn't dare repeat the lies he told you. . . . "

" Answer me, Le Clinche. Up to now, we are certain that there were two people present near the trawler at the time of the

murder. **You** on the *one* hand, Buzier on the other. . . . You say you didn't kill him. After accusing Buzier you seem to be withdrawing your accusation. Then might there have been a third person? In that case, you couldn't have failed to see him! . . . Who was it? "

Silence. Pierre Le Clinche stared at the ground.

Maigret, still leaning on the mantelpiece, had taken no part in the interrogation, letting his colleague speak and confining himself to observing the two men.

" I will repeat my question: Was there a third person on the quay? "

" I don't know . . . " sighed the accused brokenly.

" That means yes? "

A shrug of the shoulders signifying:

" If you like."

" Who? "

" It was dark. . . . "

" Well, tell me why you asserted that the murderer was wearing yellow shoes. Wasn't it to avert suspicion from the real murderer, whom you know? "

The young man pressed his forehead between his two hands.

" I can't go on . . . " he sobbed.

" Answer! "

" No! . . . Do what you like. . . . "

" Bring in the next witness."

The door opened again, and Adèle came forward with an exaggerated self-assurance. She gave a quick glance round the assembly, to try and make out what had been happening. She gave a specially long look at the operator, and seemed amazed to see him so overcome.

" Now, Le Clinche, I expect you recognize the woman whom Captain Fallut kept concealed in his cabin throughout the entire journey, and whose lover you were. . . . " He looked coldly at her, although Adèle's lips were already half-opened in an encouraging smile.

" That's her."

" Briefly, there were three of you on the ship hanging round her: the captain, the chief engineer, and you; You possessed her at least once. . . . **The** chief engineer didn't succeed. . . . Did the captain **know you had deceived him?** "

" **He never mentioned it** to me."

" He was very jealous, wasn't he? It was because of this jealousy that for three months he didn't say a single word to you? "

" No "

" What? There was another reason? "

Le Clinche grew red and didn't know where to look; too quickly he stammered:

" That's to say, perhaps it was because of that—I don't know. . . . "

" What other cause for hatred or mistrust was there between you? "

" I . . . There was none.... You were right.... He was jealous. . . . "

" And what sentiment were you guided by on becoming Ad&e's lover? "

Silence.

" You love her? "

" No! " he said curtly.

" Thank you! " shrieked the woman. " You are polite, I must say! But that didn't prevent you from running round me up to the last day. Isn't that true? It's also true that there was probably someone else waiting for you on shore. . . . "

Gaston Buzier affected to whistle, his fingers stuck in the armholes of his waistcoat.

" Tell me again, Le Clinche, whether, when you went back on board after witnessing the death of the captain, Adele was really locked up in his cabin. "

" Locked up, yes. . . . "

" So she couldn't have killed him? . . . "

" No, that wasn't it, I swear. . . . "

Le Clinche was quite unnerved. But Superintendent Girard went on ponderously:

" Buzier states that you didn't do the murder. You, after accusing him, took it back. Another hypothesis is that the two of you were accomplices.... "

" Thank you! " Buzier exploded with terrific scorn. " When I get mixed up in a crime it won't be in the company of a . . . "

a . . .

" That's enough! Both of you might have done the murder out of jealousy, as you had both had Adele as your mistress. "

Buzier sneered.

" Me jealous? . . . Of what? "

" Have you any further statement to make? You, Le Clinche? •

" No."

" Buzier? "

" I insist that I am innocent and I demand to be set free."

" And you? "

Adele was making up her lips.

" Me? " ~ a dab of lipstick—" I"—a look in her mirror—" have nothing at all to say. All men are mugs! You heard this boy here, for whom I could maybe have done something pretty silly? You needn't look at me like that, Gaston. . . . Now, if you want my opinion, it is that in all this affair on the boat there are things we know nothing about. Just because there was a woman on board you thought that explained everything. But suppose it was something else? "

" Such as . . . ? "

" I don't know . . . Fm not the police. . . ."

She arranged her hair under her red straw toque. Maigret noticed that Le Clinche turned away his head.

The two detectives exchanged a look. Girard announced:

" Le Clinche will go back to his cell. You two will wait in the parlour. In a quarter of an hour I shall let you know whether you are free or not. . . ."

The detectives were left alone, both rather worried.

" Are you going to propose to the examining magistrate that he should let them go? " asked Maigret.

" Yes! I think it's the best thing to do. They may be mixed up in the affair. At the same time, there are other elements that have escaped us. . . ."

" *Parbleu!* " "

" Hello! Give me the Le Havre Law Courts. . •. Hello 1 Yes, the Court!"

A little later, while Superintendent Girard was talking to the magistrate, there was a disturbance in the corridor. Maigret rushed out and saw Le Clinche lying on the ground struggling with three men in uniform.

He was in a terrible state of over-excitement. His bloodshot eyes were starting out of his head, his mouth dribbled. But, held down on every side, he could not move.

" What happened? "

" We hadn't bothered to put handcuffs on him as he'd always been so quiet. Then, coming down the corridor, he tried to take

my revolver out of my belt. He got hold of it . . . • I managed to prevent him from pulling the trigger. . . ."

Le Clinche lay on the ground, staring fixedly above him; his teeth bit into his lips, mixing blood with saliva.

The most disturbing thing about him was that tears were rolling down his wan cheeks.

" Should I get a doctor? "

" No! Leave him! " Maigret commanded.

And when they had gone, leaving him lying alone on the stone floor, he said:

" Get up! Come on! Quicker than that . . . and quietly! Or else you'll feel my fist in your face, silly fool that you are! "

The operator obeyed, docile and timid. His whole body was throbbing with fever and he had got dirty when he fell down.

" Where does your fiancée come in, in all this? "

Superintendent Girard came up.

" It's all right," he said. " They're free, all three of them, but they are not allowed to leave Fecamp. . . . What's been happening? "

" This fool tried to kill himself! If you'll allow me, I'll see to him. . . ."



Together they walked along the quay. Le Clinche had dashed some cold water on his face, which still had red patches on it. His eyes were feverish, his lips too highly coloured.

He was wearing a ready-made three-buttoned grey suit, fastened without any regard for elegance. His tie was askew.

Maigret, his hands in his pockets, walked doggedly along, growling, seemingly to himself:

" You must understand that I've no time to lecture you. But there's one thing. Your fiancée is here. She's a brave little thing, who hurried here from Quimper and has been moving heaven and earth. It's no use driving her to despair.. - •"

" She knows? "

" You don't need to tell her about that woman."

Maigret watched him closely. They came to the end of the quays, the bright colours of the fishing-boats blazed in the sun, the pavements were crowded.

Sometimes Le Clinche seemed to be taking an interest in life

again: he would look round him hopefully, and then his eyes grew hard and he looked scornfully at people and things.

They had to pass quite near the *Ocean*, where they were just finishing the unloading. There were three trucks left in front of the ship. Quite casually, Maigret murmured, indicating certain points: " You were there . . . Gaston Buzier here.... And it was here that a third man strangled the captain. . . ."

His companion took a deep breath and looked away.

" Only it was dark and you couldn't distinguish anyone. In any case, the third man was neither the chief engineer nor the second officer, because they were both with the crew in the *Rcnde^Vous des Terre-Neuvas*. . . ."

The Breton, who was on the bridge, saw the operator and went and leant over *the* hatchway. Three sailors emerged and looked at Le Clinche.

" Come! " said Maigret. " Marie Leonnec is waiting for us."

" I can't_____ "

"What can't you?"

" Go there. . . . Leave me, please! What difference can it make to you if I do away with myself? Particularly if it's going to be better for everyone! "

" Is the secret so burdensome, Le Clinche? "

Le Clinche was silent.

" And you can't possibly tell me anything, can you? ... Yes! One thing! Do you still want Adele? "

" I detest her! "

" I didn't say that! I said want, want her as you wanted her the whole of the trip. . . . We're men, Le Clinche. .. Did you have many adventures before you knew Marie Leonnec? "

" No.. .. Nothing of importance...."

" And never that passion, that desire for a woman, that makes you fairly weep? "

" Never. . . ." He turned away his head.

" Then it was on board that it happened. There was only one woman in that bleak monotonous setting. Perfumed flesh in that trawler that stank of fish. ... What did you say? "

" Nothing_____ "

" You forgot about your fiancée? "

" It's not the same thing. . . ."

Maigret looked him in the face and was amazed at the change that had just taken place. His companion's brow had suddenly

become purposeful, his look fixed, his lips bitter. And yet, in spite of it all, the nostalgia, the dreamy expression remained.

" Marie Leonnec is pretty . • ." Maigret went on, following up his idea.

" Yes.... "

" And much more distinguished than Adele. What's more, she loves you. She's ready to make any sacrifice to ... "

" Oh, do stop it! " groaned the operator. " You know perfectly well that—diat. . . "

" That it's different! Marie Leonnec is a nice girl, will make a model wife and a good mother, but. .. There'll always be something lacking, won't there? Something more violent. Something that you knew on board, hidden in the captain's cabin, fear constricting your throat a little, in Adele's arms. Something vulgar and brutal. . . . Adventure . . . and the desire to bite, to do something desperate, to kill or to die. . . . "

Le Clinche listened in amazement.

" How do you . . . ? "

" How do I know? Because everyone experiences that sense of adventure at least once in his life. . . . You weep! You cry out! You die! Then, a fortnight after, when you see Marie Leonnec, you wonder how you can have been excited by an Adele. . . . "

While he was walking along, the young man gazed at the mirroring waters of the harbour, the distorted reflections of the boat-hulls, red, white, or green.

" The trip's over... • Adele's gone. • • Marie Leonnec is here.... "

There was a moment of calm.

" The crisis was dramatic," Maigret went on. " A man died because there was passion on board and ... "

But Le Clinche's fever flared up again:

" Stop it! Stop it! " he repeated in a dry voice. " No! You see perfectly well that it's not possible. ... "

His eyes were haggard. He turned back to look at the trawler, which, nearly empty now, stood monstrous and high in the water.

He was again seized with terror.

" I swear . • . You must let me go.... "

" The captain was in distress too during the whole trip, wasn't he? "

" What do you mean? "

" And the chief engineer? "

" No_____ "

" There were only you two, then. It was fear, wasn't it, Le Clinche? "

" I don't know. . . . Leave me alone, for heaven's sake! "

" Ad&le was *in* the cabin. There were three men hanging round. And yet the captain wouldn't yield to his desire, spent days and days without speaking to his mistress. And you watched her through the port-hole, but after a single meeting you never touched her again. . . . "

" Stop it! . . . "

" The men in the hold, the men on duty, spoke of the evil eye, and the trip went from bad to worse—bad seamanship, an accident, the cabin-boy overboard, two men injured, the cod gone wrong, and the entrance into port bungled.. . . "

They turned a corner of die quay, and the beach lay before them, with its neat esplanade, its hotels, its bathing-huts, and the multi-coloured deck-chairs on the sand.

In a pool of sunlight was Madame Maigret, sitting on a deck-chair beside Marie Leonnec in a white hat.

Le Clinche followed his companion's glance and stopped dead, his forehead damp.

" One woman wouldn't cause all that. Come on! Your fiancée has seen you. . . . "

It was true. She rose. For a moment she remained motionless, as if her feelings were too strong for her. Then she rushed along the esplanade, while Madame Maigret put down her sewing and waited.

7. *In the Family Circle*

IT was one of those situations which spring up of themselves and which it is very difficult to get out of. Marie Leonnec, alone in Fecamp and recommended to the Maigrets by a mutual friend, took her meals with them.

Now her fiance was there. The four of them found themselves together on the beach when the hotel gong sounded for lunch.

There was some hesitation on Pierre Le Clinche's part, and he looked at them with a certain embarrassment.

"Come along! They can set another place . . ." said Maigret.

And he took his wife's arm across the esplanade. The young couple followed silently. Or rather Marie did the talking, in a low voice but in a firm manner.

"Do you know what she's saying to him?" the inspector asked his wife.

"Yes! She repeated it to me a dozen times over this morning to know whether it was all right. She's telling him that she doesn't mind about anything, *whatever may have happened*, . . . You see? She's not mentioning the woman. She's pretending she doesn't know, but she told me that all the same she would emphasize the words *whatever may have happened*. . . . Poor little thing! . . . She'd go to the ends of the earth for him."

"Alas!" sighed Maigret.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Is this our table?"

The lunch went quietly, too quietly. The tables were so close together that one could scarcely talk in an ordinary voice.

To put him at his ease, Maigret avoided looking at Le Clinche, but all the same the operator's behaviour worried him no less than it did Marie L'onnec, whose face was quite drawn.

Le Clinche remained mournful and dejected. He ate and drank and answered questions, but his thoughts were elsewhere. And several times, when he heard steps behind him, he started as if he thought he was in danger.

The bay windows of the dining-room were wide open and looked on to a sea spangled with sunshine. It was warm. Le Clinche was sitting with his back to the window, but every now and then he would turn round brusquely with a nervous movement, as if to interrogate the horizon.

Madame Maigret made conversation, chiefly addressing the girl, and uttering any commonplace so that the silence might not become oppressive.

The scene was not set for a tragedy—a family hotel, the comforting rattle of plates and glasses, on the table a half-bottle of claret and a bottle of mineral water.

The manager, misunderstanding the situation, came up at dessert and asked:

"Shall we get a room ready for the gentleman?"

He was looking at Le Clinche. He guessed he was die fiance, and he probably took the Maigrets for the parents of the girl!

Two or three times the operator made the same gesture as he had made that morning during the identification, a rapid movement of his hand across his forehead. A feeble, weary gesture,

"What shall we do?"

The room **was** emptying. The four of them were standing on the terrace.

"Shall we sit down a little?" Madame Maigret proposed.

Their beach-chairs were still on the sand. The Maigrets sat down. The young people stood for a moment, rather embarrassed.

"Shall we go for a walk?" Marie Leonnec risked the suggestion with a vague smile in Madame Maigret's direction.

Left alone with his wife, the inspector lit a pipe and growled:

"I look for all the world like a prospective father-in-law!"

"They don't know what to do. It's a delicate situation..." his wife remarked, following them with her eyes. "Look at them. They're embarrassed. ... I may be wrong, but I think Marie has more character than her fiance..."

It certainly was a pitiful sight to see that skinny figure walking listlessly along, taking no notice of his surroundings and, as one could guess from far off, saying nothing at all.

And yet one could see that Marie was making great efforts, chatting away to make him forget his troubles, even trying to appear gay.

There were other groups on the beach. But Le Clinche was the only man without white trousers. He was dressed for town, and that made him look more melancholy still.

"How old is he?" asked Madame Maigret.

And her husband, lying back in his deck-chair, his eyes half-closed, answered:

"Nineteen. He's only a boy. ... But I'm very much afraid that from now on he's a doomed man...."

"Why? Isn't he innocent?"

"He probably didn't do the murder. No! I'd swear to that. But I'm afraid that he's lost, all the same.... Look at him. Just look!"

"Nonsense! Once they're alone and have kissed each other...."

"Perhaps..."

Maigret was pessimistic.

"She's **not** much older than him. She's very fond of him. She's prepared to be a nice little wife. ..."

" Why do you think that... ? "

" That it won't come off? Just an impression. . . . Have you ever looked at the photographs of people who died young? I have always been struck by the fact that those portraits, taken when the people were in good health, have already something melancholy about them. One might say that those destined to be the victims of a tragedy carry their doom on their faces. . . . "

" And you find that this boy .. ? "

" Is a victim, and has always been a victim! He was born poor! He suffered from his poverty! He slaved away as best he could, desperately, like someone swimming against the current! He managed to get engaged to a charming girl in a social position superior to his. Well! I don't believe it. . . . Look at them. They're discussing things. They want to be optimistic. They're trying to believe in their future. . . . "

Maigret talked quietly in a low tone while with his eyes he followed the two silhouettes outlined against the sparkling sea.

" Who is officially in charge of the case? "

" Girard, a superintendent at Le Havre. You don't know him. An intelligent man. . . . "

" Does he think he's guilty? "

" No! In any case, there's no proof, not even any serious presumptive evidence. . . . "

⁴⁴ "What do *you* think?"

Maigret turned as if to look at the trawler which was hidden behind a block of houses.

" I think it was a fatal trip, for two men at least. . . . Fatal enough for Captain Fallut, when he came back, *not to be able to go on living*, and for the operator, *not to be able to take up the normal thread of his life again*. . . . "

" Because of a woman? "

He did not answer directly, but went on:

" And all the others, those who took no part in the tragedy, even the stokers, were branded by it, without their knowing. They came back surly, uneasy. . . . Two men and a woman for three months revolving round a deck-cabin. . . . Just a few black bulkheads pierced by port-holes. . . . That was all. . . . "

" I've seldom seen you so affected by a case. You talk of three people. . . . What could they have done, out at sea? "

" Yes.... What could they have done? Something that was sufficient to kill Captain Fallut!... And which is still sufficient to

upset those two, who look as if they were searching on the beach for the fragments of their dreams. . . ."

They were coming back, their arms dangling, not knowing whether politeness required them to rejoin the Maigrets or discretion advised them to keep away.

In the course of their walk, Marie L[^]onnec had lost a great deal of her energy. She cast a discouraged look at Madame Maigret. They could guess that all her attempts, all her spirits, had been hurled against a wall of despair or inertia.



Madame Maigret liked to have afternoon tea. So at four o'clock they all sat down on the hotel terrace under the striped parasols which lent an atmosphere of conventional gaiety to the scene.

Chocolate steamed in two cups. Maigret had ordered beer, Le C[^]hnche brandy-and-water.

They were talking about Jorissen, the Quimper teacher who had summoned Maigret on behalf of the operator and brought Marie L[^]onnec to Fecamp. Banal phrases were being exchanged.

"He's the best man in the world. . . ."

They were embroidering on this theme without conviction, because they had to say something. Suddenly Maigret blinked his eyes, which had been fastened on a couple coming along the esplanade.

It was Adele and Gaston Buzier, he lounging along, his hands in his pockets, his straw hat on the back of his head, his walk nonchalant, she animated and provocative as usual.

"If only they don't notice us!" thought the inspector.

And, in that moment, Adele's glance met his. She stopped and said something to her companion, who attempted to dissuade her.

Too late! She had crossed the road. One by one she examined the tables on the terrace, chose the one nearest the Maigrets, and sat down where she had Marie L[^]onnec right opposite her.

Her lover followed her with a shrug of his shoulders, touched his straw hat as he passed the inspector, and sat down astride a chair.

"What'll you have?"

"Not chocolate, anyway! A kummel!"

Was that already a declaration of war? When she mentioned chocolate she fixed **her** eyes on Marie **Leonnec's cup, and Maigret saw the girl start**

She had never seen Adele. But she had understood. She looked at Le Clinche, who turned away his head.

Madame Maigret's foot tapped her husband's twice.

"Should the four of us go on to the Casino? . . ."

She had guessed too. But nobody answered her. Only Adcle's voice came from the next table.

"What a heat!" she sighed. "Take my jacket, Gaston. . . ."

And she took off the jacket of her costume, revealing bare arms and a voluptuous figure in pink satin. Her eyes did not leave Marie Leonnec for a single moment.

"D'you like grey? Don't you think they ought to forbid people to wear such depressing colours at the seaside?"

It was madness! Marie Leonnec was in grey. Ad&le showed she wanted to attack her anyhow, as quickly as possible.

"Well, waiter? Are you coming today?"

Her voice was shrill. It sounded as if she were intentionally exaggerating her vulgarity.

Gaston Buzier smelt danger. He knew his mistress. He said something to her in a low voice. But she answered loudly:

"Well? Isn't the terrace free for everybody?"

Madame Maigret was the only one who had her back turned. Maigret and the operator sat sideways to Adele, Marie Leonnec was facing her.

"One person's as good as another! Only there are some people who come crawling at your feet when you can't bear the sight of them, and who don't even know you when they're in company! . . ."

And she laughed disagreeably. She stared at the girl, who turned crimson.

"How much is that, waiter?" asked Buzier, anxious to put an end to it.

"We've plenty of time! The same again, waiter! And bring me some peanuts. . . ."

"We haven't any."

"Well, go and get some. That's what you're paid for, isn't it?"

Two other tables were occupied. Looks were cast on the new couple, who could not pass unnoticed. Maigret was worried. He undoubtedly wanted to put an end to this scene, which threatened to turn out badly.

But, on the other hand, he had the operator before him, all palpitating under his eyes.

It was as exciting as a dissection. Le Clinche sat motionless. He had not turned towards the woman, but he could not help seeing her, however vaguely, on his left—in any case, the pink splash of her blouse.

His eyes were fixed, a leaden grey. And one hand, lying on the table, closed very, very slowly, like the tentacles of a sea-animal.

One could foresee nothing yet. Would he get up and flee? Would he throw himself on her as she went on talking? Would he ... ?

No, none of these things. It was something quite different and a hundred times more moving. It was not only his hand that closed up, it was the whole man. He shrank and folded in on himself.

His eyes became the same grey as his skin.

He did not move. Did he even breathe? Not a tremor. **But** his motionlessness grew to nightmare intensity.

"This reminds me of another lover of mine, a married **man** with three children. ..."

Marie Leonnec, breathing quickly, swallowed her chocolate in a single gulp out of sheer embarrassment.

"... He was the world's most passionate man. Sometimes I would refuse to see him, and then he would sob on the landing and all the other lodgers would laugh their heads off. * My little Adele, my adorable darling ...' The whole works you know! ... Well, one Sunday I met him out walking with his wife and kids. I heard his wife asking: 'Who's that woman?' And he said, as solemn as a judge: 'Some woman of the street, I expect! ... You can tell by the ridiculous way she's dressed. ...' "

And she laughed. She was playing to the gallery and watching the effect of her behaviour on their faces.

"All the same, there are people who haven't much nerve. ..."

Her companion again tried to silence her by saying something in a low voice.

"You go to hell! Have you got the willies? I pay for my drinks, don't I? ... I'm not doing anyone any harm! ... So they can't say anything to me... . What about those peanuts, waiter? And bring me another kiimmel. ..."

"Should we go? ... " said Madame Maigret.

It was too late. Adele had got going. And they knew that if they went she would stop at nothing to make a scene.

Marie Ldonnec stared at the table, her ears crimson, her eyes bright, her lips parted in anguish.

As for Le Clinche, he had closed his eyes, and thus he remained, blind, his face set. His hand still lay inert on the table.

Hitherto Maigret had had no chance of observing him in detail. His face was at once very young and very old, as is often the case with adolescents who have had a hard childhood.

He was tall, taller than the average, but his shoulders weren't yet a man's shoulders.

His skin, which was rather neglected, was sprinkled with clusters of freckles. He had not shaved that day, and the fair hairs gleamed on his chin and his cheeks.

He was not handsome. He could not have laughed much in his life. Instead, he had often burnt the midnight oil, read a great deal, written a great deal, in rooms without any fire, in his cabin jolted by the waves, by the light of miserable lamps.

"But what really makes me sick is when people pretend to be respectable when they're no better than the likes of us. . . ."

Adele was getting impatient. She was ready to say anything to attain her ends.

"Young girls, for instance, who pretend butter wouldn't melt in their mouths and who run after a man the way no tart would dare to. . . ."

The proprietor of the hotel, from the doorstep, was trying to catch his customers' eyes to find out whether he ought to intervene.

Maigret saw only Le Clinche, close-up. His head was slightly bent forward. His eyes were still closed.

But tears spurted one by one from his closed lids, made their way through his lashes, paused and zigzagged down his cheeks.

It was not the first time the inspector had seen a man weep. But it was the first time he had ever been affected to such an extent, perhaps because of the silence, the immobility of the whole body.

Those fluid pearls were the only sign of life in the operator; the rest of him was dead.

Marie L[^]onnec had seen nothing. Adele was just starting off again.

Then, a second later, Maigret had an intuition. The hand lying on the table unclenched itself imperceptibly. The other was in the pocket.

The eyelids **opened a mere** fraction of an inch, just enough to

let a glimmer of a look filter through. And that look sought out Marie Leonnec.

Just as the inspector rose, a shot rang out **and** there was a general uproar and a scraping of chairs.



Le Clinche did not move immediately. Only his body drooped imperceptibly to the left, and his mouth opened in a faint rattle.

Marie Leonnec was slow in understanding because she had not seen the weapon. She threw herself on him, embraced his knees and his right hand, and turned to the inspector in desperation.

"Inspector! What is it? . . ."

Only Maigret had guessed. Le Clinche had a revolver in his pocket, obtained heaven knows where, because he had not had one when he came out of prison that morning.

And he had fired from his pocket! It was the butt-end that he had been clutching during those long minutes when Adele was talking, while he closed his eyes, waiting and perhaps hesitating. . . .

The bullet must have got him in the stomach or the side. One could see his burnt waistcoat, torn to ribbons as far as his hip.

"A doctor! . . . Police! . . ." someone cried.

A doctor, who had been on the beach a hundred yards from the hotel, came up in his bathing-suit.

They caught Le Clinche just as he fell, and carried him into the dining-room. Marie followed them like a woman demented.

Maigret had no time to bother with Adele or her lover. But as he was going into the cafe he saw her, livid, emptying down a large glass against which her teeth were chattering.

She had helped herself. She still had the bottle in her hand and she filled up the glass again. . . .

The inspector did not look further, but somehow the image of that pallid face above the pink bodice, and particularly the teeth chattering against the glass, remained in his mind.

He could not see Gaston Buzier. They were shutting the dining-room door.

"Please don't stay here . . ." the proprietor was requesting his guests. "Keep calm! . . . The doctor wants as little noise as possible. . . ."

Maigret pushed through the door and **found the doctor on his**

knees. Madame Maigret was holding back the girl, who was making frantic efforts to throw herself on the injured man.

" Police . . ." Maigret whispered to the doctor.

" Can you get those ladies out of here? . . . Til have to undress him and . . . "

" All right. . . . "

" I'll need two people to help me. . . . They ought to phone for an ambulance straight away. . . . "

He was still in his bathing-suit.

" Is it bad? "

" I can't say until the wound's been probed. . . . But you can see for yourself. . . . "

Yes, Maigret could see for himself, a dreadful mess, flesh and rags of clothes all mixed up.

The tables were set for dinner. Madame Maigret went out, taking Marie L6onnec with her. A young man in flannel trousers came up and said timidly:

" Would you allow me to help you? I'm a medical student...."

An oblique ray of the sun, violently red, struck a window and was so blinding that Maigret went and let down the Venetian blind.

" Will you raise his legs? . . . "

He remembered what he had said to his wife that afternoon, comfortably installed in a deck-chair, following with his eyes that ungainly silhouette beside the smaller and livelier one of Marie Lionnec as they meandered along the shore.

" A doomed man...."

Captain Fallut had died the moment he got back. Pierre Le Clinche had struggled long and fiercely, perhaps he had still been struggling with his eyes shut, one hand on the table, the other in his pocket, while Adele went on talking, talking and playing to the gallery.

8. *The Drunken Sailor*

IT was shortly before midnight when Maigret came out of the hospital. He had waited to see the stretcher wheeled out of the operating-theatre bearing a muffled white form.

The surgeon was washing his hands. A nurse was setting the instruments in order.

" We'll try **and** save him! " he answered the inspector. " **The** intestine is perforated in seven places. **What one** might call a dirty wound! We've cleared it all up.... "

And he pointed to tubs full of blood, cotton-wool, and disinfectants.

" I can tell you it was a hell of a job... . "

They were in excellent spirits, doctor, assistants, and nurses. When it had been brought in, the case had been as bad as it possibly could be, filthy, the stomach gaping open and burnt, with fragments of clothing encrusted in the flesh.

Now it was a clean body that was wheeled out on the stretcher. And the stomach was carefully sewn up.

The rest would come later. Perhaps Le Clinche would recover consciousness, perhaps not. At the hospital they did not even try to find out who he was.

" There's really a chance that he'll pull through? "

" Why not? I saw worse cases in the war. .. . "

Maigret had immediately telephoned to the *Hdtel de la Plage* to reassure Marie Leonnec. Now he went off by himself. The hospital door closed behind him on its well-oiled hinges. It was night, the street with its little bourgeois houses was deserted.

He had not taken ten steps when a figure emerged from the shadow of a wall and Adele's face was revealed in the light of a street-lamp.

" Is he dead? " she snapped at him.

She must have been waiting for hours. Her face was drawn and the love-locks on her temples had lost their curl.

" Not yet! " Maigret answered in the same tone.

" Is he going to die? "

" Perhaps.... Perhaps not. ..' . "

" You believe I meant to do it? "

" I don't believe anything. "

" ... because it's not true... . "

The inspector walked on. She followed him and had to walk very quickly to keep up with him.

" You'll admit that at bottom it was his fault. "

Maigret pretended not to hear, but she persisted stubbornly.

" You know perfectly well what I mean. On board, he all but asked me to marry him. But once he was on shore ... "

She wouldn't be put off. She seemed to be impelled by an irrepressible need to talk.

" If you think I'm a bad woman you don't know me. Only there are times . •. Listen to me, Inspector. . . . You must tell me the truth anyway. I know it was a bullet and that it got him point-blank in the stomach.. •. They've performed a laparotomy, haven't they? "

One could see that she had frequented hospitals, heard doctors talking, and had been accustomed to people who had had more than one gunshot.

" Was the operation successful? It seems that it depends on what you had for your last meal. . . ."

This was no violent show of emotion, just a harsh obstinacy that nothing could rebuff.

" Won't you answer me? And yet you knew why I carried on like that just now. Gaston's a rotter, I never loved him. . . . But this one . . . "

" There's a possibility that he'll live! " Maigret declared, looking the woman in the eyes. " But, unless the mystery of the *Ocian* is cleared up, it won't make much difference to him... ."

He waited for a word, a shudder. She lowered her head.

" Of course you think I know . . . seeing that the two men were my lovers. And yet I swear. . . . No! You didn't know Captain Fallut. So you can't understand. He certainly was in love with me. He used to come and see me at Le Havre. And perhaps, at his age, a passion like that may have made him go a bit queer. But that made no difference to the fact that he was methodical in everything, very self-controlled, and quite mad the way he loved order. I still wonder how he could have made up his mind to hide me on board. . . . But what I do know is that we were hardly out to sea before he regretted it and began to detest me. His character changed quite suddenly. •.."

" But the operator hadn't seen you yet! "

" No! That wasn't until the fourth night, as I already told you... ."

" Are you sure Fallut turned queer before then? "

" Not so much perhaps! But, later, there were days when it was quite like a nightmare, when I wondered whether he really hadn't gone mad. . . ."

" And you haven't the slightest idea what might have caused this behaviour? "

" No! I've thought about it. Sometimes I thought there was a secret between him and the operator. . . . I even thought they might

be carrying contraband. Oh! nothing will persuade me to go on board a fishing-boat again! . . . Consider that it went on for three months. And then the finish! . . . One killed the moment we arrived. The other . . . It is true that he's not dead, isn't it? "

They had come to the end of the quay, and the woman hung back.

"* Where is Gaston Buzier? "

" At the hotel. He knows that it's no time to be bothering me and that for two pins I'd leave him. . . . "

" Are you going back to him? "

She shrugged her shoulders in a gesture which implied:

" Why not? "

A trace of her coquettish manner reappeared. As she left Maigret, she murmured with a strained smile:

" Thank you, Inspector. You've been very good to me. I . . . "

She did not dare finish. But it was an invitation and a promise.

" All right! All right! " he growled as he hurried off.

And he pushed open the door of the *Rendezvous des Terre-Neuvas*.



With his hand on the handle he could hear quite clearly a confused noise from inside the cafe, as if about a dozen men were talking at once.

But as soon as the door was open, there was a complete silence, without any transition. And yet there were more than ten people in the room, in two or three groups, who must have been shouting across to each other from table to table.

The proprietor came up to Maigret and shook hands, not without a certain embarrassment.

" Is it true what they're saying, that Le Clinche has shot himself? "

His customers were suddenly very busy with their drinks. P'tit Louis was there, the Negro, the Breton, the chief engineer, as well as some others whom the inspector was beginning to know by sight.

" It's true! " said Maigret.

And he noticed that the chief engineer stirred uneasily on the bench, which was upholstered in oil-cloth.

" A fine trip! " growled a voice from one corner in a strong Norman accent.

And those words seemed to express the general opinion, for heads were nodded, a fist smote a marble table, and a voice echoed:

"Yes, an ill-fated trip!"

But Léon coughed to remind his clients to be discreet, and pointed at a sailor in a red blouse who was drinking alone.

Maigret went and sat down near the bar and ordered a brandy-and-soda.

There was no more conversation. Everyone was trying to put a good face on it. And Léon, skilful stage-manager, suggested to the largest group:

"Would you like a game of dominoes?"

It was one way of making a noise, of occupying their hands. The black dominoes were shuffled on the marble table. The proprietor sat down beside the inspector.

"I made them shut up," he whispered, "because that chap in the left-hand corner near the window is the kid's father. . . . You see?"

"What kid?"

"The cabin-boy . . . Jean-Marie. The one who went overboard the third day out. . . ."

The man was listening. Although he couldn't catch the words he knew they were talking about him. He signed the barmaid to fill up his glass and he drank it off in one gulp, with a shudder of disgust.

He was already drunk. His bulging light-blue eyes were glassy. A wad of tobacco stuck out of his left cheek.

"Does he do Newfoundland too?"

"He used to. But now that he has seven children he fishes herring in winter because the trips are shorter; one month to begin with, and then getting shorter as the fish come south. . . ."

"And in summer?"

"He fishes on his own, setting nets and lobster-pots. . . ."

The man was on the same bench as Maigret, at the other end. But the inspector was watching him in a mirror.

He was short, broad-shouldered; the real Nordic seafaring type, thick-set, plump, with no neck, pink skin, and fair hair. Like most fishers, his hands were covered with the scars of carbuncles.

"Does he always drink as much?"

"They all drink. . . . But it's specially since his kid died that he gets drunk. It gave him a turn to see the *Ocean* again. . . ."

But now the man was looking at them with an offended expression.

"What do you want with me?" he mumbled at Maigret.

"Nothing at all ____"

All the sailors were following the scene without interrupting their game of dominoes.

"Because you'd better tell me! Perhaps I haven't the right to drink? .."

"Of course you have."

"Tell me I haven't the right to drink . . ." he repeated with drunken obstinacy.

The inspector's eyes lighted on the black band he was wearing on his red blouse.

"Well, what do you both want, snooping round and talking about me?"

Leon signed to Maigret not to answer, but went up to his client.

"Come on now, no scenes, Canut.... It's not you the inspector's talking about, but this boy who's put a bullet in himself.. .."

"Serves him right! Is he dead?"

"No! . . . Perhaps they'll be able to save him...."

"Pity! I wish they were all dead! . . ."

Those words made a powerful impression. All faces were turned towards Canut. And he felt a need to shout louder:

"Yes, the whole lot of you!"

Leon was worried. He looked appealingly at everyone and made a hopeless gesture in Maigret's direction.

"Go on! Off to bed.... Your wife's waiting for you...."

"Go to hell!"

"Tomorrow you won't even have enough guts left to lift your nets——"

The drunken man sneered. P'tit Louis took the opportunity to call Julie.

"How much is that?"

"Are you paying for both rounds?"

"Yes, you can charge it to my account. I'll be getting my advance tomorrow before we sail.. .."

He rose automatically, imitated by the Breton, who followed his every step. He touched his cap. He did it again in Maigret's direction.

" Cowards!" **growled** the drunk as they **went past** him.
" They're all cowards. . . ."

The Breton clenched his fists and nearly answered back, but P'tit Louis dragged him away.

" Go on off to bed . . ." said Lion again. " Besides, we're closing. . . ."

" I'll go when everyone else goes. Fm as good as anyone else, ain't I? "

And he looked at Maigret as if he wanted to provoke an argument.

" Look at that big man there. . . . What's he up to? "

He was talking about the inspector. Ldon was on hot coals. The last customers were waiting, convinced that something was going to happen.

" Oh, well! I might as well go. . . . How much? "

He fumbled under his blouse and brought out a leather pouch, threw some greasy notes on the table, rose to his feet, wobbled and got to the door, which he had great difficulty in opening.

He muttered something indistinctly, insults or threats.

When he got outside he pressed his face against the pane to give Maigret a last look; his nose was flattened on the misty glass.

" It gave him a turn . . ." said Leon, with a sigh as he went back to his place. " He had only the one son. . . . All the other kids are girls and don't count, so to speak. . . ."

" What are they saying down here? " Maigret asked.

" About the operator? They don't know. So they invent. Stories about falling asleep standing. . . ."

" What? "

" I don't know. It's still the *evil eye*. . . ."

Maigret felt a keen look fixed on him. It was the chief engineer, who was sitting at the table just opposite.

" Has your wife got over her jealousy? " he asked him.

" Seeing that we're off tomorrow, I'd like to see her trying to keep me at Yport! . . ."

" The *Ocdan* sails tomorrow? "

" Yes, sails with the tide! Did you think the owners were going to let her rot in harbour? "

" They've found a captain? "

" A retired man who hasn't sailed for eight years! And what's more, he commanded a three-mast brig! It's going to be fun"

" Wliat about an operator? "

" They got a kid from school.... A Technical College they call it_____ "

" Is the second officer back? "

" They've wired him. He'll be here by morning.... "

" And the crew? "

" It's always the same thing. They collect anyone hanging round the port. They'll always do, you know. "

" Have they got a cabin-boy? "

The other gave him a sharp look.

" Yes," he said dryly.

" And you're glad to be going? "

No answer. The chief engineer ordered another grog. And L6on said in an undertone:

" They've just got news of the *Pacific*, which was due back this week. It's a ship of the same class as the *Ocian*. In less than three weeks it had struck a rock and gone down. The whole crew is lost. I've got the wife of the second officer up there. She came from Rouen to meet her husband. She spends her whole time on the jetty. She knows nothing yet—the Company is awaiting confirmation before they publish the news. ... "

" A run of ill-luck! " growled the chief engineer, who had heard what he said.

The Negro yawned and rubbed his eyes, but did not dream of leaving. The abandoned dominoes made a complicated pattern on the grey rectangle of the table.

" In short," said Maigret slowly, " nobody knows why the operator tried to kill himself? "

His words met with an obstinate silence. Did all those men know? Did they carry even to this point the freemasonry of seafaring people who don't like to see landsmen interfering in their affairs? "

" What do I owe you, Julie? "

He rose, paid, and went heavily to the door. Ten pairs of eyes followed him. He turned, but met only sealed or scornful faces. Even Leon, in spite of all his goodwill, formed a united front with his clients.

The tide was out. Of the trawler, only the funnel and the derricks were to be seen. The trucks had disappeared. The quay was deserted.

A fishing-boat, its white light balanced on the top of the mast,

was making slowly for the jetty, and one could hear two men's voices talking.

Maigret filled a last pipe, looked at the town, the Benedictine towers, with the gloomy walls of the hospital below.

The windows of the *Rendei-Vous des Terre-Neuvas* cast two rectangular pools of light on the quay.

The sea was calm. One only heard the faint murmur of the spring tide lapping at the shore and the piles of the jetty.

The inspector was right at the edge of the quay. Thick hawsers, the ones which held the *Ocdan*, were coiled round metal bollards.

He bent down. Men were closing down the hatchways of the holds where, during the day, they had stored the salt. A young man, even younger than Le Clinche, was standing watching the sailors at work, leaning against the operator's cabin.

It must be the successor to the man who had just put a bullet through his stomach. He was puffing away nervously at a cigarette.

He had come from Paris, from college. He was obviously excited. Perhaps he was dreaming of adventure.

Maigret couldn't tear himself away. He was kept there by the feeling that the mystery was quite near, within his reach, that there was only one more effort to be made. . . .

He turned suddenly, because he felt the presence of someone behind him. In the darkness he saw a red blouse, a black arm-band.

The man had not seen him, or else was paying no attention. He walked right up to the edge of the quay, and it was a miracle that, in his condition, he did not fall into space.

The inspector could see nothing but his back. He had the impression that, overcome by giddiness, the drunkard was going to throw himself on to the deck of the trawler.

But no! He was talking to himself, sneering and shaking his fist.

Then he spat once, twice, three times at the ship. He spat to express his complete disgust.

After which, no doubt having relieved his feelings, he went away, not towards his cottage in the fisher quarters, but towards the lower town where there might still be a light in some wretched little *bistro*.

9. Two *Men* on the Bridge

THERE was a tinny note from the direction of the cliff: the clock of the Benedictine abbey striking one.

Maigret walked towards the *Hotel de la Plage*, his hands behind his back, but, as he got nearer, his steps became slower and finally stopped altogether, right in the middle of the quay.

Before him was the hotel, his room, his bed, everything that was peaceful and reassuring.

Behind . . . He turned. He looked back at the funnel of the trawler from which smoke was coming gently, for the furnaces had **been** lit. Fecamp was asleep. There was a great pool of moonlight in the middle of the dock. A breeze had arisen from the water, almost icy, like the breath of the sea.

Maigret turned, heavily, regretfully. He again strode over the hawsers coiled round the bollards and found himself at the edge of the quay with his eyes fixed on the *Ocian*.

His eyes were narrowed, his mouth threatening, his fists in the depths of his pockets.

This was the solitary, discontented Maigret, sunk within himself, doggedly persistent, caring nothing for ridicule.

The tide was low. The deck of the trawler far below the level of the dock. But a plank had been thrown from the quay to the bridge. A thin, narrow plank.

The sound of the surf was becoming more distinct. The tide must have turned, and the foamy water was gradually encroaching on the beach.

Maigret went on to the plank, which curved in the middle under his weight. His steps grated on the iron bridge. But he did not go any farther. He let himself down on the quarter-deck opposite the steering-wheel, where Captain Fallut's huge sea-mittens dangled from the compass.

In the same way dogs ensconce themselves, surly and obstinate, in a place where they have smelt out something.

The letter from Jorissen, his liking for Le Clinche, Marie Leonnet's importunity, were no longer his concern. This was a purely personal matter.

Maigret had reconstructed for himself the figure of Captain Fallut. He had made the acquaintance of the operator, of Adele and the chief engineer. He had done his best to get the feel of the **general life** on board the trawler.

And yet this wasn't enough, something eluded him, he had the impression that he understood everything but the very essence of the drama.

Fecamp was asleep. On board, the sailors were in their bunks. The inspector rested his full weight on the quarter-deck, his back rounded, his knees slightly apart, his elbows on his knees.

And here and there his glance collected some detail: the gloves, for instance, huge, shapeless, worn by Fallut only when he was on watch, and left there by him By turning half round he could see the poop. In front of him he could see the whole bridge, the fo'c's'le and, quite near, the radio-room.

The water slapped the sides of the ship, which was imperceptibly getting up steam. And now that the furnaces were lit and the boilers filled with water, the ship seemed much more alive than on the previous days.

Was P'tit Louis sleeping down below beside heaps of coal?

On the right was a lighthouse. At the end of one jetty was a green light: a red one at the end of the odier. The sea was a great black hole which gave out a strong smell.

It wasn't exactly an effort of thought that Maigret was making, but slowly and ponderously he took everything in, trying to feel the setting, to bring it to life. And gradually he worked himself into a sort of feverish condition.

"It was on such a night as this—colder, because spring had scarcely begun. . . .

"The trawler was in the same place, a thread of smoke coming from the funnel, a few men sleeping below.

"Pierre Le Clinche at Quimper had dined with his fiancée in the family circle. Marie Leonnec had probably seen him to the door to give him a kiss.

"Then he had sped through the night in a third-class compartment. He would be back in three mondis. He would see her again. . . . Then another trip, and in winter, round about Christmas, they would get married. . . .

"He didn't sleep. His kitbag was up on the rack. . . . In it were the provisions his mother had prepared. . . .

"At the same time Captain Fallut was coming out of the little house in the Rue d'Etretat where Madame Bernard was sleeping.

"He was probably very nervous and worried, tortured in advance by remorse. Wasn't there a tacit understanding that some day he would marry his landlady?

" But all winter he had been going to Le Havre, as often as several times a week, to see a woman! A woman whom he didn't dare to show in Fecamp! A woman he was keeping! Who was young, pretty, and desirable, but whose vulgarity was rather disturbing.

" A good, orderly, meticulous man. A model of probity, whom the owners cited as an example and whose ship's papers were real masterpieces of detail!

" And now, all alone, he was going through the sleeping streets to meet her train at the station. Did he still hesitate?

" But three months! Would he find her again when he came back? Wasn't she far too fond of life to remain faithful to him? . . .

" She was quite a different type from Madame Bernard! She did not spend her time arranging her house, polishing her brasses and her floors, and building up plans for the future. . . .

" No! She was a woman whose image in his mind made him blush and breathe faster.

" There she was! She laughed with a shrill laugh, just as provocative as her flesh! It would be fun to go on a ship, to be hidden on board, to have a real adventure.

" Shouldn't he warn her that the adventure mightn't be such fun? That, on the contrary, being shut up in a cabin during a three months' trip might be deadly?

" He swore he would tell her—but he did not dare! Once she was there, laughing and swelling out her breast, he was incapable of talking sense.

" ' You're going to smuggle me on board secretly, tonight? ' "

" They set off. In the cafes and at the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas* the fishers were going on the binge with the advance they had been paid that afternoon.

" And Captain Fallut, small and natty, grew paler as he approached the harbour and his ship. He could see the funnel. His throat was dry. Wasn't there still time? . . .

" But Adele was hanging on his arm. He could feel her, warm and trembling, against his flank."



And Maigret, turning towards the empty quay, tried to imagine the two of them.

" Is that your ship? What a queer smell it has! Have we got to cross this plank? "

They went across. Captain Fallut anxiously told her to keep quiet.

" Is that the wheel you steer by? "

" Shi . . . "

They went down the iron ladder. They were on the bridge. They went into the captain's cabin and shut the door.

" Yes! That was it! " Maigret growled. " There they were, the two of them. It was their first night on board. . . . "

He would have liked to tear aside the curtain of the night and disclose the wan light of dawn, see the silhouettes of the sailors staggering along, loaded with liquor, to join the ship.

The chief engineer arrived from Yport by the first morning train. The second officer came from Paris, Le Clinche from Quimper.

The men moved about the deck, argued about bunks in the fo'c's'le, laughed, changed their clothes, and reappeared encased in stiff oilskins.

Then there was the new cabin-boy, Jean-Marie, who had come holding his father's hand. They jostled him around, teasing him about his boots, which were too big for him, and the tears that came so readily to his eyes.

The captain was still in his cabin. At last the door opened. He closed it carefully behind him. He looked dried up and very pale, with a drawn face.

" You're the operator? Good! I'll give you your instructions immediately.... In the meantime, take a look at the radio. "

Time passed. The owner was on the quay. Wives and mothers were still bringing parcels for the departing men.

Fallut trembled at the thought of the cabin whose door must not be opened at any price, for Adele, half-undressed, her mouth open, was lying across the bed, asleep.

Everyone felt a slight early morning nausea, not only Fallut, but the men who had been doing the rounds of all the pubs in the town, and the ones who had come by train.

One by one they dropped into the *Rendezvous des Terre-Neuvas* and gulped down coffee laced with rum.

" Au revoir! If we get back . . . ! " "

There was a loud siren blast, then two more. The women and children, after a last embrace, ran towards the jetty. The owner shook hands with Fallut.

The hawsers were cast loose. The trawler slipped away from the

quay.... Then Jean-Marie, the cabin-boy, overcome by fear, burst into sobs, stamped his feet and tried to jump ashore.

Fallut had stood where Maigret stood now.

" Stand by! A hundred and fifty degrees !... Half-speed ahead!"

Was Adèle still asleep? Would she hate being upset by the first swell?

Fallut did not move from the post which had been his for so many years. Before him lay the sea, the Atlantic....

All his nerves were on edge with this mad thing he had done. It had not seemed so bad on shore.

" Two points to port. ... "

And then there were cries and the group of people on the jetty surged forward! A man who had climbed up the derrick to wave good-bye to his people had fallen on to the deck!

" Stop! Hard-astern. Stop! .. . "

Nothing stirred from the direction of the cabin. ... Was there still time to put the woman back on shore? .. .

Boats approached. The ship came to a standstill between the jetties. A fishing-smack wanted to get past.

But the man was injured and must be left behind. He was taken off in a dory....

The superstitious women on shore were quite overcome by the accident. And the cabin-boy, in addition, was so afraid of going that he had to be held back from throwing himself into the water! .. .

" Stand-by! .. Half-speed! .. . Full speed ahead! .. . "

Le Clinche was taking possession of his domain, trying the gear, ear-phones on his head. And in the midst of his duties he wrote:

My darling sweetheart,

Eight o'clock in the morning! We are just off.... Already the town is out of sight. ...

Maigret lit another pipe and rose so as to see his surroundings better. He had all his characters in hand, he had them all moving in their appointed places on the ship which he surveyed.

The first breakfast in the narrow cabin reserved for officers: Fallut, the second officer, the chiefengineer, and the operator. And the captain announced that he would take his meals alone in his cabin.. •.

It was something unheard of! A fantastic idea! Everyone tried vainly to think what could be the reason.

And Maigret, his head in his hand, went on muttering:

"It was the cabin-boy's duty to carry up the captain's food. And the captain would either have to open the door a very small way or to hide Adèle under the bed which he had raised up. . . ."

There were two of them to eat a single portion! The first time, the woman laughed! And Fallut probably gave nearly the whole of his share to her.

He was too serious. She laughed at him. She coaxed him. . . . He yielded and smiled. . . .

Had they already begun to talk of the evil eye in the fo'c's'le? . . . Weren't there comments on the captain's decision to eat alone? And besides, they had never known a captain who went about with the key of his cabin in his pocket!

The two propellers revolved. The vibrations had started which would shake the ship for the next three months.

Down below, men like P'tit Louis were feeding the furnaces with coal eight or ten hours a day, or sleepily examining the oil-pressure. . . .

Three days. . . . That was the general opinion. . . . It had needed three days to produce an atmosphere of uneasiness. . . . And from that time the men had wondered whether Fallut had gone mad.

Why? Was it jealousy? But Adele had declared that she hadn't seen Le Clinche until the fourth day. . . .

Up to then he had been too busy with his apparatus. He intercepted messages for his own personal satisfaction. He made attempts at transmission. And, the ear-phones on his head, he wrote pages and pages as if the post would carry them immediately to his fiancée.

Three days. They would hardly have had time to make each other's acquaintance. Perhaps the chief engineer had pressed his face against the port-hole and seen the young woman? But he had said nothing!

The atmosphere on board ship is only created gradually, as men get nearer to each other by sharing their adventures in common. But as yet there were no adventures! They hadn't even begun fishing! For that they would have to wait until they were on the Great Bank over there in Newfoundland, on the other side of the Atlantic, which they wouldn't reach for at least ten days.



Maigret was standing up there on the bridge, and if a man had wakened up he might have wondered what he was doing there, enormous, solitary, looking slowly round him.

What was he doing? He was trying to understand! All the people were in their places, with their own particular mentalities and their own particular preoccupations.

But from then on there was no way of guessing. There was nothing but a blank. The inspector could only review the evidence.

"It was by about the third day that Captain Fallut and the operator had come to regard each other as enemies. They both kept revolvers in their pockets. They seemed to be afraid of each other...."

And yet Le Clinche had not yet become Adele's lover!

"From then onwards, the captain acted like a madman...."

They were out in the Atlantic now, off the route of steamers. They only very occasionally met other trawlers, English or German, on their way to their fishing-grounds.

Was Adèle getting impatient and complaining about her life of confinement?

"... *like a madman*. . . ."

Everyone was agreed on that word! And it would seem as if Adele weren't sufficient to produce such a state of mind in a man as balanced as Fallut, a man who all his life had worshipped orderliness.

She hadn't been unfaithful to him! He had let her have two or three airings on the bridge at night, taking all manner of precautions.

Then why was he *like a madman*? . . .

The evidence continued:

"... He gave orders to anchor the boat where no cod had ever been caught within living memory. . . ."

And he wasn't a nervous or a fiery or hasty man! He was a meticulous *petit bourgeois* who had once dreamed of uniting himself with his landlady, Madame Bernard, and ending his days in the house in the Rue d'Etretat with its lace curtains.

"... Accidents went on happening. ... When they finally reached the Bank and found some fish, it was salted in such a way that it was considerably damaged by the time they got back."

Fallut was no beginner. He was due to retire! No one had ever had anything against him before.

He always ate in his cabin.

"... He sulked with me ..." Adele had said. "He'd let days and weeks go past without saying a word to me. Then suddenly it would get hold of him again...."

A wave of sensuality! She was there, in his room! Sharing his

bed! And yet he managed to leave her alone for weeks, until the temptation became too strong!

Would he have acted like that if he had only been troubled by jealousy?

The chief engineer prowled, fascinated, round the cabin, but hadn't the nerve to pick the lock.

Then the epilogue: the return of the *Ocian* to France with a cargo of damaged cod.

It must have been on the way back that the captain drew up that sort of will in which he declared that no one must be accused of his death.

Therefore he wanted to die! He wanted to kill himself! Nobody but he was capable of taking the bearings, and he was sufficiently imbued with the sailor's code to bring his ship back into port first.

Would he have killed himself because he had broken the regulations by taking a woman with him? Would he have killed himself because the oversalted fish would have to be sold at a few francs below the current price?

Would he have killed himself because his crew, astonished by his strange behaviour, thought he had gone mad?

He, the coolest and most meticulous captain in Fecamp? Whose ship's papers were cited as a model? Who had lived so long in Madame Bernard's placid house?

The ship came alongside. All the men jumped off and made for the *Rendei-Vous des Terre-Neuvas*, where they could at last get a drink of spirits.

They were all branded with the seal of the mystery! They were all silent about certain things! They were all uneasy!

Because the captain had behaved in an inexplicable manner?

Fallut came ashore quite alone. He would have to wait until the quays were deserted to take off Adele.

He walked a few steps. Two men were hiding: the operator and Gaston Buzier, the woman's lover.

But that did not prevent a third man from leaping on the captain, strangling him and pushing him into the dock.



And that had happened in the very place where the *Ocian* was now floating in the black water. The body had caught on the chain of the anchor... •

Maigret smoked, his brow set.

" At his first interrogation, Le Clinche lied and talked about a man with yellow shoes who had killed Fallut.... The man with the yellow shoes was Buzier. ... Confronted with him, Le Clinche withdrew his statement. ... "

Why did he lie, unless to save the third person, that is to say, the murderer? And why wouldn't Le Clinche reveal his name?

Far from it! He let himself be imprisoned in his place! He scarcely defended himself when there was every chance that he would be found guilty!

He was gloomy, like a man eaten up with remorse. He did not dare look his fiancée or Maigret in the eyes.

And one tiny detail: before he returned to the trawler he went to the *Rendezvous des Terre-Neuvas* and, upstairs in his room, he burned his papers. . . .

When he got out of prison he was quite joyless, even when Marie Leonnec was there, urging him to be optimistic.. • . And he found a way of getting hold of a revolver. . . .

He was afraid. ... He hesitated. ... For a long time he had remained with his eyes closed and his finger on the trigger. ...

Then he had fired....



As the night wore on the air became cooler and the breeze more charged with the musty smell of seaweed and iodine.

The trawler had risen a few feet. The bridge was now on a level with the quay, and the suction of the tide made it lurch sideways and caused the gangway to creak.

Maigret had forgotten his fatigue. The worst hour had passed. Day was near.

He drew up a list:

Captain Fallut, who had been taken off the anchor-chain, dead.

Adele and Gaston Buzier, who were always quarrelling, fed up with each other and yet with no one else to turn to.

Le Clinche, who had been wheeled out on a stretcher, swathed in white, from the operating-theatre.

And Marie Leonnec.

And those men who, even when they were drunk, at the *Rendezvous des Terre-Neuvas*, remembered something terrible.

" The third day! " said Maigret aloud. " That's where we'll have

to look! Something happened more terrifying than jealousy. *And yet something which was a direct result of the presence of Adele on board, . . .*

The effort was painful. There was a tension in all his faculties. The ship swayed imperceptibly. There was a light in the fo'c's'le where the sailors were getting up.

" The third day ... "

Then his throat tightened. He looked at the quarter-deck and then at the quay where lately a man had stooped down and shaken his fist.

Perhaps it was the effect of the cold. In any case, a shudder passed over him.

The third day. The cabin-boy . . . Jean-Marie, who had stamped his foot and hadn't wanted to go . . . and was washed overboard by a wave . . . in the night . . .

Maigret stared round the deck as if trying to find the exact place where the catastrophe had occurred.

" There were only two witnesses, Captain Fallut and the operator, Le Clinche. The next day, or the day after, Le Clinche became Adele's lover. ... "

It was a clean break. Maigret didn't wait an instant longer. Someone was moving in the fo'c's'le. Without being seen, he crossed the plank which connected the ship with the land.

And, lugubriously, his hands in his pockets, his nose blue with the cold, he went back to the *Hotel de la Plage*.

It wasn't yet day, but it was no longer night, for on the sea the crests of the waves loomed up, crudely white. And the seagulls made light splashes on the sky.

A train whistled in the station. An old woman went off towards the rocks, her basket on her back, a hooked stick in her hand, to catch crabs.

10. *What Happened on the Third Day*

WHEN Maigret came down from his room at about eight in the morning he felt light in the head and heavy in the chest, as if he had been drinking too much.

" Isn't it going as it should? " his wife asked him.

He shrugged his shoulders and she did not press him. But there on the hotel terrace, facing a treacherous green sea breaking into white horses, he came upon Marie Leonnec. She was not alone. There was a man sitting at her table. She rose precipitately and stammered out:

" Allow me to introduce you to my father, who has just arrived."

The wind was fresh, the sky overcast. The seagulls were skimming low over the water.

"I am most honoured, Inspector. Most honoured and most happy...."

Maigret looked mournfully at him. He was short on his legs and would have been no more ridiculous than anyone else had it not been for a disproportionate nose, as big as two or three ordinary ones, pitted, moreover, like a strawberry.

It wasn't his fault! It was a genuine infirmity. But that made no difference to the fact that one saw nothing but the nose, and when he talked, one looked only at the nose, which made it impossible to take seriously anything he might say.

" You'll have a drink with us? "

" No, thank you. I've just had breakfast."

" Well, a little brandy to warm you up."

" Don't bother!"

But he insisted. It was only polite, wasn't it, to make people drink against their wills?

And Maigret observed him and his daughter, who, apart from the nose, was very like him. Looking at her in this way, he could see pretty well what she would be like in about ten years, when the charm of youth had gone.

" I want to go straight to the point, Inspector. That's my motto. I've travelled all night for this. When Jorissen came and told me that he would accompany my daughter, I gave my permission. So no one can say I'm not broadminded. . . ."

If only Maigret hadn't been in a hurry to go somewhere else! And there was that nose! And a certain vulgarity which came out in his conversation.

" Nevertheless, my duty as a father compels me to find out what's what, doesn't it? That's why I ask you, out of your goodness of heart, to tell me whether you think that the young man is innocent. •."

Marie Leonnec looked away. She must have felt confusedly that this interference of her father wasn't going to settle anything.

Alone, running to the rescue of her fiancé, she had a certain charm. At least she was touching.

But seen with her family it was different. It was too suggestive of the shop at Quimper, the discussions before her departure, the gossiping neighbours.

" You're asking me whether he killed Captain Fallut? "

" Yes. . . . You'll understand that it is essential."

Maigret looked straight in front of him with his most distant expression.

" Well. . . ."

He could see that the girl's hands were trembling.

" He didn't kill him. You'll excuse me . . . I have most urgent business. I expect I'll have the pleasure of seeing you again quite soon."

He fled! He even upset a chair on the terrace. He could guess that they were struck all of a heap, but he did not look round to see.

On the quay he kept to the pavement, away from the *Ocian*. But he could not help noticing that some men had just arrived with their kitbags on their shoulders, and were taking a look round the ship. A cart was unloading sacks of potatoes. The owner was there with his patent-leather boots and his pencil behind his ear.

There was a lot of noise coming from the *Rendezvous des Terre-Neuvas* and the door was open. Maigret could just make out P'tit Louis holding forth to a group of the new hands.

He did not stop. He hastened his steps as he saw the proprietor making signs to him. Five minutes later, he was ringing the bell at the door of the hospital.



The assistant was quite young. Under his overall his suit was in the latest fashion, his tie was exquisite.

" The radio operator? I took his pulse and his temperature this morning. He's doing as well as is to be expected. . . ."

" His mind's quite clear? "

" Oh, yes, I think so. He's said nothing to me, but he keeps following me with his eyes...."

" Can I talk to him about serious matters? "

The assistant made a vague gesture of indifference.

" I don't see why not. Once the operation's successfully over and the temperature's normal... Would you like to see him? "

Pierre Le Clinche was alone in a little enamelled room kept at a moist heat. He watched Maigret come up, and his eyes were clear and untroubled. ^

" You see, he couldn't be doing better.... He'll be up in a week. But, on the other hand, there's a possibility that he'll limp, because one of the tendons on the thigh has been severed. And he'll have to take certain precautions.... Would you prefer to be left alone with him? "

It was slightly embarrassing. The day before, it was a real bundle of rags that had been brought in, bleeding and filthy. One would have sworn there wasn't a breath of life left in him.

And now Maigret found a white bed, a face that was slightly drawn, a little pale, but more peaceful than he had ever seen it. It was almost serenity that one read in those eyes.

That is perhaps why he hesitated. He marched up and down the room, pressed his forehead a moment against the double window from which one could see the harbour and the trawler with the men working in red jerseys.

" Do you feel strong enough to have a talk? " he growled suddenly, turning towards the bed.

Le Clinche made a faint sigh of assent.

" You know that I'm not officially connected with this case? My friend Jorissen asked me to prove your innocence. Well, that's done! You didn't kill Captain Fallut. ... "

Maigret heaved a great sigh. Then he got on with it and went straight to the point.

" Tell me the truth about what happened on the third day, that's to say, about the death of Jean-Marie."

He avoided looking the sick man in the face. He filled a pipe for something to do, and as the silence seemed as if it would last for ever, he murmured :

" It was evening. There were only you and Captain Fallut on the bridge.. . Were you together? "

" No ! ... "

" Was the captain walking near the poop? "

*' Yes. I had just come out of my cabin. ... He didn't see me. ... I watched him, because I thought there was something queer about his conduct. . . . "

" You didn't know yet that there was a woman on board? "

" No! I thought rather that, as he closed his door so carefully, he must have some contraband articles in his room.., "

His voice was weary. And yet it rose as he exclaimed:

" It is the most frightful thing I have ever known, Inspector. ... But who has been talking? Tell me. ... "

He closed his eyes as he had closed them when he was waiting to fire a bullet into his stomach from his pocket.

" Nobody. The captain was walking up and down, nervously, I imagine, as he had been since you sailed. .. But there was someone at the helm, I suppose? .. "

" A steersman! But he couldn't see us, in the darkness,..."

" Then the cabin-boy turned up. . . . "

He was interrupted by Le Clinche half-raising himself with his hands clutching at the ropes which hung from the ceiling to facilitate his movements.

" Where is Marie? "

" At the hotel. Her father has just come. . . . "

" To take her away! That's good! ... He ought to take her away.. .. And above all, she mustn't come here! ... "

He was working himself up to a fever. His voice was duller, his utterance jerky.

One could see that his temperature was rising. His eyes grew brighter.

" I don't know who's been talking. . . But now I must tell you everything. ... "

He was so wildly excited that it almost seemed as if he were in a delirium.

" A most extraordinary thing. . . You didn't know the kid. . . • Quite skinny. . . . And dressed in clothes cut down from one of his father's old suits. . . . The first day he was frightened and he cried. . . . How can I explain? . . . Afterwards he made up for it by dirty tricks. It was only to be expected at his age. . . . But you know what I mean by a *dirty-minded kid*. . . He was one. .. Twice I caught him reading letters I had written to my fiancée. ... And he just said impudently: ' Is that your skirt? ' "

" That evening ... I expect the captain was walking up and down because he was too nervous to sleep. . . . The sea was pretty choppy.... Every now and then a big wave would come over the side and wet the deck-plates.. .. "

" I was perhaps ten yards away.... I only heard a few words. ... But I could see their figures.... The kid swanking and laughing. ... The captain with his head sunk in his jersey and his hands in his pockets. . . "

" Jean-Marie had talked to me of ' my skirt/ ... He must have been teasing even Fallut.... He had a shrill voice. ... I remember catching the words: ' And if I told everyone that. . . '

" I only understood afterwards. ... It was he who had discovered that the captain had a woman hidden in his cabin. ... He was quite proud about it.... He thought he was smart.... He was bad without knowing it. . . .

" Then this is what happened. . . . The captain made a movement as if he'd hit him. . . . The kid, who was very quick, dodged the blow and shouted something which must have been another threat that he'd talk....

" Fallut's hand struck a stay. ... It must have hurt him and made him mad with rage. . • .

" It was like the fable of the lion and the gnat. ... He forgot his dignity and began chasing the kid, who ran away, laughing at first. But gradually he got panicky....

" There was a chance that someone might hear and understand immediately what it was all about.... Fallut was crazy with anxiety....

" I saw him make a grab at Jean-Marie's shoulders, but, instead of laying hold of him, he pushed him forward. . . .

" That's all. ... Accidents will happen. . . . His head struck a capstan. ... I heard something frightful—a sort of dull thud. ... /t was his skull...."



He passed his hands across his face. He was livid. Sweat was pouring from his forehead.

" At this point a wave swept the deck. ... So that the figure was already soaked when the captain bent over. ... At the same moment he saw me.... Probably I'd forgotten to keep hidden. . . . I took a few steps forward. ... I came up in time to see the body of the boy crumple up and then stiffen in a way I shall never forget... .

" He was dead.. . . Senselessly! .. And we stood staring at each other without understanding, without realizing this frightful thing. ...

" No one had seen or heard anything.... Fallut didn't dare touch the child.... It was I who examined his chest, his hands, and his cracked skull.... There was no blood.. •. No wound. ... Only the skull was bashed in....

" We must have spent about a quarter of an hour there, not knowing what to do, miserable, our shoulders frozen, with the spray occasionally dashing in our faces.. ..

" The captain was a different man. You would have thought that something had cracked in him too. ...

" When he spoke, it was in a cold, incisive voice: * The crew mustn't know the truth! • .. For the sake of discipline!"

" And it was he who, in my presence, lifted up the boy. There was only one thing to do. • • Wait! I remember that with his thumb he made the sign of the cross on his forehead. . . .

" Twice the sea hurled the body against the hull. We were still standing there in the darkness. We didn't dare look at each other. We didn't dare speak. . . ."

Maigret had just lit a pipe and was gripping the stem hard with his teeth.

A nurse came in. The two men turned such absent-minded eyes on her that she stammered out in embarrassment:

" I just came to take his temperature. ... "

Vina minute!"

As the door closed the inspector murmured:

" It was then he spoke to you of his mistress? "

" From that time he was never the same again. ... I don't think he was really mad... . But there was something wrong.... He started by touching me on the shoulder. . . .

" ' All because of a woman, young man! . . . ' he murmured.

" I was cold and yet feverish. I couldn't help looking at the sea on the side where the body had been thrown over.. . .

" You've heard what the captain was like? A dry, little man with an energetic expression. He talked rapidly in short unfinished sentences. ...

" ' There you are! Fifty-five years old. Nearly retired. A solid reputation. Saved a bit. Now I'm finished! Done for! In a minute! In less than a minute. Because of a kid who ... Or rather because of a woman. .. . ' "

" And so, in the night, in a dull and angry voice, he told me everything, bit by bit. ... A woman from Le Havre. ... A woman who was pretty worthless, he realized that. . . . But he couldn't get over her....

" He had taken her on board. ... At the same time he had the feeling that her presence would provoke trouble... •

" She was there ... asleep...."

He moved restlessly.

" I don't remember everything he told me.... For he felt he had to talk about her—with a mixture of passion and hatred. . . .

" ' A captain has no right to start a scandal capable of ruining his authority.. ..'

" I can still hear those words. It was the first time I'd sailed on a ship, and now I thought of the sea as a monster that would get us all....

" Fallut cited examples. In such and such a year a captain had taken his mistress with him on his ship. There had been such rows on board that three men hadn't come back....

" It was blowing hard. ... Spray kept dashing over us.. .. Sometimes a wave would lick round our feet, which slipped about on the greasy metal deck. ...

" No, he wasn't mad!.. .. But it wasn't the same Fallut....

" ' We'll get this trip over! . . . Then we'll see. .. /

" I didn't understand what he meant. It seemed to me both conventional and fantastic to be so attached to the idea of duty.

" ' They mustn't know.... A captain must do no wrong . . . '

" I was ill with nerves. I couldn't think. Thoughts were going round and round in my head, and finally I was living in a real nightmare.

" This woman in the cabin, this woman whom a man like the captain couldn't get over ... whose very name made him breathe fast... •

" I wrote scores of letters to my fiancée, but we were going to be separated for three months. ... I had had no experience of such transports. • • •

" And when he said *her flesh* ... or *her body* ... I blushed without knowing why. ... "

Maigret questioned him slowly:

" No one on board except you two knew the truth about the death of Jean-Marie? "

" No one! "

" And it was the captain who, in accordance with tradition, recited the prayers for the dead? "

" At dawn. The weather had broken. We ran into an icy mist. ... "

" The crew said nothing? "

" There were some queer looks and whispers. But Fallut was more wilful than ever and his voice had become quite mordant.

He **didn't** permit of the least reply. He got angry merely if a man's expression didn't please him. He spied on the men as if he was trying to guess whether any suspicions could have arisen.. . ."

"And you?"

Le Clinche did not reply. He stretched out his arm to reach a glass of water which stood on the bedside table, and drank greedily.

"You prowled round the cabin more than ever, didn't you? You wanted to see this woman who'd put the captain in such a state? ... Was that on the following night? ..."

"Yes ... I met her for a moment. Then the next night... I had noticed that the key to the radio-room and the captain's cabin were the same. ... The captain was on watch. ... I crept in like a thief. ..."

"You became her lover? ..."

The operator's face hardened.

"I swear you won't understand! The whole atmosphere had no connection whatsoever with everyday realities. That kid ... And the whole business of the previous night. ... And yet, when I thought of it, it was always the same image that came to my mind: that of a woman different from all other women, a woman whose body, whose flesh could so change a man. ..."

"Did she encourage you? "

"She was lying on the bed, half-naked. ..."

He blushed violently and turned away his head.

"How long did you remain in the cabin? "

"Perhaps two hours ... I don't know. When I came out there was a buzzing in my ears and the captain was at the door. He said nothing. ... He watched me go past. I nearly threw myself on my knees and cried out that it wasn't my fault and begged his forgiveness. But his face was frozen. I walked off. ... back to my post.

"I was afraid. ... From then on I kept my revolver loaded in my pocket, because I was convinced he was going to kill me. ..."

"He never spoke a word to me except on matters of routine. What's more, most of the time he sent me written instructions.. •

"I wish I could explain it better ... I just can't. Each day was worse than the last. I had the impression that everyone knew about the tragedy.

"The chief engineer began haunting the cabin too, and the captain would spend hours shut up inside.

"The men kept giving us anxious, inquiring looks.... **They**

guessed that something was up. Hundreds of times I heard them talking of the evil eye. • .

" And I had only one desire...."

" Naturally! " growled Maigret.

There was a silence, and Le Clinche fixed reproachful eyes on the inspector.

" There was filthy weather for the next ten days. I was sick. But I kept thinking of her. She had scent on. She ... I can't tell you! ... It made me ill! Yes! It was the kind of desire that made you ill, made you cry with rage!... Especially when I saw the captain going into the cabin! Because now I imagined things.... You know—she had called me her *big boy*... in a special kind of a voice, rather husky! And I used to repeat those words over again to torture myself. ... I stopped writing to Marie. ... I indulged in impossible dreams of going off with this woman as soon as we got back to Fecamp...."

" And the captain? "

" He became still more icy, more cutting. Perhaps, after all, it was insanity in his case ... I don't know. He ordered them to fish in a certain place, and all the old sailors swore that no fish had ever been seen in those latitudes. ... He wouldn't allow them to say a word! He was afraid of me. I don't know whether he knew I was armed. He was armed too. When we met, his hand would go to his pocket. I tried hundreds of times to see Ad&le again. But he was always there! With shadows round his eyes and his lips drawn back! And the smell of cod.... The men were salting the cod in the hold. ... There was one accident after another.

" The chief engineer kept hanging round too. And we were no longer talking to one another. We were like three madmen. There were nights when I thought I would have killed someone to get back to her. Can you understand that? Nights when I tore my handkerchief with my teeth while I repeated to myself, in her voice:

" ' *My big boy!* . . . *Big stupid!* . . . '

" And it was so long! Days followed nights, and then more days! With nothing but the grey water round us, cold fogs, and the scales and entrails of cod everywhere.. ..

" The nauseating taste of brine in one's throat....

" And nothing but that one time! I believe if I could have only been with her one other time I should have been cured! But it was impossible. He was there! He was always there, and the shadows **round** his eyes grew blacker....

" And that perpetual rolling, that life without a horizon. Then we saw cliffs again. . .

" Can you imagine that going on for three months? . . . Well! Instead of being cured I was even more ill. It is only now that I realize it was an illness. . . .

" I detested the captain, who was always in my way. I had a horror of this old man shutting himself up with a woman like Adele. . .

" I was afraid of getting back to port. I was afraid of losing her for ever. . .

" In the end I thought of him as a sort of demon! Yes, a kind of malevolent spirit who kept the woman for himself. . . .

" The boat was badly handled as we came into port. Then the men leapt ashore with relief and made a rush for the pubs. I knew, of course, that the captain was only waiting for nightfall to let Ad&le out.

" I went to my room at Leon's. There were some old letters and photos of my fiancée there, and, I don't know why, overcome with fury I burned them all. . .

" I came out. I wanted her! . . . I tell you, I wanted her! Hadn't she said that when we got back Fallut was going to marry her?

" I bumped into a man...."

He fell back heavily on his pillow, and his whole face crumpled up in an expression of utter agony.

" Since you know ..." he croaked.

" Yes. It was Jean-Marie's father. The trawler was in dock. Only the captain and Ad&le were left on board. He was going to take her off. Then ..."

"Stop!..."

" Then you told this man, who had come to look at the boat in which his son had died, that the kid had been murdered. Isn't that so? And you followed him! When the captain came along you hid behind a truck! ..."

"Stop!"

" The crime was committed before your eyes. . . ."
, "Please!"

" No! You were a party to the crime. You went on board! And you took the woman off...."

" By then I didn't want her any more!"

Outside there was a loud siren blast Le Clinche's lips trembled and he stammered:

" The *Octan*_____ "

" Yes... . She sails at high tide."

They were silent. All the sounds of the hospital came to their ears, including the subdued rumble of a stretcher being wheeled towards the operating-theatre.

"I didn't want her any more!..." the operator repeated convulsively.

" Only it was too late_____ "

There was another silence. Then Le Clinche said:

" And yet... now ... I so much want to .. ."

He didn't dare pronounce the word on his tongue.

" To live? ... " asked Maigret.

" O, don't you understand? I was mad ... I don't understand it myself. It all happened somewhere else, in another world. We came back here and I realized it. Listen! There was that black cabin and ourselves outside it. And nothing else existed. It seemed to be my whole life. I just wanted to hear her say *My big boy* again. I couldn't even say how it happened. I opened the door. She went away. There was a man in yellow shoes waiting for her, and they fell into each other's arms on the quay. . .

" I must have been dreaming. That is the right word for it And from that moment I wanted not to die. . . . Then Marie Lconnec came with you Adele came too, along with that man. . .

" But what did you expect me to say? . .

" It's too late, isn't it? . . . They let me out. I went on board and got a revolver. Marie was waiting for me on the quay. She didn't know. . .

" And that afternoon that woman began talking... . And there was the man with yellow shoes too. . . .

" Who could conceivably understand all that? ... I fired. . . . It took me a long time to make up my mind. . . . Because Marie Lconnec was there! ...

" Now .. ."

He sobbed. He literally cried:

" I'll have to die all the same! And I don't want to die! I'm afraid to die. I . . . I . . ."

He began tossing about so violently that Maigret called a nurse, who, with the calm precise movements acquired during long years of professional experience, managed to quieten him.

A second time the trawler gave its piercing summons, and women ran to line up on the jetty.

11. The "Ocian" Sails

MAIGRET arrived at the quay just as the new captain was giving the order to cast off the hawsers. He saw the chief engineer saying goodbye to his wife, and went up and took him aside.

" Tell me something. It was you, wasn't it, who found the captain's will and put it in the police letter-box? "

The other hesitated, rather anxiously.

" You've nothing to fear. You suspected Le Clinche. You thought it was the way to save him. Although you had been after the same woman. . . . "

The siren shrieked angrily to late-comers, and on the quay couples loosened their embraces.

" Please don't talk to me any more about it. . . . Is it true he's going to die? . . . "

" Unless they can save him. Where was the will? "

" In the captain's papers. . . . "

" And what was it you were looking for? "

" I hoped to find a photo . . . " he confessed, with lowered head.

" You'll excuse me. I've got to . . . "

The hawsers fell into the water. The gangway was being taken up. The chief engineer jumped on board and gave a last wave to his wife and a last look at Maigret.

Slowly the trawler made its way towards the harbour exit. A man was carrying the cabin-boy, who was scarcely fifteen, on his shoulders. The boy had taken the man's pipe and was holding it proudly between his teeth.

On shore women were crying.

By walking quickly one could follow the ship, which only got up speed when it was beyond the jetties. People shouted their last-minute instructions.

" If you meet the *Atlantique*, don't forget to tell Dugodet about his wife. . . . "

The sky was still overcast. The wind ruffled the sea and raised litde white waves which made an angry noise.

A Parisian in flannel trousers, followed by two laughing girls in white, was taking photographs of the ship's departure.

Maigret nearly knocked down a woman who clutched his arm and asked:

" Well? ... Is he any better? "

It was Ad&le. She couldn't have powdered her face since the morning, because it was quite shiny.

" Where's Buzier? " Maigret asked.

" He preferred to hop it to Le Havre. He was afraid of trouble. And, as I'd told him, I was giving him the bird ... But that boy, Pierre Le Clinche? ... "

" I don't know. "

" Tell me! ... "

But he didn't. He left her to her fate. He had caught sight of a group on the jetty: Marie Leonnec, her father, and Madame Maigret. All three were turned towards the trawler which was just passing them, and Marie Leonnec was saying fervently:

" That's *his* boat_____ "

Maigret went forward slowly, grumpily. His wife was the first to see him in the crowd of people who had come to see the sailing of the Newfoundland ship.

" Have they saved him? "

Monsieur Leonnec's monstrosity of a nose turned anxiously towards him.

" Ah! I am very glad to see you. ... Where does the inquiry lead now, Inspector? "

" Nowhere! "

" You mean ... ? "

" Nothing. I don't know. "

Marie's eyes opened wide with astonishment.

" But Pierre? "

" The operation was successful. He'll probably pull through. "

" He's innocent, isn't he? ... Please. ... Tell my father he's innocent.... "

Her whole soul was in the request. And Maigret, as he looked at her, imagined how she would be in ten years' time, with the same features as her father, and rather a severe expression, meant to impress her father's customers.

" He didn't kill the captain ... " he said.

Then, turning to his wife:

" I've just had a telegram recalling me to Paris. "

" Already? I had promised to go bathing tomorrow with .. * "

He gave her a look and she understood.

" You'll excuse us.... "

" But we'll accompany you as far as the hotel. ... "

Maigret caught sight of Jean-Marie's father, dead-drunk, shaking his fist again at the trawler, and turned away his head.

"Don't trouble, please."

"Tell me!" declared Monsieur Leonnec. "Do you think I could take him back to Quimper? People are bound to talk."

Marie looked pleadingly at him. She was quite pale. "Seeing he is innocent! ..." she stammered.

Maigret's face wore its vaguest and grimmest expression.

"I don't know. It would probably be best. ..."

"But you'll allow me to offer you something... a bottle of champagne? ..."

"No, thank you."

"A small glass.... How about some Benedictine, as we're in the district? ..."

"I'll have a glass of beer."

Upstairs, Madame Maigret was fastening up the bags.

"So you're of my opinion, are you? He's a good boy. ..."

Still that pleading look from the girl, begging him to say yes!

"I think he'll make a very good husband. ..."

"And a good business man!" The father outdid him. "For I don't intend to let him go sailing off for many months to come. Once you're married, you've got to ..."

"Of course!"

"Particularly as I have no son. ... You'll understand that! ..."

"Of course_____"

Maigret kept looking at the stairs. Finally his wife appeared.

"The bags are ready. It seems there is no train until ..."

"Never mind! We'll hire a car_____"

It was a real flight!

"If you ever have the occasion to visit Quimper . . ."

"Yes. . . . Yes. . . ."

Still that look from the girl. She seemed to realize that it wasn't quite so clear as it appeared, but she was begging Maigret to keep quiet.

She wanted to have her fiancé\

The inspector shook hands, paid his bill, and finished his beer.

"Thank you a thousand times, Monsieur Maigret. ..."

"Don't mention it."

The car that had been telephoned for had arrived.

.. . and, unless you have discovered elements that have escaped me, I conclude by suggesting that this ~~case~~ be classified as . . .

It was a passage out of a letter from Superintendent Grenier, of the Le Havre *Brigade Mobile*, to which Maigret replied by wire:

AGREED.

Six months later he received a communication which read:

Madame Veuve Le Clinche has the honour of announcing the marriage of her son Pierre to Mademoiselle Marie L6onnec . .. etc. ... etc.. . .

And, a little later, when he was on a case that necessitated visiting a special house in the Rue Pasquier, he thought he recognized a young woman who turned her head away.

It was Adele.

That was all! Except that, five years later, Maigret passed through Quimper. He saw a rope merchant standing at his shop door. He was quite a young man, very tall, but with the beginnings of a paunch.

He had a slight limp. He was calling to a little boy of three who was playing with a top on the pavement.

" Better come in, Pierrot! Mamma will be cross! "

The man, preoccupied with his offspring, did not see Maigret, who, moreover, hurried past, looking the other way and making a rather rueful face.

