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Georges Simenon

LOST MOORINGS

Translated from the French by

STUART GILBERT

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Translated from the French:

TOURISTE DE BANANES

BANANA TOURIST

I

THIRTY-SEVEN days had passed since the *Ile-de-Re* left Marseilles. It was freezing when she sailed, and almost everyone was sick when the Straits of Gibraltar were left behind and the ship was rolling in a long Atlantic swell. The eighteen-hours' stay at Guadeloupe had been a welcome break, and in the cool of the evening all the passengers had trooped ashore to visit the famous native dance-halls. Even the missionary travelling Second Class had donned a light grey suit, to escort the Nicou family through this mild adventure.

At Panama the women had bought bottles of scent, cheaper here than anywhere else, and, according to a time-honoured custom, luncheon had been served on deck while they were going through the Canal.

Now they were approaching the Antipodes, and quite a number of people rose with the dawn to have a glimpse of the Galapagos, and to click their Kodaks at pelicans and flying-fish. Muselli, a government official returning from leave, whose chief distinction was his skill on the ukulele, bought an Indian's head shrunk to the dimensions of a baby's fist; which, according to him, was a mascot of supreme efficacy. With the soft purr of an electric fan, the *Ile-de-Re* cut her way through the silken smoothness. The sea was hardly blue at all, and so dazzling that there was a run on the glare-glasses in the barber's shop. The pencilled line that traced the course on the big chart in the Saloon was creeping steadily nearer a little blur of dots *inscribed Marquesas Is.*

For thirty-seven days they had been in a world apart—neither at home nor anywhere on earth. And yet, though in this floating limbo one lost track of time as well as space, and days were all alike, this was a Sunday, with the special atmosphere and feel of a French Sunday, and everyone on board was aware of it.

It was not merely because at ten that morning a Chinese steward

had gone the rounds, tinkling a small bell that sounded like an acolyte's; nor because the red-haired missionary, who had spent thirty years in the New Hebrides, had held a service in the First Class Saloon, to which, for this once, the Second Class passengers had been given access.

For, long after the service was over, at three in the afternoon, when most passengers were having a siesta, that Sunday atmosphere could still be felt. Why was this day unlike other days, with bridge being played in the First Class and *belote* in the Second; with Oscar Donadieu and the missionary at their game of chess, and the usual scurrying of children to early meals, the chatter of a few indefatigable players of deck-quoits on the promenade-deck? Why was there that Sundayish smell, that special mildness in the sunlight, an all-pervasive languor?

They were half-way round the globe, and yet this afternoon was exactly like one of those hot summer afternoons in France when a village fete is impending and, for all its lethargy, one is conscious of an effervescence in the air.

The reason was that everyone was thinking of, or preparing for, an "event" announced on the notice-board, the entertainment which always took place on the third *night* before the ship reached Tahiti. There was to be a dance, a sweepstake, a concert in the smoke-room, and, to conclude, the leading lady would graciously distribute prizes to the winners in the sports. Three of the girls on board, with miniature flags of the Line to which the *Ile-de-Re* belonged pinned to their blouses, were going round selling tickets for the sweep. Muscilli, President of the Sports Committee, aided by the chief steward, was setting out on a long table the prizes given by the passengers for the winners: boxes of sweets, bottles of liqueur, knick-knacks bought at the barber's shop, or souvenirs acquired at previous ports of call, of which their owners had already wearied.

Because it was a Sunday, Oscar Donadieu, who never indulged in a siesta, had to do without his daily chess-match with the missionary. He had lowered his bulky form on to the iron deck, well forward, where the awnings shivered in the least breath of air.

But he did not try to sleep; nor was he thinking. For so many

days, life had been going not to one's own rhythm but the ship's, that thought was in abeyance; one lived and moved like an automaton. And if he shut his eyes, it wasn't to exclude the visible world; for through the pinkish mist that hovered on his retina he still could visualize each object in its usual place. He knew that as far as eye could reach was empty sea, its smoothness broken only by the long streamers of the wake; and that no smoke was rising from the red-banded funnel, but above it heat-eddies were shimmering on a grey-blue sky.

Ten yards or so away, in the First Class Saloon, Muselli was practising on his ukulele the piece he intended to play at the concert, and he had found a girl to accompany him on the piano.

Nicou, the gendarme from Surgeres, was lying on his back, in his khaki suit, with a newspaper sheltering his face. His mouth was gaping, and now and again his breath shifted the newspaper, which his wife, who was sitting sewing at his side, would carefully adjust.

Jaubert, the wireless operator—the only one whom Donadieu envied—was in his eyrie on the boat-deck, which he never left except for meals.

There were only three days more to go, yet they promised to be interminable. *It* was a Sunday, and the minutes were even slower, drowsier, than on weekdays.

Why, for a moment, did Donadieu imagine that his heart had stopped? Everything seemed in suspense, as if the ship had broken contact with the sea. It took him a minute or two to realize that what had stopped was the pulsation of the engines.

In every corner of the ship the passengers were conscious of this, and, though nobody was actually alarmed, it produced a vaguely disquieting impression. Nicou pushed aside the paper, displaying a red, puffy face, and asked his wife sleepily:

"What's up?"

It was nothing really, yet everyone was thrilled. There, to port, so close that one could hear the people talking on her decks, was another steamer, exactly like the *Ile-de-Re*. Her passengers, in white ducks or khaki, were pressing towards the rail, and some, who had run down to their cabins, were coming back with field-glasses.

And suddenly everyone was on his feet—the First Class pas-

sengers on their deck, to which the Seconds were not admitted; the others, Donadieu amongst them, on the fore-deck, which was their domain.

Some of the crew gazed, but without much interest, at the *Ile-d'Oleron*, their sister-ship, on her way back from the New Hebrides, Noumea and Tahiti. Nicou turned to one of them.

"What's happening ?"

But the man merely shrugged his shoulders. He neither knew nor cared. The two ships had halted only a cable's length from each other, and now the *ile-d'Oleron* was lowering a boat.

Donadieu had followed his neighbours' example and was leaning on the rail. His shorts and shock of unruly hair gave him the look of an overgrown schoolboy, the type of youngster one sees in Y.M.C.A. huts and youth hostels.

One of the Second Class passengers, a girl, came up and took her stand beside him. A school-teacher, named Blanche Lachaux, she was going to Noumea to join her fiance, who also was a school-teacher.

"Do you know why we've stopped ?"

"No, I haven't an idea." Though in his twenty-fifth year, he was so little used to women that he blushed when she addressed him.

"Perhaps someone's fallen ill, and we're to take him back to Papeete."

"Yes, I expect it's that."

On the First Class boat-deck they probably knew by now. The port officer, returning to Tahiti from long leave, could be seen in earnest conversation with a group of the more important passengers, amongst whom was Bondon, Public Prosecutor at Noumea. The Firsts always knew everything, rubbing shoulders as they did with the High Command—that is to say, the captain, chief engineer, ship's doctor and first officer. In the Second Class they had only junior officers presiding at their meals, and the young men always ate as fast as they could, to get the boring duty over.

Nicou, who had produced a huge pair of binoculars, pointed to the ship's boat.

"That chap in the stern looks mighty like the captain, don't he ? Can you see the number of stripes on his sleeve ?"

II

What gave the queerest impression was the silence of the *engines*, and the motion of the ship, rolling lethargically on a long, slow swell of whose existence no one had been conscious half an hour before.

Donadieu, who was standing near the Jacob's ladder, watched the boat come alongside. There were three officers in it; one, a captain. He could see only the tops of their caps until the captain glanced up. To his surprise, the man's face was known to him; it was Lagre, one of his father's skippers in the days when old Donadieu was the chief shipowner in La Rochelle.

A circumstance which, taken by itself, was in no way extraordinary. But actually it was the second coincidence of the kind that had befallen him on the voyage. Soon after the ship left Marseilles, a fat, rubicund man, accompanied by his wife and daughter, after examining the passenger-list, had come up to Donadieu and accosted him with a slightly embarrassed air:

"Excuse me, sir. Are you one of the Donadieus of La Rochelle?"

He had nodded. Then the red-cheeked man had grown almost effusive, while his wife took on a sympathetic air.

"Why, surely it's young Monsieur Oscar! Please excuse me talking to you like this without being introduced. But, as I was saying to my wife . . . My name's Nicou; I was sergeant of police at Surgeres till I got this transfer overseas. You don't know me, but your father knew me all right; in fact, it was he who got me my first promotion years ago. . . . Aye, Monsieur Oscar, it was real tough luck what happened—to your family, I mean. . . . But may be I didn't ought to speak about it."

That was how it had begun. In the days that followed, Nicou had kept hovering round him with the same obvious eagerness to please, and the same diffidence. Really, what embarrassed him was that the great Oscar Donadieu's son should be travelling Second, and sitting at the same table as himself; and, most of all perhaps, that he persisted in dressing like a boy scout.

And now another ghost of the past had risen in the form of Lagre. What was it about this man that he should remember—some incident of that old life **at La Rochelle**, which he'd left behind **for ever**?

Whatever it was, it must have happened when he was quite a small boy, for it had completely slipped his memory.

Looking over the side, he saw Captain Lagre starting up the ladder, while Captain Maurin of the *Ile-de-Re* came to the side to meet him.

Donadieu was puzzled by the grave look on both men's faces. And why, instead of shaking hands, did they exchange military salutes, with almost exaggerated formality ?

But what was most striking was Lagre's expression, the look in his eyes. It was that of a man in a waking dream, unconscious of his whereabouts or what he was doing. Indeed, for a moment Donadieu had feared that he would lose his foothold on the ladder.

"Will you kindly come with me?" said Captain Maurin.

It was impossible to make sense of what was happening. No sooner was Lagre on board than the *Ile-de-Re's* first officer started down the ladder, followed by one of the crew carrying his suit-cases, and no sooner had he sat down in the boat than it started back to the *Ile-d'Oleron*. The next thing was a clang of the ship's telegraph, the engines started, and gradually the *Ile-d'Oleron*, without her captain, dwindled into the distance.

The Sunday atmosphere persisted still, but with a difference. Everyone was conscious that something exceptional had taken place; knots of people gathered on the decks, eagerly exchanging theories as to what they had seen, while bolder spirits buttonholed the ship's officers and plied them with questions.

Meanwhile Donadieu was knitting his brows, ransacking his memories. "Lagre ... Lagre.... Now what was there about him ? Something I should remember. . . ." Why had he heard Lagre's name mentioned oftener than the names of any other of his father's skippers ? Why had this name a place apart ?

"Lagre . . . Ferdinand Lagre."

Suddenly the man's Christian name had come back, and this, too, proved that something about him must have caught his attention in those early days.

There was a voice in his ear. Sergeant Nicou, who had been beside him for some moments, had ventured to speak.

"Did you notice how pale he looked ?"

"Yes."

But "pale" wasn't the word. It was something subtler, more complex. Indeed, everything about the incident had been perplexing, and hardly less remarkable was what now met his eyes. From where he stood, Donadieu could see the captain's quarters and the bridge, at one end of which, when the ship was in port, Captain Maurin entertained his friends and treated them to champagne or short drinks. The natural thing would have been for the two captains to settle down there, or enter Maurin's quarters for a chat. But there was no one on the bridge except the man at the wheel and, beside him, Gallet, the Second, a youngster of twenty-four, the officer of the watch presumably.

Just then Donadieu's attention was diverted by a little scene, of exactly the sort one may observe in any French village street on a fine Sunday afternoon. A flushed, excited young woman suddenly made her appearance and started talking in a voice shrill with indignation. It was Blanche Lachaux, the school-teacher on her way out to get married.

"I went to the promenade-deck to have tea with Madame Muselli; she'd invited me, of course. And—what do you think!—I was told to clear out, because Seconds aren't admitted to the First Class deck."

Two young Americans who, like Donadieu, were on their way to Tahiti, asked to have her remarks translated, and promptly waxed indignant. Mme Nicou put in her word.

"They didn't make any objections, did they, when you went to the First Class to play accompaniments for Monsieur Muselli? Downright mean, I call it! When they want us, they're all over us. When they don't, they keep us parked here in the Second Class, like a lot of outcasts, and won't hear of our trespassing on their preserves. But that don't prevent them butting in on us when they feel like it. That funny old Englishman, for instance. He's always coming to our end of the ship for his sun-bath. Really, it makes me quite uncomfortable to see him sprawling there, with hardly a stitch on."

Donadieu, who was still leaning on the rail, could hear the missionary trying to calm them down. The *Ile-d'Oleron* was no

more than a smudge of smoke on the horizon. Mme Nicou had an inspiration.

"Why shouldn't we have a show of our own tonight, without troubling about those snobs ? It'd serve 'em right. All the talent's in the Second Class, and they'd have to call it off if we stood out."

Annie Nicou, a girl of eighteen, was the star singer, and Blanche was the only one on board who could tackle accompaniments. There were also two clever little boys and a small girl who were to perform a playlet.

"Don't do anything hasty, my dear ladies," the missionary kept repeating. "There's been some misunderstanding. I'll have a talk with them."

When the ship entered the tropics a swimming-pool had been rigged up aft. It was little more than a big box lined with sailcloth, and one could swim its length in a couple of strokes. For the *Ile-de-Re* was no luxury liner, but carried cargo as well as passengers; indeed, the First Class accommodation hardly came up to the Second on the better transatlantic lines.

The voices behind him were still jangling in Donadieu's ears, and he decided to escape. After changing into a bathing-suit in his cabin, he spent the next half-hour in the swimming-pool, which he had to himself. After that he did his daily course of physical exercises. That was how he employed his days, killing time as best he could and keeping to himself. If he had taken to playing chess with the missionary, it was because that worthy man had found him one day playing by himself and proposed a game.

Not that Donadieu had any feeling of superiority to the others; he felt no more superior to Nicou, whose respectful sympathy got on his nerves, than to the two American youths, who had just money enough for their passage and could never set foot in the bar; or to Gorlic, a vulgar, loud-voiced Marseillais.

Only, he preferred his own company. He disliked having people speak to him of their private concerns, and blushed when anyone referred to his. Nicou, for example, who kept on harping on the Donadieu family history.

"What a grand man your old father was! And how tragic that he should meet his death like that, falling off the wharf one night

into the harbour!" Or: "There ain't many nowadays that can carry their age like he did." Or: "Aye, he was all a man should be, straight as a die, and he knew how to make himself respected by his men. There wouldn't be none of these here labour troubles if all employers was like him."

And, in conclusion, he would shake his head sadly.

"But that's how life is. Once the luck sets against a family . . ."

This lack of reticence jarred on young Donadieu. It was none of Nicou's business, nobody's in fact, that after the old man's death the Donadieu family had gone to pieces, and the business foundered as the result of a particularly painful scandal.

Oddly enough, he felt almost equally embarrassed when Nicou confided in him that, by going to Tahiti, he would not only come on a higher scale of pay but be given a handsome local allowance.

"There's only one snag. I shouldn't much care for my daughter to marry one of them colonials."

One evening Nicou had made bold to ask him point-blank :

"Do you really intend to live all by yourself in Tahiti ?"

"Why not?"

"Well, I'd have thought that you . . ."

The police-officer left the phrase unfinished, and wondered if he hadn't already said too much. But it genuinely distressed him that the "grand old man's" son should propose to settle down there as a banana tourist.

"Banana tourist" was the term. Donadieu had heard it used several times in the course of the voyage, and one morning he'd persuaded the wireless operator to explain its meaning. They were the earliest risers, and usually met at five in the morning in the swimming-pool.

"You mustn't take offence, Donadieu. It's what we call some of our passengers, the ones who are going to the islands with the idea of leading the simple life, living on bananas and coconuts, and what not. The return to Nature, they call it. Those two young fellows from the States who sit at your table are bitten with that idea. They've just enough money for their passage. When they get to Tahiti they'll hunt round for an empty native hut, and settle in. After a few months they'll fall sick—they always do—and totter

in to the nearest police-station or their consulate, and ask to be sent back home."

But Donadieu was unmoved. With the Americans he had exchanged a few words only, but enough to realize that he was of a different stamp.

"And, of course," the wireless operator added, "there are some who have their own reasons for wanting to disappear."

He didn't fall into that category either. But he kept his own counsel. If he passed for a "banana tourist" and roused Nicou's compassion, it mattered nothing. He owed explanations to nobody, and couldn't be bothered to account for his presence on this ship.

Ferdinand Lagre. For the last two hours, unconsciously, he had been thinking about the man. Only when the dinner gong was sounding did it come back to him.

"Of course! The christening . . ."

He was only twelve at the time. But he had acted as godfather to Lagre's first-born, and the child had, if he remembered correctly, been given the name of Oscar. The incident had ludicrous, if rather painful, associations. To tease him, his sister Marthe had declared that he would have to wear a top-hat and frock-coat for the ceremony—which had upset him to the point of tears. His father had intervened, and rounded on Marthe.

"Stop that nonsense! Your brother's nerves are bad enough already; there's no need to make them worse."

So he was godfather of Lagre's youngster.... Dinner had begun, and as usual the wireless operator was sitting on his right. There was an atmosphere of gloom; relations with the Firsts had been broken off, and it looked as if the long-awaited festivities were going to fall through.

The wireless operator was a taciturn young man; which, perhaps, was why Donadieu had taken to him. They had something in common. Tonight he was even more silent than usual, and seemed to have lost his appetite.

Donadieu asked no questions, and Jaubert held his peace. But, when the meal ended, they went on deck together, and halted by a derrick. There was the tinkle of a ukulele from the promenade-

deck, where the First Class passengers were making a show of amusing themselves.

"That was Captain Lagre who came on board this afternoon, wasn't it ?" Donadieu asked after a longish silence.

"Do you know him ?"

"Yes."

"Know anything about his family ? Is it a fact he has a wife and two kids in France ?"

"Yes."

"You've been told why he's on board, I suppose ?"

"No."

Jaubert fidgeted for a moment and lit a cigarette. When he spoke, the words came with a rush, as if he felt a need to unburden himself.

"The day before yesterday, when the *Ile-d'Oleron* had just left Papeete, Lagre shot his third officer, Henri Clerc, through the head, killing him on the spot. Clerc was twenty-five, and a very popular young officer; everyone called him 'Riri.'"

Provoked by the sounds of revelry in the First, Nicou was trying to start a rival entertainment, and could be heard demanding coloured light-bulbs from a steward. The constellations of the Southern sky were swinging overhead; wafts of sudden heat veining the coolness of the tropical night.

"It was Lagre himself who radio'd our Papeete office, saying what had happened, and asking for orders. They decided it wouldn't do to leave him in command for the rest of the voyage. We were told to bring him back to Papeete."

While Jaubert talked, Donadieu was picturing the little cabin on the boat-deck, where the wireless operator spent his days and nights, listening to voices from the ends of the earth.

"They thought he'd better be tried at Papeete, especially as the motive concerns a native girl called—what was the name now ?—Tamatea."

He took out his watch and, though it was too dark to see the time, said promptly:

"Well, I must be off. Baranquilla should be on the air by now."

It wasn't that he expected news of any special interest from Baranquilla, but he lived in a world where the hours went to a

rhythm of their own, set by transmissions and varying with each meridian, and he thought of cities not as places where men live but in terms of kilowatts and wave-lengths.

Indifferent to the warfare raging between Firsts and Seconds, Donadieu went to his cabin, and was soon asleep.

In his sleep he had been dimly conscious of a change; still, it was startling, when he opened his eyes, to see the various objects in his cabin rocking and slithering in all directions. The sea had got up in the night, and dressing was an ordeal. In quest of a breath of fresh air, he struggled up on deck. The bows were capped with spray and, as far as eye could reach, the sea was veiled in spindrift driven before a rising gale.

He had to clutch at any object within reach, a stanchion, a derrick, a bulwark rail, to progress, and for a moment doubted if he could reach the boat-deck. There the scene was even drearier than below; not a dry spot anywhere, a grey, sunless sky. A gust whisked his cap off, and he watched it foundering in the hollow of a wave.

He had had a vague idea of looking up the wireless operator, but *it* gave him no surprise when, *in* the narrow gangway between the end of the bridge and the boats, he found himself face to face with Captain Lagre. And at the same moment he saw one of the crew a few steps behind him, and understood.

Like most shy people, he had a way of blurting out what he had to say, without troubling about preliminaries, and now, because of the wind, he had to shout.

"Good morning, Captain. I don't suppose you recognize me?"

Lagre had the same absent, faintly puzzled look in his eyes as on the previous day, and his face betrayed nothing of his feelings.

"Well, to tell the truth, I don't."

The sailor was wondering if he should permit this conversation to go on, and kept looking round anxiously to see if there wasn't an officer about, to relieve him of his responsibility.

"I'm Oscar Donadieu."

Lagre had pale cheeks, though he had spent his life at sea; an angular face, and greying hair. He puckered his brows like a man

struggling to remember; then seemed to try, without success, to conjure up a smile.

"Ah, yes." He showed no sign of interest.

"**You** remember?"

"Certainly I do. Your father was most good to me." But his voice rang dead, as if the words had no thought behind them.

"I was told yesterday . . ." Donadieu began, and looked away.

"Quite so."

It was the first time in his life that Donadieu had talked to a man who had killed another, and his nerves were on the stretch. Lagre was staring gloomily at the sea. Donadieu, too, tried to keep his eyes on it, but they kept straying back to the captain's face. With an effort he got some more words out.

"Yesterday when you came on board, I felt sure I recognized you. . . "

"Yes?"

Donadieu realized that Captain Lagre found his conversation as irksome as Nicou's was to himself.

"I must apologize."

"What for?"

"For inflicting myself on you like this."

"No, no. It was a very kind thought of yours.... By the way, how do you come to be in this part of the world ?"

Now that he had switched the conversation off himself, Lagre had turned, and was looking at the young man—without great friendliness perhaps, but with, anyhow, some show of interest.

Donadieu felt the blood rising to his cheeks, and said the first thing that came into his head.

"Oh, there's no special reason, really."

"On a pleasure cruise, I suppose ?"

"Well, not quite that. I'm thinking of settling in Tahiti. Not at Papeete itself, but somewhere in the interior, or in one of the islands near by."

The gale was driving over and between them, welding their clothes to their limbs, and, to keep their footing, both had gripped the handrail. Sometimes through the stridence of the gale there came the shrill creak of a pulley-block, or a seagull's mew. The

sailor was still hovering in the background, wondering' what to do.

"What a strange idea!"

"Eh ?" Donadieu had failed to catch the last words.

"I said it was a strange idea."

Lagre was sucking at his pipe, trying to make the damp tobacco catch. His face was calm. And yet the man was a murderer!

"I thought..." Donadieu began timidly, and paused.

"What?"

"I don't know how to put it. But I thought perhaps I could be of help ..." When he saw the captain shrug his shoulders and look away, he added hastily: "I beg your pardon. I shouldn't have said that."

"No, it's quite all right. You're very kind. I didn't know what had become of you, and I'm delighted to see you so fit. Perhaps you'd do better to stay on the ship and go back in her to France."

"Why?"

"Oh, it was only a suggestion. . . . Have you a light ?"

"I'm afraid I don't smoke."

"That's too bad!"

Donadieu could think of nothing more to say. The rolling of the ship made him still more ill at ease. For some moments he lingered without speaking, as one lingers in a death-chamber, out of deference, reluctant to seem in haste to be gone.

It was a relief when Configue, the purser, came up to Lagre and said in a low tone:

"I've a message from the captain, sir. It's time for you to return to your cabin."

When Donadieu came down the companion-way he learned from the few passengers up and about that morning that there had been a scene at midnight between Muselli and Nicou. Both men were somewhat drunk, and the President of the Sports Committee, who had come to cast an eye on the proceedings in the Second Class, had been rebuffed by the police-sergeant.

"No, sir. This is our 'do,' and we don't want no interference from the Firsts."

And Muselli had had to turn tail.

At eleven, when a good many of the passengers, though far from well, had struggled up on deck, someone pointed at a big grey buoy bobbing on the waves, and exclaimed:

"Fakarava!"

The name was familiar to some as that of one of the loveliest atolls in the Pacific. But the sea was still rising, and it was almost impossible to keep one's balance. Only five passengers put in an appearance at lunch. The wireless operator explained to Donadieu, who was struggling through the meal without much appetite:

"It's the tail-end of a typhoon. In a couple of days the sea will be like a mill-pond. There's a ship in front of us that's on a round-the-world cruise, and she hasn't been able to put in at Tahiti on account of the storm."

Donadieu heard the words, but his head was swimming and they conveyed little. A quarter of an hour later he hurried down to his cabin and stretched himself on the berth, only rising when he heard the throbbing of the engines cease once more.

They were in the Tahiti Roads, waiting for the pilot. Rain was coming down *in* torrents. Half hidden in grey clouds, a huge conical mountain rose six thousand feet above the forest, and one had glimpses of red roofs nestling in the verdure. A line of foam marked the coral reef girdling the island.

The passengers had mustered on the heaving deck, which was already cluttered up with cabin-trunks and valises. Most of them were green about the gills and looking sorry for themselves. Others were in the bars, standing farewell drinks to those who were continuing the voyage as far as Noumea or the New Hebrides.

A motor-boat came alongside, and a Breton pilot in oilskins and a sou'wester climbed on board and up to the captain's bridge. The telegraph rang *Slow Ahead*. Everyone looked over the side when the ship was going through the gap in the barrier reef beyond which lay calm water; once through, they gazed eagerly shorewards.

There was not much to be seen of Papeete under the torrential rain; little more than a landing-stage on piles, a row of godowns **with corrugated-iron roofs, and some three hundred people in European dress sheltering under umbrellas.**

A police-launch came up; its occupants went straight to the captain's quarters, and remained closeted with him.

The two young Americans, who, like Donadieu, were in shorts and mackintoshes, gazed eagerly at the wharf, where five or six cars were lined up, like the taxis one sees waiting at any harbour station.

Nicou was counting up the uniformed Customs officers, and trying to see if any gendarme was about.

There was a loud rumble; the anchor had been cast. The telegraph clanged and the propellers did a few turns astern, churning up the mud, which formed a thick brown belt around the ship.

It was the eighth of February.

II

DONADIEU had no opportunity of saying good-bye to anyone. Not that this mattered much. The rain may have had something to do with it; never in his life had he seen such rain. Either the wind had dropped or the black sugar-loaf mountain acted as a barrier; here there was no trace of storm except the whitecaps racing in the offing and some tattered palm-leaves floating on the bay. It was like being in a shower-bath, and, perhaps because they were tepid, the drops seemed more liquid than ordinary rain.

His luggage consisted of a suitcase and a knapsack—no more. By the time he had fetched them from his cabin the other passengers were already streaming down the gangway, greeting and kissing friends and relatives who had come to meet them, or hurrying into cars.

Donadieu wasn't in the least romantic—he had little use for sentiments of the conventional type; still, he felt there was something almost indecent about this general stampede. People whom he had never seen before were jostling him, getting in his way without a word of excuse. Residents of Tahiti pushed their way on board, against the current, buttonholing stewards, shaking hands with the ship's officers.

"Have you got it for me, old chap?" "Did you see her?"
"Had a good voyage?"

He'd have liked to say *Au revoir* to Jaubert, the wireless operator, with whom he had been relatively intimate. But when he went to the boat-deck, he found the cabin locked.

"He went ashore ten minutes ago," one of the crew informed him.

Muselli, too, and his wife had gone ashore, and were driving off in a car flying the Government House flag. The two Americans could be seen in front of the Customs House, in confabulation with a khaki-clad official.

There were darker patches on the men's clothes where they had been splashed, and some were taking the puddles at a leap. A group of bare-footed girls stood huddled together under umbrellas beside a wall.

While the ship was being made fast and the crew were still dragging hawsers across the deck, the Nicou family had hurried on shore and annexed a car.

It couldn't be helped, and Donadieu felt no great regret at having missed them. He lingered for a while on deck, watching the porters, bare-foot too, in white or near-white trousers and banians, carrying the heavy luggage down the gangways, and it struck him they were little different from Europeans.

Only when he saw Captain Lagre being escorted to a gangway by native policemen, who were obviously thrilled at having for once a white man in their custody, did he feel any compunction. To Lagre, anyhow, he would have liked to say good-bye, but he was not allowed to approach the group. And when at last he stepped on to the wharf, the police-car was already moving away.

"Want a taxi, sir?"

Someone had addressed him in English. This did not surprise him. He had lived for some years in the States and was often taken for an Englishman or an American. Before he could say a word the man had seized his suitcase and slung it into a taxi.

The rain was like a steel curtain, and he could see little of the town. He had glimpses of shop-signs, all in English; in fact, what he saw reminded him much more of America than of France. After a few hundred yards the shops along the road gave place to trees, and twice the taxi plunged through deep potholes, splashing his cheeks with mud.

Finally it stopped in a sort of garden, in front of a wooden building roofed with bright red tiles. A Chinese boy came forward, took the suitcase, and led Donadieu along a path ankle-deep in water to one of a group of small bungalows in the compound.

"Boss back in an hour or so," the boy announced in English.

He went away, and Donadieu felt lost as never before in his life. His surroundings were utterly unfamiliar, unlike anything he had seen, or even imagined; he might have been marooned on another planet!

The rain showed no sign of abating. Wire-gauze screens did duty as windows, and it was like being in a meat-safe. The distempered walls were oozing moisture. Opening a door, he found a primitive bathroom. Through the meat-safe window he saw huge, vividly green leaves with water cataracting down them.

Donadieu changed his clothes, but promptly regretted having done so. For by the time he reached the main building he was soaked through. In a corner of the restaurant was a bar of the ordinary road-house type. There were half a dozen small tables with red check table-cloths. On the walls hung paintings, like those one sees in Montparnassc cafes, mostly marked "For Sale." On shelves were slabs of mother-o'-pearl, oddly shaped shells and native curios, likewise ticketed "For Sale."

"Where's the proprietor?" he asked the boy.

"Back presently."

The whole place sounded empty. A big red umbrella was dripping near the doorway. On a small platform were some musical instruments shrouded in dust-sheets.

A car stopped outside. A man in oilskins entered, his drenched canvas shoes swathing his feet like bandages. He was tall and fair, and had small, lacklustre eyes. After a quick glance at Donadieu, he said in English:

"You've come in the *Ile-de-Re*, I suppose? Have you been given a bungalow? Like a drink?"

"No, thanks."

"Have you filled in your registration form?"

"Not yet."

"Chang, give the gentleman a slip."

He went out, came back some moments later, and glanced at the form.

"Oh, you're French. Government service?"

"No."

"A tourist, then?"

The man showed no cordiality; indeed, his tone was barely polite.

"I'm thinking of settling in Tahiti."

"I lived in France, too, before coming here. Know the *Pickwick Bar* in Montparnasse? No? I used to run it in the old days. . . . By the way, Captain Lagre came back with you on the *Ile-de-Re*, didn't he?"

"Would you tell me what your charges are? I shall be staying here for a few days while I look round the island. . . ."

"Five dollars. Drinks are extra, of course. It's dearer in the season."

His elbows resting on the bar-counter, the Chinaman was staring into vacancy. The hotel-proprietor fell to straightening up the table-cloths, then turned towards the entrance. A woman, wearing only a red cotton brassiere and short bathing-drawers, was standing on the threshold.

Dripping with rain, she cut an incongruous figure. There was no beach within sight; nothing to suggest the nearness of the sea. She went straight to the bar, perched herself on a high stool, and, in a brisk New England voice, asked for a cocktail.

At dinner she wore the same costume, and beside her was a curly-headed boy much younger than herself—he didn't look more than twenty—girt with a leopard-skin *a la* "Tarzan". Donadieu was given a table next to theirs. There was nobody else. The band-platform remained empty. No other servants beside the Chinaman appeared; the proprietor could be heard having his meal in an adjoining room.

The place had a desolate air, like that of a seaside hotel in the off-season, or a night-club that has fallen on evil days.

To get to bed Donadieu had to wade once more through water ankle-deep. . . .

Next morning it was still raining, neither more nor less than on

the previous day, when he came back to the restaurant. In a pareu of the most revealing cut the American woman was finishing her breakfast; the leopard boy smoking a scented cigarette.

"Are there any other hotels?" Donadieu asked the proprietor, who, at ten in the morning, was still in pyjamas.

In spite of the rain the light was better, and through the wire-gauze windows one could just make out a ramshackle, unkempt beach, some outrigger canoes, a diving-board.

"Sure. There's some French hotels down-town, but all the tourists stop with me. You must have seen how clean I keep my bungalows." His pyjamas, however, were far from clean, and as he bent over Donadieu's tumbler, squeezing an orange into it, one could see he hadn't shaved, or even washed. "There's the *Relais des Meridiem*" he continued, "on the Front. And just behind, by the post office, you'll find the *Pacifique*. And there's two or three more small ones."

It was obvious that he had no desire for Donadieu to remain at his hotel. And he kept casting curiously furtive glances at the young man; the explanation was forthcoming when he asked:

"Are you, by any chance, one of the Donadieus of La Rochelle?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because, if you are, I used to know your family. When I was running the *Pickwick*, Monsicur Philippe Dargens used to drop in pretty often, with his wife."

"She was my sister."

"They're dead, aren't they? Wasn't there some sort of tragedy—a double suicide, or something?"

There had been far more to it than that, but Donadieu felt no desire to enlighten the man beside him.

"Yes, they're dead," he said curtly.

"They were good customers. Many's the champagne cocktail I served Monsieur Philippe. . . ."

Though the rain showed no sign of abating, anything was better than staying in this dreary hotel, and Donadieu set forth along the road, which was no more than a ribbon of yellowish, watery slime. After walking for a quarter of an hour he saw some wooden houses of the same type as the bungalow in which he had slept; then some

more or less dilapidated shacks, with native women squatting on the doorsteps.

Presumably he was now in Papeete, but what he saw was quite unlike a town, or even a village. In some ways it reminded him of Big Hole City in the States, that mushroom growth of huts and lodging-houses where, after his decision to earn his living by the sweat of his face, he had spent three laborious years, as one of the army of workers on a great barrage-dam.

His shoes were full of water, his sodden shirt clung to his shoulders. He hadn't shaved, and was painfully conscious of his bedraggled appearance. And with the nostalgia of the exile remembering Zion, his thoughts kept harking back to Big Hole City, as to a lost paradise.

The first people he encountered—it was when he was passing a picture-postcard and souvenir shop—were the two American boys, who, bowed beneath their haversacks in the pouring rain, looked as forlorn as himself. They hailed him like an old friend.

"Where are you stopping?"

"At an hotel just up the road."

"What do they charge?"

"Five dollars."

"We haven't a dollar between us. Last night we slept in a verandah. They had the nerve to ask three francs for a cup of coffee this morning. So we're through with Papeete, and we're off to have a look up-country. One good thing is, this darn rain won't last much longer."

Yes?

"By rights the rainy season should be over by now, so they say. In a day or two the sun will be sinning and there won't be another drop of rain for nine or ten months. Twelve miles up this road, just beyond a village, there's a whole lot of empty shacks, so we've been told."

Donadieu guessed that externally he must resemble these two young men, and for some reason it made him ashamed.

"Well, good luck," he said, but his tone lacked assurance.

"Why not come along and join us?"

"I'll think about it."

Though he took the situation philosophically, and indulged in no self-pity, really it looked as if Nature, too, were conspiring to make things harder. This persistent rain, for instance, when normally the rainy season should have ended—almost it seemed part of a plot to discourage him and make him see the folly of his dreams.

And, though he refused to let conditions get him down, he was conscious of being at a loss, uncertain how to act. There was no reason to walk in one direction rather than in another. And somehow the sight of four consecutive tin-roofed shops, all of them selling souvenirs, postcards and camera-films, added to his despondency.

Even for those two Americans he was a mere "banana tourist" ; and he began to wonder if really there was so much difference between him and them as he'd supposed. Hadn't Nicou always addressed him in a pitying, if deferential, tone ? Even Jaubert had betrayed a certain constraint when they talked together.

No, they were mistaken. He was not the weakling, the drifter, they supposed. He knew that he was following, had followed all his life long, not the line of least resistance, but a definite ideal. As a boy, in the family mansion at La Rochelle, he had been looked down on because he was "backward" and without initiative; yet one November Sunday afternoon he had made his way cross-country almost to Sables d'Olonne, where he intended to ship on the first boat he saw as cabin-boy or deck-hand.

When the family became involved in financial and domestic complications of a more or less unsavoury order, had he not made his escape again, after his fashion, by spending long hours on gymnastic exercises, under his tutor's guidance, and vanquishing his physical weakness; with the result that now he was tall and muscular above the average of his generation ?

Then, disgusted by the sight of his sisters and brothers-in-law squabbling over his dead father's estate, he had fled once more—this time to America—and joined the host of workers, of all nationalities, employed on a great dam. There, again, he had to struggle with a physical infirmity, his fear of heights, and he had fought it down so successfully that, at the end, he could work for hours on the highest scaffolding with hardly a trace of dizziness.

At the time when catastrophe befell his family, and his sister Martine and Philippe, her husband, came to a tragic end in Paris, he had been obliged to return to France. He intended to take the next boat back to the States, but his mother had begged him to stay while the tangled family finances were being straightened out, with a view to saving as much as possible from the wreck.

Actually, very little of the Donadieu fortune could be saved. The only concession made by the creditors was that his brother-in-law, Olsen, should go on managing the business, in which he now had not a single share.

The reason why Donadieu hadn't carried out his intention of returning to Big Hole City and the congenial atmosphere of Mrs Goudie's boarding-house was that, while in Paris, he had been drawn into a political movement that fired his imagination. True, the secretarial post they offered him was on starvation pay, but he had flung himself into this new crusade with faith and fervour. He had composed speeches for the leaders, carried banners in processions or followed with an armlet on his sleeve, distributing leaflets.

Then one day it was discovered that two of the leaders had been helping themselves freely to the funds collected by their young admirers, the police stepped in, and the crusade came to an ignoble end.

Donadieu was young and active, and a good worker. He could easily have found employment in Paris, in an office or a factory. But that way out was not for him; his hopes were set on an ideal, hardly perhaps, but surely to be attained; his was a dedicated life. He was not like his mother, who was "making the best of things" after the family debacle, in an attic of the old house in the Place des Vosges where she had had a flat in better days. Nor was he like his brother Michel, now travelling for a firm in the South of France.

He was twenty-five, as shy and awkward as he had been when half that age, and, though his height and build gave him a look of toughness, saw the world still through a dreamer's eyes.

Why, with all his unsociability, had he been more distressed than he cared to admit, even to himself, by that heartless, almost inhuman scurry off the ship on the previous day, when none of the passengers had stopped to say good-bye, and Nicou, for all his show of affa-

bility on board, hadn't found time to have a few last words with him?

And why should that contemptuous term "banana tourist" be applied to people who, like himself, wished to return to Nature and live in close communion with her, renouncing the false amenities of "civilization" ? Why should even the wireless operator, who, too, was young and seemed to have a good deal in common with him, have spoken in the same vein ?

"They'll stick it out for a few months. Then they'll get ill or bored to death and apply to be sent back home." He was talking of the American youngsters, but probably, at the back of his mind, he was thinking of Donadieu too.

"Still," he'd added, "they'll turn it to account, I dare say. Once they're back at home they'll run round to a newspaper office and sell their stuff. 'I Lived Six Months on Bananas.' 'Marooned in the Pacific' There's a market for that kind of thing."

"Hi there! Monsieur Donadieu! Monsieur Oscar!"

He was standing on the quayside. Slewng his eyes round, he saw a two-storey wooden building, and Nicou at one of the ground-floor windows.

"Come in for a bit. I've something to tell you."

The entrance was inscribed "*Au Relais des Meridiem*," and Donadieu remembered that the owner of the hotel where he was staying had mentioned this as one of the French hotels in town.

He entered a room with whitewashed walls, marble-topped tables like those in French provincial cafes, and a counter with an array of bottles on it.

Nicou shook hands with him. The police-officer was in khaki and his tunic was unbuttoned, disclosing a well-developed paunch. Beside him sat another gendarme, swarthy-faced, with thick black hair brushed back from his forehead.

"My friend Batisti. Monsieur Oscar Donadieu, son of one of the biggest shipowners in La Rochelle. What'll you have, Monsieur Donadieu ? No, don't shake your head. You really must have one with me. On board I didn't like to insist, but ashore it's different; I'm at home here in a manner of speaking." He gazed at Donadieu for a moment, and seemed to feel it his duty to cheer him up. "You

know, this rain won't last. We'll have two or three days more of it, four at most, and then the island will look quite different. Ain't that so, Batisti?"

The man addressed had the sallow cheeks and dark-ringed eyes which come of living over-long in the tropics.

"It's the same story every year," he said. "The monsoon lasts three months, and then, when by rights it's over, we have another dollop, like now. It gets a man down, this blasted rain, going on and on. . . . By the way, they have pre-war absinthe here, the real thing. Have one with me."

"No, thanks, I'd rather have a lemonade."

"Boy! A lemonade." Batisti leant back and went on talking, rocking his chair. "When Nicou here spoke to me about you, I told him right away you'd made a mistake, going to the *Hotel des Iles*. I saw the taxi taking you there yesterday. For one thing, they rook you like hell. And it ain't a place the French go to; they're mostly Yanks. How much are you paying?"

"Five dollars."

"Well, here you can fix it up with Maniere for much less. Twenty or twenty-two francs a day, all in, most likely. And you'll get *bouillabaisse* twice a week. Maniere hails from Toulon and he's a dab at making it."

"But I don't propose to stay long at Papeete," Donadieu said uncomfortably. "It's hardly worth moving."

"I know. Nicou's told me about your . . . ideas. That's why, when he saw you on the Front just now, I told him to give you a shout. I've been twenty years in these parts, and there's mighty little I don't know about 'em, see? I can show you the ropes. If you went off on your own-like, you might get landed in some village where the natives'd treat you bad; or you might even settle down in a leper's hut. That's happened before now. When Maniere's back he'll tell you about it."

Nicou was fidgeting, wanting to get his word in.

"Listen, Monsieur Donadieu. This is how things stand. I'm posted to Tiarapu; it's a peninsula at the southern end of the island, twenty miles from here. I'm told it's the prettiest part of Tahiti."

"It's fine!" Batisti put in enthusiastically. "I was stationed there ten years."

"Don't run away with the idea you'd be living in the backwoods, or anything like that," Nicou continued. "There's a 'bus comes every day, with the mail and food supplies."

"It's where that English writer, Stevenson, hung out," Batisti said. "You can still see his house."

The two gendarmes seemed to be taking it in turns to impart their information. Now it was Nicou's turn.

"If you come to those parts you won't be so—so cut off. As a government official I'll be able to make things easy for you."

"Thanks very much."

"We're not leaving till tomorrow. My wife and daughter are going with me, of course. The Governor's lending us a car, and, if you like, we can take you in it."

"Well, I think of staying some days more in Papeete."

"I quite understand. I wouldn't want to hurry you. Anyhow, I'll leave you my address."

A door stood open and the pungent smell of Southern French cookery hovered in the air. But it was a white-capped Chinaman who could be seen officiating at the range.

Batisti poured himself out another drink.

"In the meantime, if there's anything I can do . . . Oh, by the way, had you to deposit two thousand francs?"

"What for?"

"It's a new regulation. I suppose they didn't enforce it this time, but they'll certainly begin with the next boat. In some years there's been as many as fifty fellows wanting to be sent back home, because they'd run through all their money. So the Governor decided to make tourists deposit the passage-money for then-voyage back, on landing. Anyhow, you've escaped it; good for you!"

"There's one thing I'd like to ask."

The gendarme smiled and made a familiar gesture signifying: "Ask away!"

Nicou no less than Batisti seemed to be enjoying this interview, which made them feel their own importance.

"What's become of Captain Lagre?"

"Why, he's in jail. Where else should he be?"

"Oh? There's a prison here?"

"Of course there is. Didn't you see the prisoners cleaning up the street on your way here?"

"Do you mean to say that Captain Lagre . . .?"

"No. As he's up for trial on a murder charge, they keep him under lock and key. Can't run any risks." Batisti rose, cast a glance into the kitchen, and came back to the table, wearing a mysterious air. "That girl, you know . . . Tamatea. It's here she lives. She ain't up yet, but you'll see her soon. She's nothing much to look at nowadays. But you should have seen her five years ago. A real juicy bit, she was! . . . Lagre, of course, is bound to get it in the neck."

"Why?"

Nicou, for the first time, was showing signs of interest in the conversation.

"You'll understand when you've been here a bit longer. . . . You haven't met the Judge yet, have you? Well, if you go to the Colonial Club—it's up the road, just by the British Consulate—you'll see him large as life. Isnard, his name is. I think he hails from Tours or Nantes. You'll see his wife too."

Batisti was smiling to himself, like a man who knows a good deal more than he thinks fit to disclose.

"Yes, you'll find it out for yourself, no doubt. I'm a government servant and I know when to keep my mouth shut. But I don't mind telling you that only a few months ago Isnard and Tamatea . . . Come to the window. Now look to your left, under the third flamboyant tree. Do you see that little shanty with a corrugated-iron roof done over with red lead? That's where he kept Tamatea."

"The Judge, you mean?"

"You've said it! His Honour Justice Isnard. But I'll leave you to hear the rest of the story from others, who ain't in government service like I am. And then you'll understand why Lagre is for it. If I was in his shoes I'd reckon myself lucky if I got off with twenty years."

"You mean twenty years' imprisonment?"

"What else should I mean?"

There were footsteps on the staircase. First a pair of slippers feet came into view, then greyish trousers held up by a leather strap, then a soft shirt gaping on a hairy chest.

Finally a man, who still seemed half asleep, slouched up to Batisti, shook hands limply with him and Nicou, and held out his hand to Donadieu, sizing him up with a long, lethargic stare.

Next, without having said a word, he went to the bar and poured himself out a glass of white wine.

"Well, Maniere old boy, how're you feeling today?" asked Batisti.

Maniere had greasy hair with a parting down the middle, big, grey-green, red-rimmed eyes, with something almost sinister in their expression. Slowly he gargled his mouth with the wine, then spat out half of it behind the bar. After lighting a cigarette he said hoarsely:

"Same as before. Shan't be better till these blasted rains stop."

"Fever," Batisti explained to Donadieu in a whisper.

The hotel-keeper went to the kitchen, gave a quick glance round, lifted the lid of a saucepan and, after a few words with the Chinese boy, came back with a damp towel and rubbed his face with it.

"I was just saying," Batisti remarked, "that Captain Lagre is for it."

"The man's a fool." Suddenly he scowled, called the Chinaman, pointed to a woman's comb lying on a table, and flew into a rage. "Haven't I told you often enough, you lazy scut? I won't have my hotel looking like a bloody brothel. Take that thing away at once, or I'll give you the biggest hiding you ever had."

His bulging eyes roved the room looking for something else on which to vent his spleen.

"They stayed again till four in the morning, damn their souls!" he grumbled. "It's the same story every time a boat comes in. Hina was sick as a dog all over the place. Tamatea had a high old time, everyone stood her drinks. All on account of that b. f. Lagre, of course."

He planted himself in front of Donadieu.

"How much are they rooking you at the Iles?"

"Five dollars."

So everyone knew already of his arrival, even of the hotel he was staying at!

"I was thinking of moving into your hotel," Donadieu said rather timidly. "If you can take me, that is to say."

"Okay. But not till tomorrow. We've nothing free today." The man glanced upwards; there were footsteps overhead. "Ah, Tamate's getting up at last."

He went to the bar, then to the kitchen, and, as he was coming back with a cup of coffee, a girl entered the room. She was wearing a gaudy wrap, which she didn't trouble to keep fastened, and one could see she had nothing on beneath it. Her hair, even greasier than the hotel-keeper's, was tumbling down her back in heavy coils, her cheeks were shiny with sweat and there were still patches of rouge on her lips.

She took the coffee without a word, making the wry face of someone who has drunk too much the night before. Then she went back to the staircase to pick up a sandal which had slipped from her foot as she was coming down. She took no notice whatever of Donadieu or the two gendarmes.

"Has the *Ile-de-Re* gone?" she asked Maniere, her eyes fixed on the window.

"She sailed an hour ago."

"I'm feeling rotten."

"No wonder, after all the drinks you put down last night."

The girl made no attempt to hide her nakedness, and Nicou couldn't keep his eyes off her. At one moment he grew conscious that Donadieu was observing him, and gave him a sheepish smile, as if to excuse himself. "Why not? She's quite worth looking at."

Her breasts, certainly, were finely modelled in a dusky bronze that lit with sudden glints when she turned towards the light, and her eyes dark and lustrous. But her nose was flat, her mouth coarsely shaped, her expression vacuous.

"Isn't Hina up yet?" she asked.

Maniere's answer was a wink.

"Who's with her?"

"Can't you guess?"

"That kid Robert, I suppose?"

Maniere merely shrugged his shoulders. Then he went up to the table where Donadiou was sitting.

"Well, gentlemen, what'll you have? It's on the house." He turned to the girl. "For God's sake go and get dressed, or I shan't give you any lunch. You look a proper dope this morning."

"I'm not hungry."

"Anyhow, clear out of this!"

Turning his back on her, he went to fetch the drinks. Tamatea moved into the kitchen and, as he had done, lifted the lid of a saucepan to see what was in it, then started talking to the Chinaman.

Donadiou rose. Maniere asked indifferently:

"Off already?"

"Yes. What do I owe you?"

"Don't bother about that," Nicou put in quickly. "It was my shout. I asked you in."

"Shall I reserve a room for you, for tomorrow?" the hotel-keeper asked.

Donadiou was by no means sure that he wanted to come here, but he nodded—and was ashamed of his supineness.

"Can I lend you an umbrella?"

"No, thanks. I'm soaked through already."

Too late he guessed that the question had been facetious; the man had never thought of lending him an umbrella.

On the way back he missed a turning, and it took him half an hour to get to the *Hotel des Iles*. The American woman and the boy in the leopard skin had already started lunch; the proprietor was making up accounts.

"Will you be keeping your room?"

"Well—er—I'm not quite sure yet."

"Because, if you are, I must ask you to pay a week in advance. Sorry to insist, but it's one of our rules." He pointed to a small notice written in violet ink and pinned to the wall near the entrance. Donadiou could have sworn it had been put up during his absence, and that when he went out there had been nothing on that wall except a picture ticketed "For Sale." "You can let me know what you decide, presently," the man continued. "I don't wish to rush

you. As a matter of fact, we don't really want people staying here at this time of the year. We'd do better to close down."

Donadieu's place was laid beside one of the wire-gauze windows. With a disdainful air the Chinese boy set on the table a small fillet of fried fish and, at the same time, a bowl of salad.

III

"A N D you, Monsieur Donadieu ? Will you have *ailloli* ?"

For one thing, there was that "Monsieur"—to which Maniere's voice, gruff at the best of times, always imparted an ironical, if not contemptuous, inflection. Also there was the man's assurance; it was as if he said in so many words: "You'll eat it, my lad, whether you like it or not. You'll not dare to say you don't like it, and anyhow you won't get anything else."

Without waiting for a reply, he called to the kitchen:

"One *ailloli*"

Donadieu wondered if it was by chance that on each of the three days he had been staying here all the food given him had been seasoned with garlic. This national Provencal dish, *ailloli*, fifty per cent, pure garlic, was only the climax of a series.

Like the other guests at the *Relais des Miridiens*, he had a table to himself, and he shrewdly suspected that this *one*, up against a window, where the rain driving through the wire-gauze drenched his cheeks, had been deliberately allotted him.

But he made no protest. He plodded through what was set before him, trying to ignore its pungent, sickly odour, took no notice of the other people in the restaurant, and, the moment his plate was empty, went up to his room.

As he had no dry clothes left and the prospect of staying indoors all day was more than he could face, he resorted to a simple expedient. Putting on a bathing-costume, he confronted the down-pour in this attire. But, for all his indifference to others' opinion, he did not stay out long. The shrieks of laughter that went up from women standing in their doorways when he went by were too much for him.

What was he to do ? Between him and any form of action, indeed between him and his future, was this wall of tumbling water, and not till it subsided could he hope to escape from the hotel. But every hour of waiting drained away, little by little, his enthusiasm, and dulled that first fine zest.

He would have liked to close his eyes and plug his ears; to have such privacy as could be got in this jerry-built hotel, where none of the doors closed properly and the windows were no more than mosquito-nets in metal. He would lie for hours on the rickety bed, gazing at the flaking whitewashed walls which, when he took possession of the room, had been adorned with pin-ups of a more or less pornographic order. Across the thin partition he could hear a bed creak as Hina rose, and then the sound of bare feet padding on the wooden floor. And he could hear distinctly when she went to the bathroom at the end of the passage, where an old tin tub beneath a shower-bath rubbed shoulders with a cracked water-closet and some empty packing-cases.

"Are you up, Tamatea ?" she would call.

Maniere, who was still suffering from fever, stayed in bed all the morning. The boy came up for orders and, though he tried not to listen, Donadieu heard everything they said.

He could also hear what was said below.

One evening someone asked, obviously referring to himself:

"Who's that new guy you've got here ?"

And Maniere had grunted briefly:

"A mug!"

Nicou had left for the peninsula, with his family. Batisti, like many others, dropped in at all hours for drinks, or to fix something up.

"Listen, Maniere old boy. Know of anyone who's going to Morea today ?"

"Yes, the Duclou kid's going there this afternoon."

"Good. Will you ask him to take a message for me ?"

They went to the bar. Everyone helped himself, and it was a mystery to Donadieu how the accounts were ever made up, for he never saw money change hands.

"Is Hina about ?"

"Yes, I think she's up."

"Tell her that the Yanks are on the warpath today. If she feels like going down-town with two or three of the other girls, they'll have a good time."

Like the women, the men smelt of sweat and garlic. And the Chinese boy added a peculiar musty odour of his own; everything one touched smelt of Chinaman. Batisti shook Donadieu's hand with a warmth that was meant, no doubt, to reassure him.

"We shan't have much more of this blasted rain, you'll see."

Half a dozen French civil servants had their meals at the *Relais*, but Donadieu still felt as little at home here as at the start. He had learnt that the very thin man, who was always having whispered conversations with Maniere, was a high official at the Secretariat. Donadieu was watching him when a low voice, almost in his ear, made him start.

"Well, young fellow-me-lad ?"

He was feeling rather squeamish after the *ailloli*, and in no mood for talking. Looking round, he saw a very fat man holding out his hand. He was wearing a straw hat, a soiled tussore suit and elastic-sided boots. With a wheezy grunt he lowered his bulk on to the chair facing Donadieu's.

"Getting to know your way about this charming country ?"

He seemed incredibly old, and was actually in his eighties. For sixty years he had lived in these parts, and he prided himself on never once having set foot in Europe during that period.

"Feeling a bit low ? What ?"

Everyone called him "Daddy Lou"—why, Donadieu had no idea, but he assumed his first name to be Louis. He knew everyone, not only in Tahiti, but in all the islands of the archipelago. Now and again he would chuck Tamatea or one of the other girls under the chin. "I wager you don't remember your granny. But I knew her well when she was living with a gendarme who thrashed her every night."

He never laughed. But when something pleased him, the big moon-face began to quake, the blubber lips pouted in a mindless ecstasy. With shaky fingers he lit a cigarette.

"Yes, young fellow, I wouldn't mind betting you're feeling sorry

for yourself. That's because you've struck a bad patch, at the end of the rains. But just wait a bit! When the sun comes out, you'll be baa-ing with enthusiasm, like all the rest of 'em, about the be-ew-ty of it all—this earthly paradise, *et cetera*. Paradise, my eye! After a few months you'll be singing a different tune."

He had a habit of winking, as if tickled by his own remarks. Donadieu's one desire was to escape, but he didn't dare to show discourtesy to a man so vastly older than himself. Though convinced that Daddy Lou was deliberately inflicting himself, choosing the words best calculated to shatter a young man's illusions, he listened meekly.

"I've been all over the shop, in the Marquesas, at Tuamotu and Rapu, and there's precious little I don't know about the islands. Well, this"—he made a sweeping gesture that included the untidy restaurant, the tables, the people eating and drinking at them—"this is the Pacific, the real tiling.

"You'll find out what I mean in a month or two. All the rest—atolls, beaches fringed with coconuts, blue lagoons—is picture-postcard stuff, just poppycock. Gosh, I could tell you stories that'd make your flesh creep! I remember a young fellow—uncommonly like you he was—who blew in thirty years ago. Came of a good family, by all accounts, and his people sent him a remittance every month. He settled down with a native girl at the far end of the peninsula, and everything in the garden was lovely—for the first six months. Then he got fed up with hogging it, and came and lived here, not at this hotel—it wasn't built then—but at another one farther down the road. For twelve years he never left the place, not even for a walk along the Front. And he'd have been living here now, I'm pretty sure, if one fine day it hadn't come out that he'd become a leper. He must have caught it in that hut. He's still in the leper-hospital at the other side of the island, and by all accounts he's fairly happy there."

Why had the old chap launched into this rigmarole? Donadieu felt sure there was some design behind it.

"There was another fellow," Daddy Lou went on, "Billaud his name was. He must have been quite fifty when he landed on the island. The first thing he did was—to buy a horse! Said he must

have riding-exercise. He did a fifteen-mile ride every morning. He bought a whole lot of fishing-tackle, too, and was always out in a canoe on the lagoon. Then one day he got in tow with a kid called Angele—I knew her mother years ago in the Tuamotus—and now he never leaves his bungalow except on mail-days, twice a month that is, to get his letters at the post-office. They carved up the horse and ate it, as he couldn't find a buyer."

Daddy Lou was chuckling to himself, smacking his chops, winking between each phrase. Donadieu couldn't keep his eyes off the gnarled, glossy hands, which shook so much that the old man could hardly get his cigarette between his lips.

"So, if you haven't a balance at the bank, or someone at home to send you money, my advice is this: Go back by the next boat."

Donadieu's suspicion that this move had been part of a pre-arranged plan was confirmed when he saw Daddy Lou whispering in Maniere's ear, and heard the hotel-keeper's guffaw. And they were not the only ones. Much of what was said at the other tables during meals was obviously aimed at him. That long tirade, for instance, into which the very thin official—who, Donadieu gathered, was Chief Secretary to the Government—thought fit to launch, for no apparent reason.

"They're a damned nuisance, these banana tourists, and I'd like to have the lot of them repatriated. For one thing, they do no end of harm to the white man's prestige out here. And, after three months or so on a diet of bananas and fish from the lagoons, they creep back, more dead than alive, and beg to be admitted to hospital. And who foots the bill? The ratepayer, of course."

Donadieu stiffened up. All his life there had been something for him to fight down: his physical weakness, as a child; his fear of heights, when he was working on the dam; and, more recently, his disgust when he had found himself involved, much against his will, in the family catastrophe. It was nothing new for him, this sense that he must struggle to keep his end up.

But why was there never anyone to talk to him in his own language, and to understand at least, even if he could not share, his aspirations?

It was true enough that he had no money in the bank, nor the

slightest prospect of having any sent him. All the same, he wasn't the simpleton they took him for; he had no expectation of being able to live stark naked in a new Eden, where he had only to stoop to pick up all the food he needed.

All he desired was to escape from the herd, to lead a simple but laborious life, digging the soil, and learning to spear fish, as the natives did, in the lagoon. He had five thousand francs left. It might be a good idea to buy a small plot of land to begin with.

"Tell me, please," he timidly enquired of Daddy Lou, "is there any land for sale here?"

"Yes. You can get it as low as five francs the square yard—but it's not worth buying. All the best land—along the lagoon—is in the hands of English and American residents. Would you believe it, some of them paid half a million francs and more for their houses."

In the three days Donadieu hadn't spoken more than a couple of times to the two girls who lived at the hotel; and then only to murmur shyly when he passed them on the stairs or in the restaurant:

Excuse me.

They were amused by him, and sometimes giggled when they caught his eye. Now and then a car would come to take them to some "do"—as Maniere called it.

A "do" took place that evening at the *Relais*. There were no premonitory signs. Muselli dropped in for a short drink, accompanied by Cande, the Chief Secretary, and a young lawyer whom everyone called "Joe." Muselli caught sight of Donadieu sitting in his usual corner and went up to him.

"Still here? I thought you were moving on to the Marquesas."

And he left it at that, taking no more notice of the young man. Hina and Tamatea were hovering in the offing, and a near-white girl was with them. After some rounds of drinks Muselli's eyes began to sparkle, and when Joe suggested, "How about feeding here, the lot of us?" he agreed at once, and hurried to the 'phone to warn his wife.

"I've lobsters today," Maniere announced, "and I'll cook them *a l'Americaine*

But Donadieu didn't share in the lobsters. He was served the

ordinary meal while, garlanded with flowers, the men and women sat round the big table and a trio of guitar-players thrummed away in a corner.

No sooner was dinner over than Donadieu went up to his bedroom. His nerves were on edge, he was disgusted with everything and everyone, and at three in the morning he was still tossing about on his uncomfortable bed. All the noises from the restaurant below, the tinkle of Hawaiian guitars, songs, shouts of laughter, the sound of furniture being shifted to make room for dancing, reached his ears. To crown all, he heard Muselli being helped up to Hina's room, where for nearly two hours he went on retching and vomiting.

Perhaps, had there been a boat leaving on the following day, Donadieu might have been lured into embarking. But there would be none for a fortnight. The *Ile-de-Re* had still to visit the New Hebrides and Noumea before turning back on the homeward voyage.

As he was trying to picture Lagre in his cell, at last he fell asleep. He woke with a start, jumped out of bed and, running to the window, was greeted by a blaze of sunlight. His lips quivered, his pupils dilated; he felt like weeping for sheer joy.

It was unbelievable, the scene before him. What held his eyes bewildered was no single detail. It was a world, a new world that he was seeing for the first time; lovelier than any he had pictured in his wildest dreams, all in blues and pinks, in vivid green and gold, and other colours for which no name exists, like those one sees in certain kinds of mother-o'-pearl.

Huge flamboyants in the foreground framed the prospect in dark, lustrous green, and the road was bright red, the red of brick-dust. A little native girl in a white dress with blue spots was riding past on a bicycle, two schooners had hoisted all their sails to dry them in the sun.

Besides the colours there were the sounds; the voices, at once gay and languorous, of another world. With baskets of fruit on their heads a string of brown half-naked youths were swinging in Indian file along a bouncing plank that served as gangway on to one of the schooners. A group of Europeans showed up more clearly

because of their white clothes and sun-helmets. At the end of **the** quay was an open-air market, with women squatting on the ground beside their many-coloured wares.

Donadieu hurried through his shaving, cutting his chin in the process. After bundling all his possessions into his knapsack and suitcase, he ran down the wooden stairs.

The restaurant was empty. No attempt had been made to tidy up; a sandal and a tussore coat sprawled on the floor, and the air was heavy with the cloying fragrance of tiare flowers strewn on tables or trampled underfoot.

"Anyone about?" His voice was shrill with impatience.

He had a horrid fear that something unforeseen might hinder his going; there was no time to lose.

"Anyone about?" he shouted again.

The level rays were streaming in between the slats of the shutters, dappling the room with light and shade. He opened the kitchen door, found the Chinaman snoring on a mattress, and clattered a saucepan to awake him. Slowly the slotted eyes opened and fixed themselves dully on this white man in a hurry.

"Go and call Monsieur Maniere. I want my bill."

It was a slow process. The boy was reluctant to make a move. At last he stretched, yawned, scratched his head and mumbled:

"No use going to master. He not come."

"Tell him I'm leaving at once, and I want to settle up."

He had raised his voice. Someone rapped on the floor above to remind him that people were sleeping in the rooms overhead.

The Chinaman scratched at a door, murmured something, then came down again and opened a shutter.

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

"Will he be coming?"

"Dunno."

Donadieu was fretting at the thought of these empty minutes, all he was missing while he waited. It was as if he feared the marvellous scene which he had glimpsed would last only a moment, and fade **out** suddenly, **leaving no trace behind.**

"**Go and tell him that...**"

"I've told him."

"Are you sure he heard?"

The boy merely shrugged his shoulders, and poured himself out a glass of water.

Evidently Maniere had heard, for there now were sounds on the floor above. A door opened. Maniere's eyes were even more swollen than usual, and his voice rasped in his throat.

"Well? What do you want?"

The light made him blink.

"Blast you, Li! What d'you want to open the shutters for?"

"I'm leaving," Donadieu said promptly. "May I have my bill, please?"

He didn't expect a word more than was necessary, from Maniere; yet it was rather like the landing from the ship, which somehow had chagrined him. With an air of complete indifference, without putting any question, the man walked to the bar-counter, hunted for his key, couldn't find it, knocked a tumbler over and kicked aside the broken glass, then grabbed the key, which the Chinese boy had discovered *in* a corner.

"Three days at twenty-two francs. You didn't have any wine or short drinks, eh?"

"No, I drank only water."

"How many coffees, Li?"

Six, sir.

"Let's say seventy francs in all." Maniere was in a hurry to get back to bed.

Donadieu produced a thousand-franc note.

"Haven't you anything smaller? Li!"

The Chinaman had started unbolting the door the moment he saw the banknote. He stepped outside into the golden haze.

The two Europeans were now alone together, but Maniere didn't trouble to speak, or even to look in Donadieu's direction. Empty bottles, mostly champagne bottles, stood on the tables, and he seemed to be counting them up.

And, inexplicably, Donadieu had once more a sudden panic—lest something should detain him here at the last moment. He walked quickly to the door, gazed out, and had to keep his eyes

half shut, so blinding was the glare. Then he saw Li coming out of a European shop, a wad of banknotes in his hand.

He gave him a ten-franc tip and, turning to Maniere, forced himself to say:

Au revoir."

"... *revoir*" the man grunted surlily over his shoulder; he was already half-way up the stairs.

And now it was Donadieu's turn to plunge into the dazzling effulgence.

He had no wish to linger in the town, and resolutely turned his back on it. From somewhere on his right came the cheerful hubbub of a market-place, and wafts of pungent, tantalizing smells; but he walked straight ahead along the Front, his haversack on his back, suitcase in hand, taking long strides, like the boy scouts one sees on Saturdays going to a week-end camp.

"So you're leaving us?"

He gave a start—Daddy Lou's voice always had that effect on him—and saw the old man holding a white umbrella with one hand and a shopping-bag bulging with fruit and vegetables in the other.

"I've been doing my marketing, as you see. I do my own cooking too. By the way, I don't suppose you got much sleep last night. Is it a fact that Muselli was sick as a dog and they put him to bed in Hina's room?" He smiled; or, rather, his fat lips twisted in an odious leer. "If you're taking the 'bus," he added, "you should go to the Square. . . . It'll be leaving in half an hour."

"Thanks, but I shan't take it."

"Footslogging *it*, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, that way you won't get so far, and you'll be back all the quicker. Anyhow—good hunting!"

A flag-staff pointed from the British Consulate; then came the Protestant Church, then the Colonial Club. After walking another hundred yards Donadieu reached a spacious square backed by a big white building, which he guessed to be Government House. Bare-footed prisoners were cleaning the avenues and paths, and once again he caught himself thinking of Lagre. Angrily he brushed the thought away. "What's that got to do with me?"

After crossing a bridge, he passed some private houses, almost of the suburban villa type, except that they were built of wood.

He started singing to himself, as he used to do at Big Hole City on his way to work, but soon he forgot his song in the interest of his new surroundings. An ancient lorry clattered by; this was evidently the 'bus he had been told of, and it was packed with natives sitting on wooden benches, on their way to the peninsula. The driver slowed down, expecting him to board it; then put on speed again, and the lorry disappeared into the distance.

Ten minutes later Donadieu halted for the first time. At this point the road began to go downhill. On the right was a cottage with the usual red-painted corrugated-iron roof and a verandah in front.

A high-wheeled vehicle of the dog-cart type had pulled up outside this house. On the driver's seat, under a big umbrella, a Chinaman was perched, and a woman, who had come out of the house, was rummaging in the foodstuffs in the body of the cart and making purchases. Three grave-eyed children squatted on the doorstep of the house, watching their mother.

After a short rest Donadieu started off again; the weight of his heavy knapsack was already beginning to gall his shoulders, and he put his thumbs under the straps to ease it. For a moment the woman stopped her activities to gaze after him, and the children, whose big, dark eyes reminded him of Tamatea's, followed suit. What did these people make of him? he wondered. Did they, like Maniere, take him for "a mug"? Or, like Daddy Lou, believe that he would soon have had enough of the simple life, return to civilization, and perhaps end up in hospital?

Looking back, he saw the little group still watching, and their immobility brought to his mind some picture he had seen, or something he had dreamt.

"Yet there isn't anything so extraordinary about what I'm doing," he murmured. But all his life people had been like that, staring at him as if he were a freak of nature. When he was twelve his parents used to frown when they saw him poring over books from morn till night; they had never understood that this was his way of escaping from the dull, thought-benumbing environment of his

home. Then, when he was fifteen, he had run away. Was it, as the family doctor supposed, because he had a mental kink, a propensity for such escapades ?

"No," he assured himself, "it wasn't that. And now, too, I'm not just running away. I know what I'm after, and where I want to go."

Really, it was truer to say that those others were the "escapists," immuring themselves as they did in a narrow, humdrum life. Like those men for whom Tahiti meant no more than the *Relais des Miridiens*.

The road was fringed by trees and vividly green meadows. A village came into view, with a schoolhouse in the middle of a field. The windows stood open, and all the children turned their heads to watch the lonely wayfarer going by.

The lagoon lay on his right, at some distance from the road, with a broad belt intervening of closed gardens, ploughed fields and pastures dotted with grazing cattle.

At noon he was still walking, at as steady a pace as he could command, and he did not halt until he came on a group of native roadmenders at work.

"Would you mind telling me the name of this village ?"

"Punaauia."

"Could I get a meal here ?"

"Try the Chinaman, just beyond the church."

The man who addressed him wore white trousers and a white shirt open at the neck. He was tall and strongly built.

Then Donadieu asked something that he hadn't dared to ask till now. He pointed to a group of huts beside the water.

"Can you tell me if there's one of those huts to let ?"

He said "to let" out of a certain sense of shame; it sounded better.

"For a longish time ?"

"Most likely."

"Come along."

Turning to his companions, the man said something in the native language. Then he picked up a bicycle lying on the roadside and pushed it by the handle-bars, talking to Donadieu as they advanced.

"I'm the village headman. You're French, ain't you? I been to France. Served there in the war. I'm a poilu." Really, he was no more different from a European than, for instance, a Greek is from a Dutchman. He pointed to a small, trim bungalow with a little garden in front. On the verandah a girl was working a sewing-machine beside which was a gramophone with an old-fashioned horn.

"That's my place," he announced proudly. "But you must be thirsty after all that walking. What'll you have? A glass of beer? Some punch?"

"Thanks; if you don't mind, I'd like a glass of water."

"Come in, sir. . . . Lelia, bring us some iced water. You came in the *Ile-de-Re*, didn't you? Then maybe you saw Captain Lagre, poor gentleman?"

Donadieu didn't dare to ask him why he felt sympathy with the murderer. He drank the iced water greedily, and the headman filled his glass again.

"Now, if you'll come with me, sir, I think I have just what you require."

They crossed the road and entered another small garden. The headman opened the door of a pleasant little cottage, then stood aside for Donadieu to enter.

"It's not looking its best just now. We haven't had time to clean up after the rains."

There was an electric bulb hanging from the ceiling. Donadieu saw two beds, a washstand, a table with a chintz table-cloth, a wicker armchair.

"You can have both rooms, or one only, as you prefer. For one room I charge two hundred francs a month. There's a fine view over the lagoon, and if you like fishing I can lend you my canoe."

Somehow Donadieu conjured up a smile.

"Yes, it's very nice," he murmured weakly.

"You should be able to get a char in the village. There'll be no trouble about your bread. The 'bus will drop it with your letters at the gate."

"Well—er—it's not quite what I'm looking for."

"Oh? What exactly did you want?"

"Really, what I'm after is a hut, something quite small and simple, you understand. Near the sea, if possible."

"There ain't nothing of that sort here." The man's voice had lost its affability. "And even if you found one, you wouldn't be able to live in it—because of the bugs, for one thing."

"Thank you, I'll think it over."

He was so cast down by the interview that he walked past the Chinaman's store without stopping, though an array of tinned provisions on the shelves—sardines, tunny-fish, tomatoes and the like—had caught his eye.

He hated Daddy Lou as he had never hated anyone in all his life. He hated Tamatea and even Hina, though she had done no more than give him an occasional, rather friendly smile.

After walking half a mile, however, he felt so hungry that he turned back and visited the Chinaman's shop. Without looking at the man, he bought a tin of sardines and some bread.

"We've some excellent wine, sir. Only eight francs a bottle."

"No, thanks."

A little farther on, he saw a track leading to the lagoon, and turned down it. Lying on the tawny sand, he gave himself up to his thoughts, completely forgetting the food he had brought. Perhaps at this moment his most poignant feeling was one of shame. Not that he was the least ashamed of himself in the ordinary sense; but he was acutely conscious of the impression he seemed fated to make on others. That Tahitian headman, for example, who wore European clothes and had served in the war, had written him down a "banana tourist," incapable of paying even two hundred francs a month.

He gave a start. A dog that seemed to have appeared from nowhere was nosing round his feet; an ugly brute, its hairless skin blotched pink and brown. Looking round, he saw an equally naked small boy squatting near by, with a strip of dried fish in his hand. On his right, a hundred yards along the beach, he noticed a hut of the exact kind he wanted, a typical native hut on piles at the water's edge. Near it a man was tinkering with a canoe.

Donadieu sighed, took out his pocket-knife and conscientiously prised open the sardine-tin. The child sidled up and watched him, while the dog hovered round, presumably in hope of scraps.

How absurd of that man to suppose that it was the two hundred francs that had deterred him! He wasn't afraid of work and could easily earn that, indeed a comfortable living, by manual labour. Would no one ever understand that what he was out for was something quite different, a self-sufficient life of loyalty to an ideal? If he was to work, he would work on his own lines. Build his own house, if necessary, with his own hands, and to his liking.

The truth was that he stood in need of no one, neither of Daddy Lou with his leers and innuendoes, nor of Maniere and his customers, who spent their days plotting in undertones heaven knew what shady schemes—in the intervals of swilling cocktails and pawing Hina and Tamatea.

The sight of the sardines recalled the family picnics of his childhood on the Atlantic coast. The bread was stale. The dog had wriggled its way still nearer.

He could hear the tinkle of streams in the undergrowth behind him. The heat was steadily rising, and, after the months of rain, the air was damp and steamy.

"Like something to eat?" he said to the small boy.

No answer. Perhaps the child was intimidated by the big young stranger, or perhaps he understood only the native dialect. But his eyes followed all Donadieu's movements with eager interest.

"Here you are."

Donadieu had put a sardine on a slice of bread and held it out. But just then a woman, wearing only a pareu, her hair hanging down her shoulders, came up, scowling, whisked up the child into her arms and walked away, followed by the dog.

The sun was high, the lagoon a sheet of silvery light, so dazzling one could not face it. A cock crowed, a church bell chimed. There was the purr of a car on the road behind; the hoot of a horn.

Slowly Donadieu stretched his bulk flat on the sand, propping his head on the suitcase, waved his hand once or twice to drive the flies away, and shut his eyes.

But though the lids were tightly closed, a limpid drop stole from the corner of one eye and trickled down his cheek and neck, making a dark smudge on the khaki shirt.

IV

A SCREECH of brakes, followed by the bang of a door that seemed to be shaking itself to pieces, heralded as usual the arrival of Raphael, the Public Works Overseer, in his ancient car. Instinctively Maniere glanced at the clock, then went on reading a tattered French novel he had picked up at the Chinaman's. It was an odd volume, one of three—but he hadn't discovered this as yet. With Hina's help Tamatea was cutting out a dress. The Chinese boy was dozing in the kitchen. No one else was at the *Relais des Meridiem*.

There were days like that. Still, it was the hour when people usually dropped in for short drinks before dinner. On the previous day the restaurant had been packed, and there hadn't been enough ham patties to go round. Probably some social gathering was taking place at Government House or the Colonial Club. Moreover, on the previous evening a wealthy Englishman—whom everybody called "the Lord"—had come in from his estate at Taravao for one of his periodical "razzles," and taken six or seven taxi-loads of people to the *Lafayette*, a dance-hall six miles out of town. On such occasions they usually kept it up till six in the morning, and spent the best part of next day sleeping it off.

Raphael bustled in with an armful of tiny lobsters on spits and dropped them into Li's basket. He always brought back foodstuff from his excursions into the remoter parts of the island, and he also carried messages.

He was promptly buttonholed by Tamatea.

"Well? Did you deliver it?"

"Couldn't find him," he replied and, going behind the bar, poured himself out a drink.

Raphael was a cheerful, pink-cheeked, blue-eyed youngster, always ready for a bit of fun with the girls. Just now his clothes were covered with dust, and he was perspiring freely.

When he was half-way through his vermouth, Daddy Lou ambled in, soundlessly as usual, and lowered himself cautiously on to his favourite chair, after flapping his hands at the company by way of greeting.

Tamatea went to the bar and tackled Raphael again.

"Didn't anyone tell you where he is?"

The old man guessed at once what the conversation was about, as Tamatea had broached the subject with him on the previous evening.

"I've told you where he is," he said to her.

"Oh, I know you, Daddy Lou. You're never happy unless you have some disagreeable news to give."

The old man smirked. • Raphael was smoothing his hair in front of the mirror behind the bar. Maniere closed his book with a sigh and went to the kitchen to see if dinner was ready. He rarely took part in conversations, but now and again, though he hadn't seemed to be listening, would put in a curt remark that closed the subject.

"They all go the same way," Daddy Lou continued. "When he saw the Orofere Valley he just couldn't resist it. That's where he is."

It was Donadieu they were talking about.

"How long's it since he left?" Hina mumbled; she had half a dozen pins between her teeth.

"Five days. No, six, counting today."

On the previous afternoon Raphael had mentioned that he was going to make an inspection tour of the peninsula, where some bridges had been washed away. And, incidentally, Donadieu's name had cropped up.

"I expect you'll see that French boy who was here, the one who's so shy," Tamatea remarked.

They fell to talking of other banana tourists who had gone that way, and Daddy Lou had told the story of a German of whom all trace had been lost and whose skeleton had been found a year later in a gully. He had a fund of stories of this kind.

"Anyhow, he changed a thousand-franc note to pay his bill," Maniere put in.

"That doesn't mean anything," Tamatea retorted.

That evening there was roast chicken for dinner, and, exceptionally, Tamatea was in funds.

"Listen, Maniere! I'll buy a whole chicken. And Raphael can give it to him when he goes by."

Now Raphael was explaining the failure of his mission.

"The **Punaauia headman saw him the day he started out.** In fact,

he tried to rent a room to him. Then he was seen going through Aua with his suitcase and his knapsack on his back. And, after that, not a trace!"

There were picturesque little villages dotted at short intervals along the road, each with its small red-spired church or protestant chapel, a school with big windows always open and rows of Kanaka urchins gazing out instead of attending to their lessons, and, to finish up, the inevitable Chinaman's store.

In all these villages Raphael was a familiar figure, better known than any of the high officials, and it was rumoured that in each he had at least one girl friend. So the fact that he could get no news of Donadieu along the road meant that, as Daddy Lou had foreseen, he had turned off it, lured by the prospect of the Valley.

"What did you do with the chicken?"

"Oh, I gave it to the padre at Punaauia."

"So you say! But I shouldn't wonder if you gave it to one of your girls."

More interested in the chicken's fate, they soon forgot all about Donadieu.

"Is it a fact," Raphael asked Hina, "that 'the Lord' got through six thousand francs' worth of whisky and champagne last night?"

"More than that, I should say."

When they were, so to speak, *enfamille*, they ate at one table, with the exception of Daddy Lou, who had all his meals at home. Absent-mindedly Maniere handed round the soup-plates. Through the slats of the Venetians one had glimpses of a landscape all in sombre greys and greens, for the last fires of the sunset had died down.

"I had to put forty men on to repairing the third bridge," Raphael informed them between two mouthfuls of soup. "Both abutments had gone. . . . Oh, by the way, Tagara's had another baby. I got there just in time to give a hand."

The Orofere Valley begins a little after the village of Aua. The road runs all round the island, a little inshore from the lagoon, and there is only a narrow strip of inhabited land, the level ground between the road and the sea. On the other side of the road the hills rise steeply, covered with dense tropical vegetation.

At some points along the road one comes on the beginning of a valley, but, with the exception of the Orofere, none penetrates far inland.

Daddy Lou, who knew every inch of the island, had seen hundreds and hundreds of banana tourists start off along the road. After discovering that it was bordered by villages, strung out at short intervals, inevitably they were tempted to explore the broad gap opening on the left, where not one red roof showed amongst the verdure. Here at last, it seemed, was the new Eden they had come to find. After forcing one's way through the tropical luxuriance for a mile or two, one came on clumps of bananas and coconut-palms, and, here and there, a deserted hut. For in earlier times, when the population of the island was larger, there had been a village on the mountain-side.

Once it was known that Donadieu had left the road somewhere after Aua, it was a foregone conclusion where he had hidden himself. Perhaps he would meet the Hungarian who had plunged into these green depths six months before, and had since then emerged once only—when he had a letter for the 'bus to take. Indeed, there might still be five or six of them lingering on in the backwoods; sometimes, usually on mail days, one would see a ragged stranger, doubtless one of these hermits of the wild, coming to the post-office for a letter or a parcel, and bolting like a hare the moment it was handed him.

At the *Relaisdes Meridiens* they went on talking of people Raphael had met, and of Muselli, who had just been appointed Resident of the Marquesas but seemed in no hurry to make a move; he still hoped to be given a post at headquarters.

Li handed round cups of coffee. A car stopped outside; the engine was so silent that everyone knew it was Joe Beaudoin's new car.

A moment later he entered the restaurant; he was wearing a stiff collar, black tie, patent-leather shoes.

Hina stared at him in wonder.

"Gosh! You *are* dolled up. Where have you been?"

"At Government House, my pet." He mopped his forehead, then shook hands with everyone. "There was a big tea-fight on, and I thought I'd better show up."

He was about the same age as Raphael, in the early thirties, almost as plump, and had the same cheery smile for everyone. But, in his case, one had an impression that the geniality was forced.

"I'm all in," he sighed. "I didn't get more than an hour's sleep last night."

"Oh? You were at the do at the *Lafayette*?"

"Yes. Some of the lads picked me up on the way. ... Li, bring me a lemon squash. No! Wait! Give me a whisky."

"Have you seen him, Joe?" Tamatea asked.

At the *Relais* they all called each other by their first names.

"That reminds me. I want to have a little talk with you, in private." He turned to the others. "You'll excuse us, won't you?"

Joe Beaudoin was a lawyer. As Captain Lagre refused to engage counsel, Beaudoin had been instructed by the Court to appear for him.

"Shall we go up to my room?" Tamatea asked, quite naturally.

Joe had slept with her dozens of times; so had Raphael. And the same was true of Hina. Neither of the girls attached the least importance to it; they were all good friends, and it was share and share alike.

"Your room? No fear! It stinks." Joe didn't mean to be offensive; he was merely stating a notorious fact. "We'll just go to that corner. Hurry up with the whisky, Li."

One could see he'd drunk too much the night before, failed to sleep it off, and had a head. The others, at the big table, made no attempt to listen and went on talking amongst themselves.

"What did he tell you?" Tamatea asked. "Did he say anything about me?"

"No. When I went to his cell, he was quite polite—just as if I'd been visiting him on his ship. He pointed to the one and only chair and asked me to sit down. But I couldn't get anything out of him."

"But he must have said *something*?"

That was so. Lagre had said something, but by no means what the lawyer anticipated. It had been disagreeable enough, interviewing him in such conditions, in a cubby-hole at the end of a passage, which had previously served as a lumber-room—for no accommodation for white men was provided in the jail. The air

in the room was foul, and the jailer who led the lawyer to his reluctant client was a native in short striped pants, who grinned offensively as he showed him in.

Lagre had let his beard grow. He was a very big man, and in the small, low-roofed cell looked even taller and burlier. Joe observed, above the iron bedstead that had been accorded the prisoner as a special favour, the photograph of a lady with two children at her side, one a boy of sixteen in a school uniform.

"I presume you know that I have been appointed counsel for the defence at your trial?"

"Yes, I know. But you won't have anything to do; there will be no defence,"

Somehow it wasn't like a real prison; true, the windows were barred, but the cell commanded a garden and, beyond it, a strip of sunlit road along which cars were speeding. Lagre's eyes were fixed on this as he continued:

"There won't be any defence—because I have nothing to say. The Court must decide as it thinks fit. I don't know how such cases are dealt with out here. . . ."

"We've no special way of dealing with them. The procedure is the same as in France."

"In that case, I shall be given the sentence that the Judge decides on, and there's nothing to be done about it. Anyhow, I've absolutely nothing to say. The whole business was meaningless, an unfortunate accident."

"An accident? You mean to say you didn't intend to shoot him?"

"There you are! And the others will be just the same, no doubt... Now, if you don't mind, would you leave me to myself? We're only wasting our time, both of us."

He was quite calm. He had procured a supply of cigarettes, and was smoking incessantly.

"I take it that in the course of your . . . your discussion with the deceased—"

"I remember nothing about it. Please don't insist."

"You'd had some drinks, hadn't you?"

"No more than usual. Since the day—I was seventeen at the

time—when I got drunk and saw how cut-up my father was about it, I've always been a very moderate drinker."

"When you fired the revolver, were you fully conscious of what you were doing?"

"No. Yes. Have it your own way."

"The examining magistrate will send for us in half an hour's time, and I sincerely hope that meanwhile ..."

But there was nothing to be got out of him.

The magistrate's office was on the first floor of the Papeete Courthouse, a big building the lower portion of which served as barracks for a native regiment. A large, well-kept park surrounded it. An iron staircase clamped to the outer wall led up to a verandah, also of iron, from which one had access to the various courts and offices, the doors of which stood open.

The sun was directly overhead, a blinding, staggering sun, and native soldiers could be seen lying on their backs in the shadow of the trees. Inside the building, however, it was relatively cool. In one of the offices a typewriter was clicking languidly, with long pauses, and occasionally a telephone-bell shrilled.

A taxi conveyed Captain Lagre and his lawyer to the Courthouse. The magistrate had just changed his shirt for the second time that day; though not fat, he sweated profusely. Despite the fact that his duties were only of a preparatory nature, he was feeling far from happy. He was only twenty-nine, and this was his first experience of dealing with a white man charged with a serious offence. At the Colonial Club, where he had been lunching with Justice Isnard, he had drunk three whiskies in quick succession to brace himself for the ordeal.

"Come in." He rapped the table with a paper-knife. "Maitre Beaudoin, would you take that chair." He had nearly made a slip and addressed the lawyer as "Joe," as usual.

The air was heavy with the languor of siesta. At that hour not more than five hundred people were awake in Papeete; all the shops were closed.

"Now then, Lagre! Shall I read out the written statement made by you, as captain of the *Ile-d'Oleron*?"

"No, don't trouble," Beaudoin put in quickly. He had not yet

changed into the clothes he was to wear at the Government House party, and he had his elbows on the desk.

The magistrate lit a cigarette, realized that he was the only one smoking, and rather awkwardly held out his case to Lagre and Joe.

"I take it you admit the actual fact—that you fired a revolver at your third officer, Henri Clerc, with the intention of killing him?"

"Yes. I believe I fired."

"You 'believe' you fired? Am I to understand you are not certain whether you did so?"

What made it more embarrassing was that the captain persisted in looking, not in front of him—at the magistrate, that is to say—but outside, towards the sunlit trees whose foliage shivered now and then in a sudden heat-eddy.

Still, he could hardly be thinking of escape; that was ruled out, for two native sentries guarded the open door. A big mason-bee kept circling round their heads with the monotonous drone of an electric fan.

"I think we had better begin at the beginning. Is it a fact that the girl Tamatea was your mistress?"

"Yes," Lagre admitted. "That's so."

But one had the impression that his thoughts were elsewhere and he hardly heard the questions put to him. Puzzled by this attitude, the magistrate kept making little signs to Joe, to invoke his aid.

"Your third officer, if my information is correct, was also having an affair with this girl. . . . Did you hear what I said? I must really ask you to pay some attention."

"Sorry!" Lagre let his eyes rest for a moment on the magistrate.

"Let me repeat it. Your third officer . . ."

"Do you think all this serves any useful purpose? Surely you must understand that it gives me no pleasure to be in this position. And that I didn't kill poor young Riri for my pleasure. It was an accident, or a fatality, if you prefer the word. I'm a married man with a family. My elder boy is taking his matric this year and I shan't be there. I'm fifty-seven, and at that age it's too late in life to think of making a fresh start."

The lawyer and the magistrate could make nothing of all this. Was Lagre completely callous, or did he not realize the gravity of

his position ? But, of course, neither of them had killed a man; neither could know. . . . And they gazed perplexedly at this man who had spoken in a quiet, rather weary voice, and seemed bored by the whole proceedings.

"Come now !" the magistrate said with some asperity. "We're not concerned with your son, or your prospects of making a fresh start. We're concerned with the death of a young man of twenty-five, who had all his life before him, and whom you killed, though he was not threatening you in any way. Or do you claim that you were acting in self-defence ?"

"No."

"What was he doing, then ?"

"I don't follow."

"What was he doing at the moment when you fired ?"

"Laughing."

Joe very nearly laughed at that himself, and the magistrate had to repress a smile; not that there was anything comic about the answer, but that it was so unexpected. Also there was the tone in which it had been uttered, a tone of simple gravity, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"I'd asked him," the captain added, "to stop laughing."

"Wait a bit! There's something else I'd like to know. At the time, were you discussing any matter connected with his duties ?"

No.

"In other words, Clerc wasn't in your cabin in his capacity of third officer on your ship ?"

"Well, no. I couldn't say that."

"Right! You were talking about women, eh ?"

"We were talking about Tamatea."

The heat was rising. Twice the magistrate tried, without success, to kill the bee when it settled on the papers in front of him. The captain reached towards the cigarette-case.

"No objection?"

And it was Joe who handed him a lighted match.

"Thanks. I must ask you to excuse me, gentlemen, if I don't answer your questions as you would wish. But, even if I did, it would be mere waste of breath."

"Really, Captain!" The magistrate was beginning to lose his temper.

"The same thing might happen to anybody, I assure you. An accident, that's what it was."

"You've told us that already. But perhaps I might point out that the Penal Code has another name for such 'accidents.' It calls them crimes."

"I can't help that. . . . Now there's one thing I'd like to ask you. Has the telegram I made out for my wife been sent?"

"In winch you ask her to come at once, and promise to explain everything? Yes, it's been despatched."

"Then I've nothing more to say."

"In that case I must ask your counsel to take note, as I have done, of your . . . your callousness; there's no other word for it. And I may also remind you that you haven't uttered one word of regret or shown any compassion for your unhappy victim."

Lagre raised his head a little, and said in a low tone:

"And how about me? Don't you realize that I'm unhappy too?" He seemed to be holding himself in with an effort. "Do you imagine it isn't heart-breaking at my age, when one's spent the best part of a lifetime building up a home, and looking forward to the day when one can settle down with one's family, suddenly to find oneself placed as I am today?"

"And who's to blame for it except yourself?"

Lagre dropped his eyes. Obviously he'd do better to keep silence; whatever he said would be turned against him. Nevertheless he made a last attempt. Almost timidly he asked:

"Have you never had the experience of—of being drunk?"

"That's no concern of yours. And, let me warn you, if you go on in this strain, I shall have to report your conduct to the Public Prosecutor. I would ask your counsel to take note of the attitude you have thought fit to adopt. In any case, let me remind you you've admitted you were *not* drunk when it happened."

The magistrate had risen from his seat. He was flushed with indignation, and now his one idea was to cut short this pointless interview. **He walked to the door.**

"Guard! Remove the prisoner."

Alone with Joe, he leant back in his chair, mopped his brows, gulped a glass of water, then exclaimed with a wry smile:

"Can you make head or tail of it?"

"No, let me speak first. You'll answer when I've done. And listen carefully, please; try to understand my questions, and take your time. . . . Now then! On the first occasion when he made love to you, how did he strike you?"

At the *Relais des Miridiens* Joe Beaudoin was leaning forward, elbows on the table, and staring into Tamatea's eyes as if he were trying to hypnotize her. Impressed by his manner, the girl did her best to keep their whispered conversation on a level of becoming dignity.

"How did he strike me? Really I couldn't say. Of course, I could see he was mad keen on me."

"You mean—he seemed to be in love with you?"

"He was just like all men are when they want it. We were at the *Lafayette*. There was the crowd there always is when a boat comes in. It was the first time I'd set eyes on this particular captain. What made me notice him was that he was sitting by himself in a corner."

The *Lafayette* had been the inspiration of an enterprising young Parisian who had seen the possibilities for a dance-hall in Tahiti. Its situation was ideal; in a palm-grove on the edge of the lagoon. The place itself was little more than a round, unwallled shelter, a sort of magnified kiosk, decorated with palms and native bric-a-brac, and the music was supplied by a group of Kanakas, taxi-drivers in the daytime, who performed on ukuleles.

As at the *Relais des Meridiens*, there were nights when nobody appeared, and on such occasions the manager and the taxi-drivers joined in a friendly game of cards. On other nights, without warning, the place would suddenly fill up, as had happened the previous evening, when "the Lord" brought his party. Then cars would scour the neighbourhood and collect the prettiest girls, who danced in Tahitian costumes while champagne corks popped merrily.

These girls were not prostitutes. Nor were Tamatea **and Hina; nor Angele, Lola** and Nenette. **Most** of them **lived in small hotels**

up-town, or at the *Relais*, and when, as often happened, they were out of money, they were allowed to stay on just the same.

Sometimes one of them would catch the fancy of a government official, and set up house in a small bungalow, where she would live for months on end in an odour of mild respectability, wearing silk stockings and high-heeled shoes.

At the *Lafayette* they danced and egged the men on to drink, sometimes winding up the night in the bed of a ship's officer or a wealthy tourist. After which they would come back to their hotels, the richer by one or two thousand francs, which everyone promptly helped them to dispose of in a glorious "drunk."

All the same, there were times when, if they didn't feel like it, they would turn down the rosiest offers; whereas they always kept open bed to old friends like Raphael and Joe.

"Did he make a pass at you right away?" the lawyer asked.

"No. He kept looking at Angele, who was with her new boy, that wireless operator, but she wasn't taking any—not from the captain. I saw her stick her tongue out at him. I don't remember how it began. I was dancing with everyone, having drinks out of their glasses, acting the fool, you know. I rather think I went to the captain's table without being asked, and tried to make him dance. But he'd never learnt, he said, and then he asked me to come for a stroll with him instead, along the lagoon. I was that tight I could hardly walk, and he put his arm round my waist. Then he started talking, all in a rush-like. He told me he was dreadfully unhappy because he'd just realized that he'd never enjoyed life a bit, and he'd soon be too old for it anyhow. I think he told me that for donkey's years he'd been skipper of a collier that was always on the same run. It was as dull as driving a tram, he said."

One could see that she was doing her best to set her memories in order, flunking hard.

"Really, what struck me most about him that night was how polite he was. He treated me like a real lady; didn't paw me about or anything like that, as most of'em do. We sat down on the beach. I kissed him first, I think. There were other people lying down, two by two, a little farther on. We could hear the music and see the Chinese lanterns; there wasn't a breath of wind. . . ."

"Did he—er—bring it off?"

"I suppose he did, but I really can't quite remember. I was muzzy-like and, later on, I was sick."

That was one of Tamatea's specialities, being sick whenever there was a "do."

"I think he brought me back here, but I'm pretty sure he didn't come in. Next morning when I got up, the ship had sailed, but the captain had left a present for me, a ring that must have cost him quite two thousand francs."

Raphael, who was getting bored, shouted across the room: "Going to be much longer? Can I come and listen in?"

"Come if you want to. But let her do the talking."

"I know more about it than she does."

"I asked you to keep your mouth shut, didn't I? . . . Now, Tamatea, carry on. And don't drink out of my glass. You shall have a whisky when you've finished."

"There's not much more to tell. Let's see. How many times did the boat come in again? Twice, I think. No, three times. The first time I wanted to find out if he'd forgotten me, and I went on board. He asked me into his cabin. He'd brought me all sorts of fruit, which he'd kept in the frige., and two pink dresses, and some shoes, and a suede bag. He asked me if I'd gone back to the *Lafayette*. . . ."

"And what did you answer?"

"I said 'No.'"

"You little liar!"

"Oh, I only said it to please him. But I told him that the Judge was keeping me just then—that was true enough—and he was jealous as the devil. Then he asked me how much a month I'd need to live on. I told him I didn't want his money, I'd rather go on as I was, and that, if I let the Judge keep me, it was because we'd started it years ago and I didn't want to hurt his feelings."

"What did he say to that? Did he agree to share you with Isnard?"

"At first he looked awfully sad. I couldn't think why he took it to heart like that. Then I told him stories to make him laugh, and he became quite happy again. As he wouldn't go to the

Lafayette that night, we had a joy-ride round the island. He talked a lot of sob-stuff, like in the pictures, and said I was the blessing and the bane of his life! He wanted to rent a house for me miles from Papeete, and he'd come and see me there each time his ship was in. He was all worked up, soft-like—you know what I mean—and he showed me a photo of his son and daughter and said, 'Even *they* don't count *now*!'

"I told him not to talk silly, but he didn't seem to understand... . The ship was supposed to sail at nine, but he kept her back till twelve—just to show there was nothing he wouldn't do for me. All that time I was in his cabin, and the passengers, two hundred of them, were wondering what had happened and why the ship didn't start. I had a good laugh over it with Hina, afterwards."

"Now listen," Joe broke in. "This is important. Didn't he strike you as rather . . . queer?"

"Queer? I should say so. He was a caution!"

"A bit crazy, shall we say?"

During the examination in the magistrate's chambers, it had struck him that the best defence would be to plead that Lagre was not responsible for his actions.

"Crazy, no. . . . But he's different to other men. On his way back he gave me a shark-skin necklace from the New Hebrides, and a Chinese shawl. That was the first time I met that boy Riri; he was a fair scream, always laughing and acting the goat..."

"And what about the last time his ship was in?"

"I was feeling fed up that day. The Judge's wife had turned nasty and made ructions, and I was through with married men. I never did have much use for them, anyhow. It's different with you, Joe; you're divorced. So I wouldn't go to the boat. And I told them here to say I was out. That night I went to the *Lafayette*. Riri was there, with Hina and two other girls." She paused, then added in a louder tone, for the benefit of Hina, who was at the other side of the room: "That's right, Hina, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"As a matter of fact, she was sick as hell because I pinched him off her."

"I didn't want him."

"Oh, that's sour grapes. Anyhow, Riri and I danced quite a lot. He kept laughing all the time. He had no end of funny stories about the captain. Some of 'em I couldn't quite make out, but I remember one thing he told me. It seems they have a—what d'you call it? Wait!—a bonus when they use less coal than usual on a run. But that time, when they left Panama, he gave orders to pile on the coal, and keep at top speed all the way. The chief engineer went in off the deep end, and they had quite a row. It made me laugh, the way he told it. Riri said it was like a donkey braying when I laughed. He told me I should have my middle tooth straightened, the one that sticks out. All of a sudden I saw the captain coming in, and I dragged Riri out as fast as I could, under the palm-trees. But I was pretty sure Lagre had seen us, so I brought Riri along here, and we went up to my room and made a night of it. He didn't wake till he heard the ship's siren going. I don't know what came over me—it was a crazy thing to do—but I gave him the ring. At first he didn't want to take it, but I made him. I was feeling sort of mad with all old men just then—because of the Judge, you know.

"Have it your own way," says Riri, and puts it in his pocket. 'I'll give it to my girl at Marseilles!'

"That's how he was. He talked like that on purpose just to make me think he was laughing at me all the time. I wanted to go with him to the ship. He tried to put me off, but I hung on to his arm. When we were on the wharf, I saw the captain watching us coming, arm-in-arm."

"That's enough!" barked Maniere from his corner. "Can't you quit talking about that bloody fool?"

"So that's why he killed Riri, I suppose. I don't know any more." Tamatea looked a little sad. "And now everybody's saying I'm to blame."

"You should have left that boy to mc," put in Hina, who had come up, "and nothing would have happened."

"Don't talk foolish. I didn't really pinch him off you. He liked me better, that's all."

"So you say!"

"Well, considering what's happened, it looks that way, don't it?"

"That don't mean he liked you better. It only means—"

"Oh, stop it, girls, for God's sake!" bawled Maniere. "We're sick to death of hearing about your dirty little games. You're just a pack of bitches."

Alone in his corner, his hands folded on his paunch, Daddy Lou was smiling happily to himself, like a plump Buddha savouring Nirvana.

"Do you know, my dears," he began, taking advantage of the silence that had followed Maniere's outburst, "how many children of mine there are in the Islands, counting in the Marquesas and Tuamotus?"

Raphael grinned disrespectfully.

"Anyhow, I wouldn't mind betting that the number's gone up since yesterday."

It was one of the old man's foibles, reckoning up the number of children he had had by native women.

"You needn't talk, my lad! Everybody knows why you went on tour yesterday, instead of Monday as usual. You wanted to give Tagara a hand with her baby—and you had your reasons. But you've a long row to hoe before you can say you've had thirty-nine children in the Islands, not counting grandchildren."

"It was thirty-eight yesterday."

"Sure! But this morning I ran across a young fellow selling shells on the wharf, and—would you believe it?—he was the spit of what I was fifty years ago. Well, I asked him where he came from, and I tumbled to it at once. He was born—"

"Of course! We know what's coming."

"Can't you keep quiet, blast you!" growled Maniere, who was absorbed in the second volume of a novel by George Sand, of which he had not read the first. "I'm off to bed. That's the only place where I can have some peace, it seems. If you want drinks, help yourselves."

There was no more talk of Donadieu that evening. The topic had lost interest. Once he had gone to ground in the Valley, six months—or, for that matter, six years—might elapse before anything more was seen of him, unless he was expecting letters and came into town to call for them. Even so, he would very likely escape notice; the recluses of the Valley disliked showing them-

selves, and scurried away like lizards the moment the postal clerk informed them: "No, there's nothing for you this mail."

As for Lagre, he was secluded in the one "private" cell the prison boasted of, while in the adjoining lock-up natives killed time gambling and quarrelling.

Joe rose from his seat and walked to the bar.

"I promised you a whisky, didn't I? Come and have it."

"Me too!" pleaded Hina.

"All right, though you don't deserve it. But listen, girls! If I'm to do anything with a plea of insanity, I'll need something a bit more definite to go on. . . . By the way, Tamatea, do you know where he bought the ring?"

"At Nathan's."

"Oh? Did Nathan tell you anything about it?"

"He said, if I liked, he'd take it back for three hundred francs, and give me another ring into the bargain."

Maniere had already retired to his bedroom. After his night up, Joe didn't feel in the least like going home and, scratching his head, he turned to Raphael.

"The night's young yet. How about moving on to the *Lafayette*? We can pick up Henri and his sister on the way. And I dare say the chemist will come if we rout him out."

So the two men started off together to make another night of it, in Beaudoin's car.

V

MUSELLI, who had been in a noisily loquacious mood all the afternoon, raised his glass to his mouth with a sweeping gesture and drained the last drops of his absinthe. Then, wiping his lips, he rose and, reaching for his panama on the hat-rack, addressed the company in the tone of a man who is summing up and means each word to make its full effect.

"Mark what I say, gentlemen. They thought they could get rid of me by giving me that absurd post of Resident in the Marquesas. Well, I haven't gone **there** yet. **And** it's more than likely that there'll be **others** taking the **boat from** here before **I** do." **Then he**

swung round towards the bar, and added in a quite different tone: "How much do I owe you, Madame Bon?"

"What have you had?"

"Oh, I'm paying for everyone," he announced in a lordly manner.

"Certainly not!" Cande, the Chief Secretary, protested energetically.

"It was my shout," Isnard, the Judge, pointed out.

But he spoke too late. Muselli had already paid, and, when he had left, an unwonted silence fell on the room. Mme Bon, who in the absence of her husband served at the bar of the Colonial Club, slipped the money into the till and fell to wiping the counter with her duster.

The three men were lounging in wicker chairs, eyeing their almost empty glasses. It was the Judge who spoke first, after mopping his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Has he really all that influence?"

The Chief Secretary's lips curled. There were rumours that he had done time in his youth; also that he had been a barber, and that his wife was the Governor's mistress. Whatever his past may have been, he now seemed very sure of himself and of his own importance.

"The man's just bluffing," he said scornfully. "He has a cousin who's a minor official in the provinces. And I've heard he has a brother-in-law in the C.I.D.—an Inspector of Casinos, or something of the sort. That's all the 'influence' he has, so far as I know."

"Is it a fact that Muselli's been posted to the Marquesas to get him out of the way?"

Cande's only reply was a cryptic smile, and once more a silence fell on their conversation. The sun was setting. It was the "green hour," when the same group of men met daily at the Club for the ritual glass of absinthe. Some English sporting prints hung on the wooden walls, and the red-coated gentlemen on horseback gave the place a certain *cachet*. But the effect was spoiled by Mme Bon, who persisted in slopping about in bedroom slippers, and never troubled to dress her towy hair. Her elbows on the bar-counter, she listened vaguely to the men's talk, gazing dolefully into the middle distance. Life had used her hardly, and her husband now spent eight months of the year in hospital.

M. Moutonnet, the Public Prosecutor, also was of a morose or, rather, edgy temperament. Tall, gaunt, very well groomed, he was always fiddling with a monocle, putting it in place with a hurried gesture, and letting it fall the next moment.

"They're Corsicans, the Musellis," he murmured after several minutes had passed and one might have supposed his thoughts had taken a new turn. "And Corsicans always hang together, as we know. Whom was he getting at when he talked about others taking the boat before he did?"

"The Governor, of course," Cande replied. "But the Governor's much safer than some people think. It'd take more than Muselli to shift him."

"I should hope so!" the Judge hastened to declare. "What a charming fellow he is! He'd be a great loss to the island if he left us."

Another silence followed. There were subjects on which it was wise to say the least possible; one never knew to whom one's remarks might be repeated. Not to mention that it was far from certain if the Governor was as "safe" as all that!

The local business men, who had a majority in the Papeete Town Council, were sending letter after letter to the Colonial Secretary asking that he should be recalled.

"Is there a bridge-party tomorrow?" Isnard asked.

It was his love of painting that had brought the Judge, now in his forties, to Tahiti. As a young man he had aspired to be an artist, and when practising at the Tours bar had continued painting, and given exhibitions at his own expense. As his style had a slight resemblance to Gauguin's, he had always longed to go to Tahiti, and jumped at the opportunity when the judgeship fell vacant.

"By the way," Cande began; then paused to order another round of drinks, "you didn't chance to meet that young Frenchman who came out in the *Ile-de-Re*, I suppose? I don't expect so. He was staying at the *Relais*," (His tone implied that, of course, neither the Public Prosecutor nor the Judge would be likely to set foot in that establishment.) "The name caught my eye when I saw it in the passenger-list, but I didn't tumble to it at once. Donadieu.

Doesn't the name remind you of anything ? Oscar Donadieu of La Rochelle?"

"Wait a bit. Yes. Didn't the name figure in the papers in connection with some case or other ?"

"That's it. There was a double suicide, and the Donadieus came a most unholy cropper. But we've had other things to occupy our minds, the Governor and I, these last few days. Only this afternoon we found time to look through the registration forms of the people who'd landed from the last boat. When he came to that name, the Governor gave an exclamation. I happen to know that he started his career as an assistant at the Rochefort Sub-prefecture, and he was quite intimate with the Donadieus in those days. They were the biggest shipowners in La Rochelle."

"What's the young chap come here for ?"

"That's what we want to find out. The Chief of Police reports that he started off by himself in the direction of Punaauia, and hasn't been seen since. The family lost everything when the business was sold up, and most likely he hasn't a penny to his name. The Governor wants to get on his tracks; it might cause a bother if ... if anything happened to him."

"It shouldn't be difficult to trace him."

"No, but the trouble will be to find him a job. We can employ him in the Secretariat till something else turns up. If your bench-clerk falls ill again, as he did last year, this young chap can replace him. That's what the Governor suggested to me, anyhow."

"Really," Moutonnet put in, "the people at home should take some steps to warn young fellows what to expect before they start. They have such absurd ideas about conditions here; they think Tahiti's practically a desert island and they can go about stark naked and live on bananas. On my last leave I was staggered by the ignorance of people—well-educated people, mind you—about this island. Some of them didn't even know that Tahiti is a French possession."

Mme Bon gave a loud sigh, for no particular reason; she had a way of sighing thus from time to time, as though to punctuate the dim, sad progress of her thoughts.

Each of them was aware that before they left for their respective

homes the talk would veer round to a certain topic. Indeed, because it was the only one of real interest, they had reserved it to the end. Cande was the first to broach it.

"What's the latest about Lagre?"

"Has the Governor said anything to you on the subject?" the Judge asked with an eagerness that betrayed his anxiety to be given a lead.

"Well, yes. His name did crop up. Quite incidentally, as a matter of fact. We were discussing the accommodation in the jail. It's obvious that no suitable quarters can be found for a white man under detention for a longish term. It would be most awkward—for everyone concerned. Either Lagre would have to stay in his cell all the time, or he'd have to mix with the native convicts—which, of course, is undesirable."

"Quite so," the Judge murmured. "As a matter of fact, that idea had struck me too."

And the Public Prosecutor frowned heavily, as if deploring the fact that such a problem should have been forced on the authorities.

"Of course," Cande concluded, as he got up, about to bid his friends good-night, "if he was sentenced to a term of transportation he'd be sent to Guiana. . . ." He paused significantly.

Though he omitted to add: "And then we'd have him off our hands," the others took his meaning easily enough.

He shook hands with everyone, then lightly pressed Mme Bon's soft, flabby* fingers.

Although it was not yet eight o'clock, to all intents and purposes their day was ended. There was nothing to do in the evenings, except on Wednesdays, when the weekly bridge-party took place at Government House. Moutonnet, the Public Prosecutor, would saunter back to his house near the barracks, and read for an hour before going to bed, while his wife sat idle, watching the clock and yawning.

Isnard, the Judge, had also no alternative but to go home. But he always arranged matters so as to be the last to quit the Club, taking care to leave something in his glass.

"Coming?" asked the Public Prosecutor.

"Not just yet. I haven't quite finished my drink."

"Good night, then."

"Good night."

Really, at this hour the lamps should have been lit, but the Judge preferred the room unlighted; that way, people on the road couldn't see in.

"Well, Madame Bon, how are you today?"

"And you, Monsieur Isnard?"

It always began like that, with an exchange of polite common-places. Then the Judge rose with a sigh, and took out his purse.

"How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing. It's all been paid."

He hung round the bar, trying to think of something else to say, and casting nervous glances towards the doorway. He was only too conscious of the grotesqueness, not to say ignominy, of his conduct, and there were days when he raged at the thought of having been reduced to this.

When they lived at Tours, his wife had shown no jealousy. Painting provided a convenient alibi; almost every day Isnard had girls posing for him in his studio, and his wife said nothing. Even at Papeete, in the early days, he had managed fairly well. As the bungalow was rather cramped, the Judge had rented an empty shed near by to serve as his studio. He had started with several models, but finally his choice had fallen on Tamatea exclusively.

"It's better for an artist to stick to the same model," he explained to his wife. "The great masters always did that."

And Mme Isnard, a fat, stupid, rather common woman, had no suspicions, to begin with. Everybody in Tahiti knew that Tamatea was the Judge's mistress, and that he had provided her with a small house near the studio, to live in. But Mme Isnard went on seeing her friends, giving tea-parties, stuffing herself with cakes and playing the piano, without an inkling of her husband's infidelities.

Until the day when, dropping in at the studio, she caught them in the act. Her first reprisal was a memorable scene at the *Relais des Meridiens*, in the course of which she came to blows with Tamatea. And, of course, she insisted on her husband's giving up the studio.

"There'll be no more nonsense of that sort. You can do your painting at home, and if you need models, they must be men. You've made me the laughing-stock of the place—and it shan't happen again."

So now Isnard dared not even turn to look at a pretty girl in the street, or dance with his colleagues' wives. He had only one place of refuge, the Colonial Club, and only one resource: to stay there after the others had left and make some feeble going with Mme Bon, who was not merely matronly but even smelt stale.

"Well, I'll have to be getting home," he said lugubriously; then, blushing, added: "Henriette, shall we . . . ?"

To which she gave her invariable answer:

"Not today."

"Do . . . please. Do let me. . . ."

Warily he moved behind the bar-counter, keeping an eye on the entrance door as he did so. He was trembling with desire, and apprehension. Mme Bon, however, remained placid and inert, and, when at last he left her, murmured plaintively:

"Really we shouldn't. . . . One day we'll get caught. And then there's my poor husband, who's in hospital."

They had very nearly been caught on one occasion. Dr Cosson had entered at a most inopportune moment and the Judge only just had time to swing round, saying shakily:

"Wait, Madame Bon! I'll get it for you. You can't reach it."

And he brought down the first bottle he laid hand on, from the top shelf. Had Cosson really been hoodwinked? Anyhow, he showed no sign of having noticed anything.

It always ended in the same way. Hanging his head, Isnard slunk off, took his hat from the peg, and muttered:

"Well, good night, Madame Bon."

"Good night, Judge."

The two hundred yards he had to cover between the Club and his bungalow gave him time to steady himself, compose his features, and assume the expression of a man who is run off his feet with work, before sitting down at table with his wife. Sometimes, when they were together on the verandah after dinner, the twanging of guitars came to them from the *Relais des Meridiem*, but he had to

make as if he heard nothing; only his fingers trembled slightly as he lit a final cigarette before going to bed.

Augustin Godard, the Police Commissioner, had been in former days sub-manager of a branch bank in the provinces of France. He was taciturn by nature, never played cards or drank.

"Well, Godard?" asked the Governor, who had taken off his collar and tie and was smoking a meerschaum pipe. "Have you found the young man?"

"No, sir, not yet. I went myself in my car, as far as the peninsula, and made enquiries along the road. The Punaauia headman saw him and they had a talk together, so I gathered."

"How did he seem? In good health?"

"There was nothing said about his looking ill. And he was carrying a pretty heavy suitcase and a knapsack."

"Did he say where he proposed to settle?"

"No. The new police-sergeant at Taiarapu—Nicou, his name is—told me that he knows him and that they came out together."

"Oh, he travelled Second Class, did he?"

"Yes. Sergeant Nicou advised him to come and stay in the peninsula; that way they could see something of each other, and Donadiieu wouldn't be so cut off from everything."

Though, needless to say, he did not take it over-seriously, the Governor felt some compunction about this Donadiieu business. He had started his career in a part of France where the Donadiieus were universally respected, for him the name retained its old prestige, and he was genuinely distressed by the thought that a son of the great Oscar Donadiieu should have sunk so low.

"The general belief is that he's somewhere up the Valley. Do you think that's so?"

"Everything points to it. I sent two natives to have a look round, but they only came across the Hungarian—you remember about him, sir? They told me he'd grown thin as a lath and his manner was very strange."

"One of these days I suppose he'll be going off his head, and giving us a heap of trouble, like that fellow last year."

"It's more than likely. The Hungarian assured my men that he

hadn't seen a soul, and he asked them not to trouble him again with such enquiries. I also sent a man to question the two young Americans who came on the same boat. They're staying with another American—that queer old fellow who lives at Matiti and can spear fish like a Kanaka. They knew nothing, of course."

"Thanks, Godard."

"Shall I go on making enquiries, sir?"

"Yes, please. . . . What about Muselli?"

"He's going round telling everybody that he's damned if he'll leave Tahiti, and that—if you'll excuse me, sir—somebody else will have to go before he does."

"Meaning me?"

"So I gathered."

"Thanks."

Next day the *Ile-de-Re* came in, on her homeward voyage from the New Hebrides and Noumea. This was one of the monthly occasions when the different social groups in the island met each other—without, however, mixing.

Maniere was always one of the first to go up the gangplank, and he promptly made his way to the kitchen and storerooms, where he carried on clandestine negotiations with the head cook and purser.

"You'll have it sent to my place?"

"Yes—after dark, of course. What'll you have to drink?"

"Nothing, thanks. My liver's out of order and I'm going slow just now. If you meet Eugene, tell him I'm fairly fit, but I wish he'd buck up and send a letter. My sister's even worse. I haven't had a line from her for three mails now."

"She's still at the *Marius Bar*. I saw her last time we put in. . . ."

Meanwhile Mme Moutonnet and M. and Mme Isnard were exchanging small talk in the First Class Saloon, where it was an old-established custom to have luncheon whenever a ship came in. Dr Cosson, who in his earlier days had been doctor on a Messageries boat, had gone off to confabulate with the ship's doctor and the officers.

"Seen Lagre?" the captain asked.

"Yes, I'm attending him at present."

"Oh? Is he ill?"

"Not very seriously, but his heart's always been a bit groggy. He won't listen to advice, and he smokes three packets of cigarettes a day."

"What has he to say for himself?"

"Nothing."

"Doesn't he ever talk about young Riri?"

"Never. He's gloomy, but quite calm. He keeps on saying it was an accident, a wretched accident."

An accident? But—"

"That's what he calls it. Sometimes one would think he doesn't realize he killed poor Riri. In fact, from the way he talks, he might be the victim, not the murderer! Isn't it absurd!"

"It was even more absurd to do a thing like that over a girl like Tamatea. She isn't even pretty."

But Cosson, who had more experience in such matters, shrugged his shoulders.

"Prettiness isn't everything, you know. There's some girls— Oh, let's change the subject. Give my love to dear old Marseilles when you make it! Don't I wish I was there!"

Just then the wireless operator, who rarely joined the group, came up and shyly asked the doctor:

"By the way, I wonder if you could give me any news of a young fellow called Donadieu?"

"That Frenchman who landed here the last time you called in? As a matter of fact, they were talking about him at the Club the other day. He's disappeared, it seems."

"Disappeared?"

"Oh, that often happens. They go to ground in the Valley and one hears no more of them for years. But Donadieu's a special case. The Governor knew his people, I understand, and intends to find a job for him. He'll be showing up again before long, I expect."

At midnight all were at the *Lafayette*, drinking and dancing, then moving off by couples to the convenient darkness of the beach. The ship's officers were rather short with Tamatea and, out of bravado, she drank more than usual, laughed more shrilly and drew attention to herself by every means. Noticing Jaubert, the wireless operator, sitting by himself at a corner table, she went up to him.

"What's come over them tonight ? Why are they looking at me in that funny way ?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Yes, you know all right, but you don't want to say. They think it's my fault that it happened. But how ever could I know that Lagre was going to go in off the deep end like that ?"

Jaubert made no reply and looked away, hoping she would leave him.

"Answer me! Do you think it's fair that I should get all the blame?"

"How can I tell ?"

As there seemed no other way of escaping, he began to rise from his chair.

"No! Stay! Give me a drink."

"All right. Order what you want."

"Aren't you dancing tonight ?"

"No."

"Don't you ever dance ?"

"No."

"Well, what *do* you do, then ?"

"Nothing!"

A red glow from the lamps fell on white uniforms and the half-naked forms of the girls, who were wearing Tahitian costumes and tiare wreaths on their hair. Some cars were parked outside, but, after going ten or a dozen yards, one entered another world, where all was silence but for the murmur of small waves fretting the coral reef and gently shelving sands. Indeed, so striking was the contrast between the noisy, overcrowded dance-hall with its garish lights and laughter and the calm splendour of the tropic night that to pass from one to the other brought to mind a stage-effect.

That blue, star-strewn sky might well have been a velvet back-cloth, gold-spangled; the palms by the lagoon were as still as trees of painted metal; and the sea had a glancing sheen, as if hidden lights were playing on it.

Actually, much of the local colour was due to artifice; the girls, for instance, had changed in the cloak-room into their picturesque attire of coloured straw; the ukulele-players had been driving taxis

half an hour before, and presently, discarding their flower garlands, would resume their white cloth caps. It was, indeed, such a medley of make-believe and reality that one might have imagined oneself in a Parisian cabaret done up in South Seas style, listening to Hawaiian records on a gramophone. One caught oneself wondering if that fishing canoe, held in a net of starshine, were real, or painted on a cunningly lighted wall.

And, in spite of her exotic make-up, shell necklaces and bare breasts, Tamatea had the look of an ordinary young woman in the sulks, as she kept plying the man beside her with the questions that girls usually put in such cases.

"I suppose you find me ugly?"

"Not particularly." The wireless operator was too bored to be polite.

"Don't you want me to stay with you?"

"No."

"Are you afraid I . . . I'll give you something? If that's it, you've only got to ask the doctor. There he is!" She sounded quite indignant.

"No, no. You've got it all wrong. It's just that I don't want to."

"Oh, I see. You don't like girls. Is that it?"

She looked at him quite eagerly. But he said nothing, and continued waiting till the other officers from the ship, with whom he was sharing a taxi, had had enough of it. It was the same story every time they were in port. And, on each occasion, one or two of the officers stayed ashore and didn't return to duty till next morning, just before the ship sailed. Jaubert was wondering why he had been such a fool as to join their party, when a new thought waylaid him.

"Do you know anything about the Valley?" he asked the girl. "Can a man live there all right?"

"What's the idea? Want to set up as a banana tourist? I shouldn't have thought it of you."

"No, but I know someone who's gone there."

"You mean that big boob who came here in your boat? He stayed three days at the *Relais*. He's another who doesn't care for girls. I'm not surprised he's one of your pals."

"Do you think he can manage to live there?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"Well, if he's got some money he can buy his food from the Chink. Or he might set up with a girl who'd do his cooking for him." She spoke lackadaisically; clearly the subject did not interest her. Abruptly she asked: "I say, is it true that a cinema company will be coming out on the next boat? There was one here last year, and I acted for them. I was the first girl who chuted down the waterfall in the picture. Did you see it?"

"Yes."

"Isn't it a shame! I've never seen it. Can one recognize me?"

"Yes," he repeated, for peace' sake; his thoughts were elsewhere.

"The director, or whatever they call him, told me he might ask me to come to America. But he hasn't written yet. ..."

Really, Donadieu and the wireless operator hadn't seen very much of each other on board ship. All the same, since the early morning Jaubert had been wondering what had befallen the tall young man of his own age who used to come up and stroll the boat-deck every evening on the chance that the door would open and the wireless operator ask him into his cabin, where he always showed a keen interest in the various gadgets.

One evening they had stayed together for some hours, leaning on the rail. They had the *Ile-de-Re* almost to themselves. The ship was alongside at Pointe-a-Pitre in Guadeloupe, and all the passengers, the missionary included, and a good many of the crew, had trooped on shore in quest of such diversions as the town provided.

It was the first time Donadieu smelt the languorous fragrance of a West Indian night, the first time he saw banana-trees etched against a deep-blue, starry sky. Some way inland a vivid sky-sign was flashing off and on, and Jaubert explained:

"That's where they've gone. It's a native dance-hall."

"Have they a dance-hall in Tahiti too?"

"Yes, but it's some way out of the town."

"Oh, there's a real town, is there?"

Jaubert hadn't cared to go into details. After all, it was none of his business. Also, he was impressed by the character of the young

man beside him, and his naive idealism, and sincerely hoped he would realize his dream, unlikely as this seemed.

"There are still some parts of the island which are almost completely uninhabited," he hastened to declare, though far from sure if this were so.

Really, Jaubert knew no more about Tahiti than did his fellow-officers, whose acquaintance with the island was confined to the curio shops, the *Lafayette*, and the fleeting glimpses one had of it on the inevitable joy-ride along the coastal road—with the car travelling at full speed, because the ship stayed so short a time in port.

Tamatea gave him a nudge.

"A penny for your thoughts."

"I haven't any."

"Are you engaged?"

He blushed. Though not engaged, he would have liked to be, not because he was in love with any particular girl, but for the romantic glamour of the state.

"So there's nothing doing? You don't want to get off with me?"

"I must go back with my friends."

"Oh, they won't mind. . . . Well, have it your own way, but it's a pity. I'd taken a fancy to you."

There may have been some truth in this, but what she really wanted was to be seen going away on the arm of a ship's officer. It would have proved that the Lagre incident hadn't impaired her position.

Hina was sitting beside the captain, who was fondling her absent-mindedly. Angele was swooning in the embrace of a passenger, who was squeezing her so fervently that she could hardly breathe. Had a taxi been procurable, Jaubert would have returned to the ship by himself; as it was, he had no option but to wait. . . . When at last they left, they were six in the car, with two girls on their knees.

On the way from the *Lafayette* to Papeete one crosses a stretch of country that, by night, shows no sign of habitation, and Jaubert's thoughts harked back to Donadieu. Somewhere at this hour, under that blue-black canopy scored with shooting-stars, Donadieu lay

sleeping, alone in the warm darkness, alone with the earth and the trees, the distant murmur of the sea.

The air in the taxi reeked of coconut-oil and tiare; the young man on Jaubert's right had a girl on his knee, their mouths were glued together in a kiss that seemed interminable. Almost Jaubert could taste on his own lips its savour, and, whenever the taxi gave a lurch, the girl's body sagged against his, and he could feel it squirming voluptuously.

If only he knew where Donadieu was, and could have gone to him! Rarely before had he felt as despondent as he did tonight, and before entering his cabin he lingered for an hour or more on deck, leaning on the rail at the same place as at Pointe-a-Pitre.

VI

WITH a discreet smile of self-approval Police Commissioner Godard announced:

"I've traced him, sir."

"Good work," the Governor said. "Where exactly is he?"

"About two hundred yards from the Papeari waterfall. He'd been seen for the last time near Punaauia, and we assumed he'd turned off somewhere near the village. Actually he went twelve or thirteen miles farther up the road—probably by night. Shall I have him brought in, sir?"

"No, don't do that. We must try persuasion first. . . . Did you learn anything else about him? How is he?"

"They couldn't say anything definite. Anyhow, nobody told me he was looking ill."

"Ask Raphael to come here, please."

It was four o'clock; the worst of the day's heat was over and a rosy glow spreading up the sky. From the barracks came the sound of a bugle-call. Raphael walked bare-headed across the gardens to the Governor's office.

"Come in, Raphael my boy. Sit down. I've a job for you, of a rather special nature. . . ."

At seven that evening Raphael was giving his order to the Chinese boy at the *Relais*.

"Two bottles. Compree ? One red and one white. And start cooking that leg of mutton right away."

Joe came in. He made a practice of roaming the town at this hour, on the chance of finding someone ready to join him for a festive evening.

"Cheero, Joe!" said Raphael. "Look here! Have you anything on tomorrow?"¹

"Tomorrow? No."

"Good! Then how about coming with me to the waterfall?"

"If Joe goes, I'll come too," Tamatea announced from the corner where she was sitting.

They fixed it up, and very early next morning, before even the market was properly under way, Raphael's noisy car was waiting outside the *Relais*. Sky and sea had the pearly lustre of shot silk; even solid objects seemed diaphanous in the all-pervading light. The canoes on the lagoon cast no shadow and seemed to float in air. The road, which had just been watered, glowed blood-red, and sounds carried so far that one could have talked from one village to another along the road.

Raphael opened a bedroom door and gave Tamatea, who was sleeping face downwards, a brisk slap on her buttocks.

"Up you get!"

"Has Joe come?"

"Don't worry about Joe ! We'll pick him up on the way."

After handing her a blue cotton dress, he tossed a pair of sandals across the room towards her.

"You can have a bath on the way. Buck up."

The locker at the back of the car had been fitted up as an ice-box, and he stowed in it the leg of mutton, a chicken, and the bottles of wine. The engine was running when Joe appeared and climbed into the car.

They started off" at once, sped through the first village and past the Chinese grocer's gig. Tamatea, who was by herself in the back, leant forward.

"Don't forget you promised I should have a bath."

"You'll have one all right—at the waterfall."

That was all. They were silent for the next half-hour or so. The countryside slipped past, with its unchanging background of the shimmering lagoon, fringed with coconut-palms. On their left was a mass of riotous verdure, with here and there a red roof peeping through the foliage, or the spire of a church small as a child's toy. Now and then a girl on a bicycle went by, or a native shadowed by his wide-brimmed hat, and one had glimpses of young pigs frolicking like puppies round the doorways of the huts.

They passed the valley into which Donadieu had been supposed at first to have vanished. The eccentric Hungarian was doubtless lurking somewhere in the green shadows, watching the car go by.

"Do you know exactly where the place is?" Joe asked, as he lit his first cigarette.

"No, we'll need a guide. I'll try to get old Moti."

Raphael drew his car in to the right to make way for a 'bus crowded with natives going to the Papeete market. One had the impression of a garden on wheels, what with the gaily coloured dresses and the huge straw hats like sunflowers. But there was a curious gravity about the faces, and the big Maori-like eyes. One old woman was dandling a small pig on her lap.

"Morning, Raphael!" the driver shouted as he drove by. Some of the people *in the* 'bus waved their hands, for the Public Works Overseer had friends in every part of the island. After making enquiries he discovered Moti's shanty, and had him sit beside Tamatea at the back of the car.

"Takes plenty finding, that guy," the Kanaka informed him. "You gotta stop the car hundred yards before the Fall."

The waterfall came into view, on the left. At this point a spur protruded from the central mountain group, and the cliff overhung the road, which was hewn in the solid rock a few feet above sea-level. Looking up, one saw a dense tangle of vegetation, cleft by a ravine down which a torrent raced. Nowhere was the bare rock visible.

On leaving the car they gazed for a moment, with the indifference that comes of familiarity, at the marvellous scene—the cascade leaping out sixty or seventy feet above their heads and plunging

through a haze of broken lights into a deep round pool a few yards from the beach.

"Now I'll have my bath!" cried Tamatea and, flinging off her dress, ran to the pool.

A year or so before, all the pretty girls of the island had been rounded up, dressed in pareus, with flowers on their heads and round their breasts, and persuaded by a young American producer in his shirt-sleeves to chute down the cascade, under the cross-fire of a battery of cameras.

Today Tamatea had the pool to herself, and round and round she swam, turning somersaults, vociferating with delight. Meanwhile Raphael was talking to the old Kanaka.

"Which way do we go now?"

"Up yonder."

"To the Standing Stiff's place?"

"Yes. He's done it up a bit, you'll see."

Raphael hadn't known the odd personage to whom this hut owed its equally odd name. They dated from before his time. One fine day a schooner captain had decided to live as a recluse, and built this hut in an eyrie on the cliff-side, just above the waterfall. He had lived there in complete isolation for a number of years; then one day he had been found dead in his hut, standing beside a table he had made himself, with one hand resting on it.

"Come along, Tamatea! You've poisoned the pool quite enough!"

She didn't trouble to dry herself, and the thin wet dress moulded itself to her body.

"You lead the way, Moti."

It was blazing hot already. There was no path, not the vestige of a track, and they had to scramble over boulders, and grip projecting roots or lianas, to make the ascent. After a couple of minutes everyone was sweating, and Raphael, the fattest of the four, called a halt.

"Let's hope we find our young friend at home," said Joe. There was no knowing if he meant it humorously.

Really, it was difficult to believe that there could be a human dwelling on those trackless crags. The going became steadily harder, and at some points Moti had to give Raphael a hand and

haul him up on to a ledge above. Suddenly the Kanaka pointed to something lying on the ground.

"See ?" It was a banana-skin.

So Donadieu had been this way. Perhaps at this very moment he was quite near, hiding in the undergrowth and listening to their voices.

"Are you there ?" Raphael shouted, making a speaking-trumpet of his hands.

There was no answer, but, after going another twenty yards or so and rounding a clump of trees, they saw the hut immediately in front; a low-roofed, tumbledown shed propped against the trunk of a flamboyant. A man stood on the threshold, and at first no one recognized him.

There was a moment's indecision, indeed embarrassment. Without a word the man watched them approach, but one could see a glint of panic in his eyes, like that of a wild animal taken by surprise.

"Well, old chap, how are you getting on?" said Raphael in a jovial tone. "I must say you've chosen a queer spot for your abode."

What made Donadieu so hard to recognize was his auburn beard and the long hair falling in a mass of curls, like a ruff, on the back of his neck. His only garment was a pair of khaki shorts, and his skin was tanned almost as brown as a Kanaka's.

"We're not disturbing you, I hope. Can we sit down here ?"

"By all means."

He seemed startled by the sound of his own voice. Before speaking he had hesitated, and his attitude still gave the impression that, at the least provocation, he would take to flight.

Looking round, Raphael understood why he had chosen this particular spot. The view it commanded was quite the finest in the island. The hut stood on a projecting ledge, and it was like being on a terrace overhanging the lagoon, while close at hand the cascade fell sheer, a column of living light. The road could not be seen, nor any trace of civilized life.

"Sorry to break in on you like this, but the Governor asked me to look you up." Raphael turned to Joe and Tamatea. "Look here, supposing you two move off for a bit while I have a word with him."

When they were out of hearing Raphael mopped his brow and asked:

"Have you been living here long?"

Less out of curiosity than to keep himself in countenance, he fell to gazing at the hut, which Donadieu had patched up, as best he could, with bark and brushwood. There was a small mound of ashes in front of the door, and a primitive fireplace made of stones.

"Really, I couldn't say how long." Donadieu's voice was becoming more assured.

"Managing all right?"

"Not too badly, as you see."

Lifting some moistened palm-leaves lying on the floor, Raphael discovered four small fish; then glanced at his companion interrogatively.

"How did you catch them?"

"With a hook and line."

"So you've been down to get hooks?"

"No, I had them with me."

"Do you intend to eat those fish?"

"Yes."

"Well, I advise you not to. They'll make you ill."

"I've been ill. I had spots all over and a sort of colic."

"That's not surprising—if you'd been eating that kind of fish."

"But I'm quite fit now. . . . There were three days when I couldn't stir a finger."

He explained all this rather shyly, almost as if wanting Raphael to excuse his inexperience; nevertheless, one could detect an undertone of pride at having seen it through alone.

"As a matter of fact," he continued, "I'm much better equipped than you probably imagine. When I was in the States I often went camping with my friends, and I'm really an old hand at the game. Look!"

He opened the suitcase, which was of metal, and revealed a complete cooking outfit, with a spirit-lamp.

"How do you manage about methyated?"

"I don't use the spirit-lamp. I've brought enough matches to last me a good six months, and there's lots of wood, of course.

My greatest trouble, to start with, was finding bait. But after a bit I discovered a kind of centipede that the fish seem to like. The other day I landed a six-pounder."

Raphael would have been hard put to it to say what it was about Donadieu that affected him disagreeably; why his whole attitude somehow seemed unnatural. It was as if he were on his guard all the time, and his voice, too, was muffled, his eyes lacked frankness.

"You said just now that the Governor had told you to come and see me."

"That's so. But how about having something to eat, to start with? I've the makings of a nice little picnic in my car. . . . Moti, trot down to the car and get out all the stuff that's in the back. Take Tamatea to give you a hand. Mind you don't break the bottles."

Frowning, Donadieu listened; then watched the two natives scrambling down and Joe coming back towards them.

"You don't mind?" the lawyer said politely, as he sat down near Donadieu. "As a matter of fact, I know all about it."

"About *what*?"

"Why the Governor is interested in you, I mean. He knew your family quite well when he was in France. He had an administrative post at Rochefort."

Donadieu's face hardened; he was on the defensive again.

"The Governor's a very kind-hearted man really, though he can be a bit awe-inspiring, I allow, if you rub him up the wrong way. What are all those red marks you have on your skin?"

"I came out in pimples all over my body, and that's what remains of them."

"You must have been a sight! You'd been eating fish, of course. One's got to be very careful about the fish from the lagoon. There's some kinds that are quite harmless when there's no moon, and deadly poison when the moon is full. You should ask the natives to advise you; it's only they who know."

"I've been eating fish almost every day."

"Well, that was a bit rash, to put it mildly."

Donadieu turned to Raphael.

You said the Governor had sent you. May I know exactly why?"

"As Joe"—he corrected himself— "Maitre Beaudoin said just now, he remembers your family very well. And he's sent me to tell you that he's at your disposal. ..."

"At my disposal? I don't follow."

"He means that he'll be glad to help you out of . . . of this." He glanced at the dilapidated hut, the makeshift fireplace, the four small fish. "He'll find a post for you in one of the offices, to start with. That will give you time to look round."

Joe gave Raphael an ironic glance, as who should say: "You're wasting your breath, my lad."

Indeed, Donadieu's look was plainly hostile, his tone was almost surly when he answered:

"But I've never expressed any wish to be given a job in an office."

"Quite so," Raphael rejoined blithely. "But the Governor will find you one. Anyhow, you'd be better off than you are here."

"No, I shouldn't."

"Do you mean to say you enjoy living in this god-forsaken hut?"

"Nothing will induce me to live in a town again."

"Just as I thought," Joe murmured to himself.

Raphael shrugged his shoulders.

"Have it your own way! Anyhow, I've carried out my orders. . . . Now let's get on with our lunch. We'll have another talk about it afterwards. Moti, bring along the grub."

Whistling cheerfully, Raphael unpacked the food, uncorked the bottles, wiped the tumblers.

"Take your places, gentlemen. . . . A spot of wine, to start with. Here's luck, Monsieur Donadieu!"

"Thanks. I don't drink wine."

"That's too bad! It may be some time before you have another chance of drinking it, if you stay here. Perhaps you don't eat mutton either?"

"I'm not very keen on it, but I'll eat some if it will give you any pleasure."

Tamatea never took her eyes off him. She had noticed that, though he refrained from looking directly at her, his eyes kept straying in her direction. She also noticed that it wasn't her face

that held his gaze on these occasions, but her body, naked under the thin cotton dress.

"Mind you," Raphael mumbled—his mouth was full—"I quite understand your idea. You're not the first to have been bitten with it. There must be *ten* or a dozen fellows scattered about the island, whom one never sees, leading the simple life, as they call it. Simple, I grant you, but it's a dog's life really."

"Why?"

"Well, do you think it's a life for a civilized man?"

"And do *you* think it's a life for a civilized man, the life you lead at Papeete, at the *Relais des Meridiens*?" The tone in which he uttered the name of the hotel betrayed his loathing of it.

"Why shouldn't it be?"

"Drinks, girls, siesta in a squalid bedroom, then more drinks, food that stinks of garlic, then girls again—day after day!"

"And what about this place? Is it any better, really?"

"At least I have Nature to keep me company."

"And a nice friend she's been to you, your precious Nature. She's covered you with pimples and given you a pain in your guts. Don't you talk to me about Nature! That sort of stuff may go down in Paris, but it cuts no ice out here. We've seen too many fellows going the way you've gone. Nature's all very well on a fine Sunday afternoon, or for a picnic like we're having now, but—"

"I'm perfectly happy here," Donadieu broke in angrily. "It's not my fault if you can't understand. ..."

Tamatea gave Raphael an indignant glance.

"Why can't you leave the boy in peace?"

"Because it's too damn' silly, what he's doing. One of these days he'll fall sick, and there'll be nobody to look after him. He'll be mighty lucky if he manages to crawl down to the nearest village."

"I *have* fallen sick," Donadieu pointed out, "but I didn't crawl down, as you say, to any village. I stuck it out up here."

They were of about the same age; Donadieu was actually the junior by a few months, though Raphael with his pink cheeks and baby face looked several years younger.

Beaudoin, who had guessed that Raphael was wasting his breath, signed to him to stop talking. But now he had started, it had be-

come a point of honour for the young man to show Donadieu the error of his ways.

"Look here! If you don't believe me, I'll bring along Dr Cosson one day. He'll tell you how they fared, the other fellows who had your ideas, about returning to Nature and the rest of it. And Moti here can tell you all about the chap who lived in this hut before, and died here, standing at that table."

"Do you imagine that you, too, won't die some day?"

"Anyhow, when I do, it won't be like that—in a native hut at the back of beyond. . . . Why, only look at the difference between a nice cut off the joint like you're eating now and those rotten half-raw fish."

"They're not half raw. I've tried several ways of cooking them, and that's the best."

"And bananas by the dozen! I ask you! I've nothing against a ripe banana now and then, but living on them . . ."

"Oh, let him be," Joe cut in. "A man's got a right to his own ideas."

"Very well, I won't say any more now. After all, he'll find it out for himself before very long."

"No, I shan't."

"In that case, you're a bigger fool than I took you for."

Both young men were heated by their argument, and they glared at each other like personal enemies. Meanwhile the Kanaka was eating every scrap of food he could lay hand on, and drinking steadily. They heard an unseen car passing on the road below, and there was something curiously remote, irrelevant, about the sound.

"I don't suppose you've even a first-aid outfit with you."

"I've everything I need in my suitcase."

"I can't think why the hell you don't live in a proper house like everybody else!"

"How'd I be any better off'in a proper house as you call it?"

Actually, Donadieu would have found it hard to explain his aversion from the thought of returning to civilized life. An hour before, when he heard men scrambling up the mountain-side, talking French, he had kept quite still, but in his heart of hearts he hoped they would not go by without a word for him.'

And even now, though the meal that was ending had given him no pleasure, he would have liked to prolong it, were that possible; indeed, he almost dreaded the moment when his visitors would leave him to his solitude and he heard the purr of their receding car.

"When I went to Big Hole City," he began, "my family was still quite well-to-do, and no one could understand what prompted me to go and earn my living as a manual labourer. I could quite easily have carried on with my studies, or taken a post in the firm."

"Then why didn't you do so?"

"Because I wasn't going to be beaten by my body! When I was thirteen, everyone predicted I'd die young, I was so delicate and puny. And now—well, look at me!"

With naive vanity he struck a pose that showed his muscular arms and robust chest to full advantage. It was the first time in his life that he had boasted of his strength, and his eyes challenged Raphael's, and sometimes roved to Tamatea's, as if to draw from them some sign of admiration.

"I used to be scared of heights; it took me months to cure myself, but I managed it all right. And after coming here, I didn't hook a single fish for the first fortnight. When I'd learned to catch them with a hook and line, I decided to go after them, native-fashion, with a spear. The day before yesterday I speared my first fish, and now I've got the knack. I'm thinking of building a canoe."

"That's simple enough," Raphael murmured.

"It would be simple if I had the tools. But I've only my axe and a clasp-knife."

"And when you've made it, what good will it do you?"

Decidedly Raphael was, for once, in a bad humour. The wine he had drunk was making him sleepy and, for some reason, the turn this talk had taken got on his nerves.

"All right, have it your own way," he said finally. "I'll tell the Governor when I see him this evening that you're quite happy as you are and don't propose to move. Now there's something else I'd like to say. I come along the road once a week or so, sometimes twice. If ever you're in difficulties of any kind, just tie a handkerchief to that branch; I can see it from below. ... By the way, *have* you a handkerchief?"

" I've a dozen, and I wash them regularly."

He resented being taken for a sort of cave-man, or a beachcomber. And he wasn't out for these fellows' pity; rather, for their admiration.

" You'll notice," he added, " that the hut's quite clean. And there aren't any bugs now; I had quite a job getting rid of them at first."

" How about buzzing off?" Joe suggested rather abruptly. Normally he was the most genial of companions; was in on every binge, and got half drunk most evenings. But for the last quarter of an hour he had been eyeing Donadieu in a curious, almost hostile way, and fidgeting.

" Let's get a move on." He rose to his feet. " Moti, pack up. Those bottles are empty, aren't they ?"

Raphael noticed that the Kanaka was packing what remained of the leg of mutton.

" Leave that," he said in a low tone.

Donadieu, who had overheard, flushed deeply.

" No !" he exclaimed. " I'd much rather he took it away. And that chicken too. You brought enough food for a regiment."

That was the end. None could think of anything more to say; all alike were in a bad humour or, more exactly, eager to cut short a disappointing experience. And none of them took any *notice* of the pearly lustre of the sky, the shining grey-green sea, the melodious lapse of the waterfall. After all, one cannot be aware at every moment of living in the loveliest region of the world, and Raphael, as he, too, stood up, became painfully conscious that that last glass of white wine had induced a headache.

" Please convey my thanks to the Governor," Donadieu said rather stiffly.

" He'll be fed to the teeth when I tell him. Anyhow—it's your funeral!"

Quite so. And I thank you, too, for all the trouble you've taken."

He noticed that Tamatea was eyeing the red scars on his chest and arms, and almost blushed again.

" By the way," he asked, " what's being done about Captain Lagre?"

"The case is coming on next week."

"As a matter of fact, I'm defending him," Joe added.

"Tell him I'm here, and that I hope everything will go off all right."

He looked away, conscious that he had put it clumsily. The Kanaka was waiting, with the basket, a little way down the slope, and showing signs of impatience. Raphael held out his hand.

"*Au revoir*, then."

"*Au revoir*"

Joe, and after him Tamatea, shook hands. The girl stared hard at Donadieu, as if awaiting the answer to a question she hadn't put into words. He lowered his eyes uneasily.

Once his visitors were out of sight, he entered his hut and lay down on a bed of dry grass spread in a corner. His limbs were aching, his temples throbbing, and he pressed his hand to his forehead. Suddenly he sat up. Someone was coming to the hut, walking fast. Tamatea had just said to the two men with her:

"You go ahead! I'll be back in a jiffy."

She stepped into the semi-darkness of the hut, saw Donadieu sitting up on his bed, and went towards him. Lowering her eyes, she murmured:

"Shall we...?"

"The fact is, he hasn't any guts, he's what they call an escapist," the lawyer muttered, and drew a deep breath, as if this remark had eased his pent-up feelings. After a longish pause he added, though Raphael had made no comment: "The absurd thing is that really he despises *us*! He thinks he's doing something fine, heroic very likely, and he'd be lowering himself..."

Raphael sounded the horn twice, to summon Tamatea, but a quarter of an hour passed before he saw the blue dress swinging down the cliff-side. She came up to them slowly, rolling her hips, and on the way she picked a flower and put it between her lips.

"Well?" asked Raphael curiously.

"I've nothing to tell you."

"Did he bring it off?"

She gave him a vague smile by way of answer. Raphael drove

slowly, because of the turns. The waterfall was left behind, the first red roof of a hamlet came into view.

"H m!" muttered Raphael, glancing back at Tamatea. "I thought as much. He's not the sort that cares for girls."

Her smile widened; really she'd have liked to tell them, but she could not find the words. Also, she was afraid of being laughed at.

She, anyhow, had laughed; she hadn't been able to help herself. Her first impression was that he was going to throw her out; he was looking at her in such an odd way, furious and bashful at once.

Then suddenly he had flung himself on her in a sort of frenzy. Never before had she seen a man in such a state, and she had laughed when she saw the look in his eyes, a look of fierce, defiant challenge, of almost feral hunger—"as if he'd like to gobble me up," she told herself, and it made her laugh still more.

"Gosh! He's a queer boy, and no mistake," she said after a few minutes' silence.

"Why didn't you stay with him," asked Raphael peevishly, "if you find him so interesting?"

The red hour was beginning, preceding the green hour, and a sultry glow spreading up the sky, while a deeper silence fell on the mountain-side and the lagoon. The steeple of a village church flamed red behind a clump of trees, and a little girl in red walking along the sandy road seemed enveloped in a sort of aura, veils of roseate light.

The car had already left behind the first three villages along the road, and still Donadieu had not moved. He was lying face downward on the dry grass of his bed, his hands clasped on his forehead. In his nostrils was the sickly-sweet fragrance of the oil with which Tamatea smeared her body, and he fancied he could still hear the drone of the car on the road below. With a violent effort he rose and walked to the door of the hut, that framed the red effulgence of the sunset.

For the first time empty bottles and scraps of paper littered the clearing in front. Eastwards the sky was turning jade-green, and one could feel the rocks and trees cooling down, while their outlines took on a peculiar sharpness in the cool, watery light. Even the waterfall had an icy tinkle, and Donadieu shivered slightly as he

recalled his sensation when making his first plunge into the deep pool below; the coldness of the water had been a shock, and for a moment he had been unable to swim a stroke.

"The Governor is interested in you. . . ."

He felt a need to set about doing the things he did every day about this time, took his fishing-tackle and spear, scrambled down the slope and crossed the road, after a quick glance in both directions to make sure nobody was in sight.

Once he had crossed the road he was back in his own domain, on the edge of the lagoon. Placing his fishing-tackle beside him, he fixed his eyes on the blue, translucent depths, watching for the silvery trail of fish among the spikes of coral. He saw some balloon-shaped fish, blue with yellow patches, that he had often tried to spear without success. But now he made no movement; he wasn't thinking of the fish—or indeed of anything. Standing on the ocean's rim, facing the red sun which in a few minutes would touch horizon line, he felt a curious instability, though his feet were solidly planted on a coral ledge. Everything seemed tenuous, unsubstantial.

But, most of all, he felt the insignificance of his speck of being in the immensity of the universe around him; and his helplessness. All he had done, all he yet might do, seemed so futile, so trivial.

His eyes were haunted by a mocking vision, the flash of a red roof amongst the green luxuriance. There, all along the road behind him, were houses where people lived normal human lives, canoes drawn up on the beach, naked children playing on the sand, dogs gambolling round them, washing fluttering on lines. . . .

At the *Relais des Meridiem* someone was lazily climbing the creaky stairs, opening a door, dropping on to a bed, and one could hear all the homely sounds of ordinary life: fish sizzling on a stove, a cork being drawn in the restaurant below, the hiss of the shower-bath at the end of the passage, Hina gargling over her basin.

He remained quite still, lost in thoughts. Unsummoned, a picture rose before him of a scene of his boyhood—when one night he had gone to his sister's bedroom and found a man there—and the memory made him hot with shame. Then he grew conscious of Tamatea's perfume clinging to his skin, and sniffed his hands and

arms. Abruptly he turned and crossed the road, so absorbed in his musings that he forgot about his fishing-tackle and spear, and left them lying on the edge of the lagoon.

His one desire was to lie down, and dream. . . .

VII

"BRRR. Brrrr." The driver gave two prolonged blasts on his horn. Not that he was really impatient; but he took a childish delight in mere noise, especially noise of a mechanical order.

The 'bus had stopped immediately below the waterfall, and all the passengers were craning their necks towards the point where, as everyone knew, was the crazy young Frenchman's hide-out. The vehicle was a decrepit lorry, fitted with wooden benches, every one of which now was packed with people. A fat brown woman, with two hens tied together on her knees, roared with laughter as the lad beside her sang in the native tongue a jingle he had made up on the spur of the moment.

"Oh, Mister Frenchman,

"Please don't make us wait ..."

A man beside her echoed in a deeper voice:

"Please don't make us wait."

And then everyone, clapping hands in time, took up the refrain:

"Please! Please! Please don't make us wait."

Gratified by his success, the young man continued improvising, the light of inspiration in his eyes, while the driver punctuated each line with blasts of his horn.

"We're going to the market,

"And we don't want to be late,

"Oh, Mister Frenchman, hurry up and wake.

"We're going to the market,

"Please don't make us wait.

"Please! Please! Please don't make us wait."

The coolness of night still lingered in the air, the lagoon gleamed misty white, and the woods were loud with birds. The fat native

woman leant well back to give full vent to her lungs, bouncing the shackled hens in rhythm on her broad lap :

"Please, Mister Frenchman . . ."

A moment later everybody burst out laughing. The Chinaman's trap had appeared, coming round a corner, and he had to pull up sharply and wait until the 'bus proceeded.

But the 'bus could not proceed until Donadieu thought fit to show himself on the cliff-side.

The Chinaman had a small trumpet and tooted on it shrilly, while the people in the 'bus yelled in chorus:

"Please, Mister Frenchman . . ."

Donadieu had only just managed to get to sleep. He opened his eyes drowsily, and very nearly closed them again. What with the noise of the waterfall and echoes of his dream, the shouting below conveyed nothing to his mind. However, a few moments later, vaguely aware of something unusual, he rose and, after walking round a shoulder of rock, looked down and saw the grinning faces of the people in the 'bus all turned in his direction.

"We're going to the market,

"Please don't make us wait."

There was another burst of laughter when they saw his look of blank amazement, his eyes blurred with sleep. The driver showed his teeth in a broad grin and waved a letter. A small boy took it and started scrambling up the hill.

"Brrr. Brrrr."

The Chinaman drew in to the side of the road to let the 'bus by, while Donadieu fingered the letter distastefully. At last, vanquishing his reluctance, he opened the envelope.

"...and you are directed to report to the Vairao police-station at your earliest convenience, with your service-hook and all papers relating to your military training."

The 'bus was rumbling away and, now the game had started, everyone was improvising doggerel and singing it in chorus.

"We brought you a nice *billet-doux*,

"She sends her love to you, Moosou,

"Oh, naughty Mister Frenchman, we *are* ashamed of you!"

When, an hour later, they reached Papeete, they were still at it,

and the Song of the Naughty Frenchman had swelled to epic length.

The day was warming up and he walked steadily ahead, feasting his eyes on the radiant countryside. But his mind was more than ordinarily troubled. Probably as a result of the conversation with Raphael and Joe, he had had an almost sleepless night. In any case, he was always a poor sleeper; any form of noise and—oddly enough—complete silence upset his nerves.

At Big Hole City he had fought down his fear of heights successfully. But here it was a vague, formless fear that always came over him with the nightfall.

He had been assured that there were no venomous snakes or dangerous animals in the island. Yet it had a disquieting effect, to be sleeping in this doorless hut, alone on the cliff-side, and to hear, all around, the furtive sounds that live in darkness. Sometimes there came a soft padding on the clearing beside the hut—was it a dog, a cat, or a wild pig?—and he had a feeling that animals, attracted perhaps by his smell, kept prowling round. And there was always a stir of tiny life in the thatch, and often he found insects crawling in the straw he slept on.

Though he knew there was no real danger, Donadieu could not master his nerves and, when at last he dozed off, his sleep was restless, unrefreshing, haunted by rambling dreams.

And now that he had heard about the "Standing Stiff," he was unable to get thoughts of him out of his head. Why had they thought fit to tell him that macabre story? Hitherto he had never contemplated the possibility of serious illness; that he might die miserably, unfriended, like that schooner captain. Only once had he come face to face with death—when a Pole had succumbed to galloping consumption at Mrs Goudie's. The man's death-agony had lasted ten hours and Donadieu had taken turns with the others to render what help he could.

Why, when he felt his end near, had the dying skipper risen to his feet and dragged himself to the table? Was there something on it that he wanted, some medicine perhaps? How long had it taken him to draw himself **up, then steady** himself against the table-edge,

propped on an arm? Perhaps at the very moment when death came to him the 'bus had been passing, crowded as it had been this morning with merry brown folk on their way to market, making up songs as they went along. And next day, too, the 'bus had passed, and on many more days, while the dead man remained standing, cold and stark, in the lonely hut.

Hardly conscious what he was doing, Donadieu plodded his way along the narrow strip of sand linking the peninsula with the island. He had been directed to appear at the peninsula police-station, and it was Nicou, presumably, with whom he would have to deal. He had no idea what lay behind the summons to appear, but he had an unacknowledged hope that some change in his life, not of his choosing but forced on him by others, was impending.

For just now he was feeling bored and discontented—in a general way, for no specific reason. As he walked, he tried to recall the dream that had been cut short by the chorus from the 'bus. Joe Beaudoin and Raphael figured in it. Its setting was presumably a court, for he, Donadieu, was under trial; but he could remember nothing of what the room looked like. Clearest of all was his memory of the two men, standing on either side of him, and so close that everything they said rattled his ear-drums.

"Why did you refuse to drink our wine?" asked Raphael in a gruff, threatening tone.

"You ate the meat all right," Joe pointed out. For some reason, in the dream, the lawyer had a big red moustache.

Then came a gap. The next thing he recalled was seeing Lagre, who was wearing an advocate's gown, rise from his seat and with a dramatic gesture point to Tamatea, asking sternly: "Why did you kill that girl?"

Tamatea followed the pointing finger with her eyes—and yet it was an admitted fact that Donadieu had killed her!

Just as he was wondering what reply to make, he was awakened by the shouts below.

He walked on without slackening speed, though sweat was streaming down his body. But today any sort of physical effort came as a relief. **Usually he went about in shorts only, but for his visit to the police-station he had put on a shirt as well.**

Though he refused to recognize that he was doing so—it was too much like a confession of weakness—he quickened his pace when the village came in sight, and gazed eagerly at the white walls and red roofs clustering round a church spire. To his ears came the homely sound of a cock crowing; two children were playing on the dusty road, and he all but paused to watch them.

Fifty yards before the church was a white building flying the French flag; in the brilliant sunlight the three colours seemed brighter, gayer than usual. The facade bore an inscription in black letters—exactly the same lettering as one sees in every French village, and on children's picture-books—"*Gendarmerie Nationale*." The door stood ajar, and an ugly, but quite friendly, mongrel lay sleeping across the threshold. Stepping over it, Donadieu found himself in a dark passage, and called :

"Anyone about?"

Listening, he was surprised to hear a woman singing to herself; then he realized that the sound came from the back of the house, probably from the kitchen. Raising his voice, he called again.

"Is anyone in?"

There was the noise of some object being placed on a table. A door opened, and in a burst of sunlight Nicou's daughter appeared, her hair in disorder, her hands shiny with soap-suds. She was peering down the dark passage, obviously unable to recognize the visitor.

"Come in. What do you want? . . . Oh, it's you, Monsieur Donadieu. I wasn't expecting . . ."

Blushing, she began to wipe her hands on her apron.

"Do come in. Wait! I'll open the parlour door." Turning her head, she called: "Mamma!"

"Yes? What is it?" The voice came from the bottom of the garden.

"Monsieur Donadieu's here."

"I'm coming."

The women's voices rang out in the crystalline air. A door was opened on his left and Donadieu stepped into a parlour lit only by the narrow lines of light creeping in between the slats of a Venetian blind. In the semi-darkness nothing could be clearly seen except some portraits on the walls.

"Please excuse me, Monsieur Donadieu. I must look a sight! I was busy in the kitchen."

He had crossed two oceans in her company without ever noticing, as now, that her skin had a warm, golden glow, like the bloom of a ripe apricot. She had little on under the thin, clinging wrapper, and he could see tiny beads of perspiration amongst the light yellow down on the back of her neck.

"Do sit down. Won't you have something to drink?"

"Thanks. I'd like a glass of water."

"Oh, do have something else. We've some quite nice wine."

She made a fuss of him because he was "Monsieur Donadieu," but all the time kept glancing at him curiously, because he was also "the banana tourist from the waterfall."

"Dad's out just now. He's gone on his bicycle to some village or other—I forget which. You want to see him, I suppose?"

He felt sure that in one of the adjoining rooms that worthy matron, the girl's mother, whose arms were muscular as a man's, was washing her hands, changing her apron. At last she appeared, redolent of soap.

"What! You haven't given Monsieur Donadieu a glass of wine?"

"He said he'd rather have water."

"You've changed a good deal, Monsieur Donadieu. Lost weight, for one thing. ..."

One was no longer in Tahiti; here even the air seemed different. The Nicous imported their own atmosphere wherever they settled; the atmosphere of a French provincial home, impregnated with a smell of stew, soap and well-polished leather. In the background was a little kitchen, the hub of domestic activity, with aluminium saucepans, a kettle simmering on the hob, a potato-parer lying on the blue-and-white-check oilcloth covering a deal table. And Nicou, with his boisterous bonhomie, his hearty welcome for every visitor, set the tone of the household.

"I've just had a notice from the authorities to report here; that's why I've come," Donadieu explained uncomfortably. He was planted on a chair between the two women, who couldn't think of anything more to say.

"Oh, I know what it is!" the girl exclaimed. "It's the order that came in from the Army people last week. All French subjects have to report, so Dad told me."

Her mother seemed to come to an abrupt decision. She got up and began to move towards the kitchen, saying:

"I hope you'll give us the pleasure of your company at lunch, Monsieur Donadieu. Yes, you really must. It won't be anything much, I'm afraid, but I'd like you to sample one of my stews. My husband swears by them. But of course the meat here isn't like what we're used to, is it? . . . Annie, will you entertain Monsieur Donadieu while I'm busy in the kitchen? You might show him round the garden."

A garden on which the Nicous prided themselves, for it was an exact replica of the kitchen-gardens one sees in the French provinces, trim and strictly utilitarian—but for a few tropical flowers whose exuberance it had been impossible to tame.

"Dad's worked so hard at it. When we came it was a regular wilderness. . . . Aren't those peas doing nicely? I really think we shall have some melons in a fortnight."

To complete the picture there was a small shanty set back against the hedge with a path leading up to it, and a heart-shaped opening in the wooden door.

The police-officer returned, and on hearing from his wife that there was a visitor went to his room for a wash before showing up.

"Good morning, Monsieur Donadieu. So you've looked us up at last. It took a government order to bring you in, though. Otherwise I don't suppose we should have had the pleasure, though you're only a half-day's march away. . . . What ever do you find to do with yourself up on that cliff, from morn till night?"

It was three before Donadieu was able to start back. They had lunched in the kitchen, where the pattern of the wallpaper imitated Delft tiling. Mme Nicou kept moving to and fro between the table and the range.

"Don't take any notice of me. I'm used to having my meal after everyone else has finished."

On at least two occasions Nicou had glanced, first at Donadieu,

then at his daughter, and one could guess what was in his mind. Meanwhile he did his best to make the young man feel at ease.

"You've nothing to worry about. It's an order which has just come in from Paris, to take a census of the men of military age in Tahiti. A mere formality—Won't you have a cigar ? No ? Of course—I'd forgotten you don't smoke. And you don't drink either. Well, there's no denying you're a queer one ..."

His manner was still courteous, almost deferential, but one could detect an undertone of familiarity that had been absent when they talked on board ship.

"Aren't you getting bored, living all by yourself in the wilds? But perhaps you aren't so lonely as all that. Of course I don't want to pry into your secrets...."

Whereat Annie promptly blushed—it was as if she did it to order—while Mme Nicou pretended to scold her husband.

"Don't pester him like that. Monsieur Donadieu's old enough to know what suits him best."

"Maybe, but, if it isn't presuming, I'd like to give him a word of advice—which he may find helpful one of these days. I don't set up to be a well-educated man, but I've kept my eyes and ears open, and I know a good deal of the world. Monsieur Donadieu here comes of a very good family, of course—but things today ain't like they used to be. There's precious little one can be sure of nowadays, and lots of people, who seem quite well off, find themselves without a penny overnight. Well, there's one kind of job you can depend on, and only one, and that's a job in government service. For one thing, there's a pension to look forward to, which means that one can end one's days in reasonable comfort."

Donadieu listened patiently to this harangue. He made a vague gesture of assent, and regretted it a moment later, for he caught a timid gleam of hope in Annie's ingenuous eyes. And, when the meal ended, he was embarrassingly conscious that both Nicou and his wife, after a long look at their daughter, then at him, were thinking:

"After all, why not ?"

And now, as he took long strides along the road towards the waterfall, he could picture mother and daughter whispering to-

gether, and Annie blushing again—she blushed rather prettily—and murmuring:

"Do you really think . . . ?"

He was done in, mentally no less than physically, and he even caught himself thinking at one moment that Nicou's establishment was rather like that of Mrs Goudie's, where he had been so happy.

There, too, was that atmosphere of somewhat heavy-handed welcome, kind intentions and almost aggressive good-humour, and, above all, the peace of mind which comes of knowing that the outside world, with its frets and fevers, cannot invade a kitchen or a parlour in which no one ever dreams of altering the position of a portrait, even of a chair.

When he was back at the ribbon of sand linking the peninsula with the island, he halted for the first time. Bathed in sunlight, an empty canoe floated on the glassy surface of the lagoon, and it was some time before he made out a man's head and shoulders emerging from the water. The fisherman had a small spear between his teeth; his eyes were fixed on the blue depths below as he trod water. Suddenly he dived, tracking a fish to its lair in a nook of coral, and for quite two minutes nothing was visible but the canoe rocking gently *in* the sunlight. Then the head bobbed up again, followed by glossy brown shoulders and an arm holding the spear, on which a fish was now impaled. With a deft jerk the swimmer tossed it off the spear-point into the well of the canoe.

Donadieu was envying the man's dexterity as he walked on. That was what he'd come here for: to learn to spear fish under water, to lead a simple animal life, at one with Nature; the life prefigured in legends of a golden age.

The taste of Mme Nicou's onion stew still lingered on his palate, and he remembered Annie's shameless glances, while he was eating. For they *were* shameless—almost brazenly so. And he felt sure that, with a little encouragement, her father and mother would have suggested she should take him for a walk to show him the country, and, once they were out of sight, exchanged knowing smiles.

"Call her 'Annie.' It sounds so funny, hearing you say 'Madoiselle' to her." The policeman had said this during lunch, and,

when his guest was leaving, had given him friendly little pats on the shoulder. "Mind you come back and see us again, now that you know the way. You'll always find a place ready for you at our table. It ain't good for a young chap like you to live cut off from everybody. No, indeed it ain't, and I know what I'm talking about."

Donadieu felt like shedding tears, the tears of a child who has been scolded by an elder. Already the mountain on whose flank his hut was perched had come into sight, and, against the glowing sky, it looked black, unfriendly. Presently that man whom he had watched spearing fish would be going to his home, changing into white clothes, and settling down to eat the fish to the sound of a gramophone. When the meal was over he would squat on his threshold and watch the coming of night, while the village dogs frolicked on the dusty road.

Donadieu was aching in every limb, and he made slow progress on the last stage of his journey. The motor 'bus passed again, coming back from Papeete. Most of the passengers were the same as those of the morning, and on catching sight of him they burst into the old refrain:

"Please, Mister Frenchman ..."

There was now a guitar-player with them, and the girls were wearing garlands of tiare. Such outings to the capital were great events, and they always came back laden with parcels containing gaudy treasure-trove from the bazaar.

"Oh, naughty Mister Frenchman, we *are* ashamed of you!"

Meanwhile Nicou, no doubt, his braces dangling on his khaki trousers, was digging in his garden, puffing luxuriously at his pipe. Annie was washing up, and Donadieu felt pretty sure that she was humming some sentimental ballad, thinking of him. . . . Yet he was determined never to set foot again in that house, unless another official summons left him no choice.

As he approached the path leading up the cliff, the noise of the waterfall grew louder, echoing in his ears like a trite, meaningless refrain, and the wraith of the "Standing Stiff" hovered again before his eyes. Feeling strangely reluctant to go back to the hut, he sat down on the edge of the lagoon. The meal at Nicou's had cut his

appetite effectively, and there was no need to fish. A drink of coconut-milk before he went to sleep would suffice.

The sun was setting behind Morea, the long island lying off Tahiti, which Donadieu had had in view all day. Once it had occurred to him that perhaps over there he would find what he was seeking. Vain hope! There, too, were villages, cars, a gendarme like Nicou. He had even learnt that the natives had started a Rugby football team, which had good chances of winning the Islands Cup.

Perhaps that scantily dressed American woman was still at the *Hotel des Iles*. The tourist season was now in full swing, and the small bungalows must be full of people who sun-bathed all day in pareus and spent their evenings learning the ukulele. And at the *Relais des Meridiens* . . .

For an hour or more he had been trying not to think of the *Relais*, but now there was no keeping his mind off it. When he was fourteen and went to Confession he used to murmur, with awkward haste: "Father, I confess to having had sinful thoughts."

And now the *Relais des Meridiens* came into that category. Not so much because of Tamatea as owing to another temptation, far more insidious—the temptation of sitting in a corner of the restaurant and listening, through the buzz of the electric fans, to the noises and the talk; of calling the Chinaman and ordering a drink; then slothfully, weakly, going up the stairs, opening a door and letting himself slump on to a bed, bemused by the warm twilight of the room and the pungent smells welling up from the restaurant, veined with a faint odour of women. . . .

"Good evening, everyone." Raphael gave perfunctory handshakes round the room, went up to the bar-counter, and poured himself out a drink. For a while nobody said anything; there wasn't anything to say. At last Raphael yawned and asked: "Hasn't Joe come yet?"

"He's at the Club."

"Oh, is he?"

They, too, could see through the windows the sun going down in a red blaze behind Morea, but they paid little or no attention to it. For them the night did not mean a sleepless vigil amongst the furtive rustlings of animals and insects, with the ghost of a dead

skipper for company, its features twisted in the throes of an un-solaced death.

After another silence Raphael spoke again.

"By the way, that chap Donadieu went to the peninsula this morning."

"What for?"

"To report to the police—about his military service, you know."

The subject interested no one, and a moment later they were talking of something else.

For two days the heat had been oppressive, the sea-line banked with storm-clouds. Raphael mopped his cheeks as he sank heavily into a chair in the corner of the restaurant, beside Tamatea, who was painting her toe-nails with a camel's-hair brush.

"I've a bit of news for you. Your Tarzan friend has been seen about these last few days. Or perhaps you knew?"

Her "Tarzan friend" was, of course, Donadieu. She had told Hina what happened in his hut, and the others never missed a chance of teasing her about it.

"The first time," Raphael continued, "he got as far as the outskirts of Punaauia, but turned back without entering the village."

"Most likely he'd something to buy at the Chinaman's," she suggested.

"It can't have been that, because he didn't go to the Chinaman's store, and he didn't speak to anyone. He just hung round the village, like a child outside a sweetshop."

"That's enough about him." Tamatea was still squatting on the floor, putting the final touches with her brush. "Let's talk of something else."

"Wait! I haven't done. The second time he came right into Punaauia, crossed the village and turned back."

"Why shouldn't he? Anyhow, it's no business of yours, what he does or doesn't do."

"The headman saw him, and Donadieu waved his hand to him from a distance, embarrassed-like, so he told me."

"Yes? And what then?"

"What then? I'll tell you. Next day he started out again and

came along the road to within three miles of Papeete. You see what that means, don't you? He's drifting back, little by little. Each time he plucks up a bit more courage, and one of these days you'll see him coming into town."

"And you're as pleased as Punch about it, aren't you?"

"Don't talk such rubbish!"

"It's not rubbish! You've got your knife into him for some reason, and—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"And Joe's just as bad. Really, one would think he'd done something to you."

"He hasn't done anything—but I can't help being amused to see him coming back like this, with his tail between his legs. In a week's time he'll be here, staying in one of the rooms at this hotel. I wouldn't mind betting on it."

"What'll you bet?"

"A bottle of the best. I bet you a bottle of fizz that he'll be with us having drinks at this bar, and making a pass at Hina, bless her little heart!"

"Why Hina?"

"You don't suppose he'll want you all the time, do you? No, he'll ring the changes, like we all do; with Hina one night, Angele another, and sometimes with a stray girl who blows in, just for a bit of variety."

"Do you think everyone's like you?"

"Well? Will you take that bet?"

"No," she said sulkily, and began examining her other foot.

Maniere, who so far had said nothing, gave a grunt, like someone who has been following up a private train of thought, and murmured:

"I wonder if there'll be a lot of people on the boat."

For a boat was due in. Nearly six weeks had passed without one, and the monotony of seeing no new faces was beginning to tell on everybody's nerves.

"I hear the Colonial Commissioner is on board," Raphael remarked. "And that means some headaches for our exalted friend." **The reason being that various** delinquencies had, been alleged

no

against the Governor, who had retaliated by counter-charges against the Mayor and Council.

At the Colonial Club, Joe was saying as he finished his final drink of the evening:

"What can I do about it, anyhow? The only defence I can put up is that he was *non compos* when he did it. Our old friend, the brain-storm. I'll read out what he said to the examining magistrate; that should convince them that the man's not all there."

M. Moutonnet was relieved by the coming of the High Commissioner for the Colonies, whom he proposed to sound discreetly as to the best line to take in conducting the case against Captain Lagre. Judge Isnard kept casting wistful glances at Mme Bon, whose thoughts were elsewhere.

"Dr Cosson says he has something wrong with his heart," Moutonnet remarked.

"Yes? What is it?"

"Oh, I don't know exactly. I'm only repeating what I was told. But it might—er—simplify matters if something happened to him before the case comes on. . . . How much do I owe you, Madame Bon?"

"It's been paid."

"Again!"

Isnard drummed on the table with his fingers, while the Public Prosecutor and Judge exchanged amenities in the doorway.

"After you." "No, no, you go first."

On board the boat coming from France, the passengers were beginning to strap up their luggage and settle bar-bills.

VIII

HE reminded one of those shy young men one sometimes sees waiting for a tram at the corner of the street, so painfully aware that others' eyes are on them that they have an almost guilty air. There was a patch of shadow where he stood, in shorts that reached barely half-way to his knees, and a khaki shirt that he had washed,

but which badly needed ironing. On the previous evening he had cut his hair as best he could, leaving it the same length all over—behind, in front and on the sides—and it had the appearance of a music-hall comedian's wig.

He was gazing fixedly down the road, towards the left. Like a traveller obsessed by the fear of missing his train, he had set out far too early. Indeed, he had risen long before sunrise, and seen the whole slow rite of daybreak, beginning from the darkest moment when the sky looked as if there could never be any dawn again.

When about to start, he had wondered whether or not to take his knapsack. Anyhow, not his suitcase. The knapsack would be ample, as he proposed to spend no more than a day at Papeete—well, at most two days.

No, he wasn't losing heart; still less playing false to his ideal. But, for one thing, his toothbrush was worn out and he could not bear the feel of dirty teeth. Also, he had used up his supply of ammonia, his only remedy for insect stings. And really, what objection could there be to his going to have a glimpse, just a casual glimpse, of what people like Raphael called "civilized life" ?

When at last he heard the rumble of the approaching 'bus, he felt a thrill of excitement, and reproached himself for it. He held out his arm to signal to the driver, and now it was a still greater effort to seem at ease; all the passengers were staring at him. Some moments passed before he ventured to raise his eyes and look at his neighbours. Always the thought was running in his head: Do they suppose I couldn't stick it any longer and I'm leaving for good, or do they realize I'm only going into town for some necessary shopping ?

The first thing he saw on looking up was a sleek brown face split in a wide, good-humoured grin. On his left was another display of dazzlingly white teeth, and a very tall Kanaka seated in front was vainly trying to conceal his laughter. In fact, all were either laughing outright or trying not to laugh, and Donadieu was the focus of their merriment. Quite a number of these people had been in the 'bus on the morning when it halted at the waterfall and the driver sounded his horn for a good five minutes, and one of them started crooning:

"Oh, Mister Frenchman, we *are* ashamed of you!"

His neighbour gave a shrill cackle and, once started, went on laughing till the tears rolled down his cheeks, making comical grimaces as he struggled to recover self-control.

"Oh, Mister Frenchman . . ."

Donadieu, who did not know a word of the native language, feigned unconcern. At the next village three more people boarded the 'bus, one of them a woman in a pink silk dress and white cotton gloves, who was evidently going to some ceremony. All the passengers looked plump, well-fed; had big dark eyes and jet-black hair. The women were dressed in bright colours, some in their Sunday best and lavishly besprinkled with eau-de-Cologne, others—those with market-bags—in cotton dresses.

"We've brought you a nice *billet-doux*. . . ."

When Donadieu saw again the first villas on the outskirts of the town, then the big square in front of Government House, it was like revisiting some familiar scene of childhood. He caught himself looking out eagerly, to his left, for the red steeple of the Protestant Church, and, sure enough, there it was! A moment later they were in the colourful confusion of the bazaar.

He alighted from the 'bus with careful dignity. Though in his ways of dressing and living he might flout public opinion, he had never been able to school himself to indifference. Whenever he came in actual contact with anyone—even a railway guard or a cafe waiter—invariably he felt a qualm of anxiety and wondered: What impression am I making? What can he think of me?

Native women, squatting beside little mounds of fruit and vegetables, laughed and shouted to him, and he wished he understood what they were saying and what they made of him. Was their laughter friendly or derisive? Could they guess that he was so much affected by the noise and bustle of the market that he hardly knew what he was doing? Or suspect that he was deliberately rubbing shoulders with the crowd; **that**, like a dog nosing its master's legs, he was eagerly sniffing **the** air, **and** feasting his eyes on the scene before him?

The shops round the bazaar were mostly owned by Chinamen, and Donadieu noticed one particularly—or, rather, smelt it, **for it**

was the fumes of steaming coffee and warm *brioche*s that lured him there. For some reason, he hadn't expected *café au lait* and *brioche*s to be forthcoming at Papeete. Walking to the entrance, he saw small tables dotted about a dimly lighted room, white china mugs, and some brown matrons eating and drinking. But did the Chinese boy in attendance understand French? Anyhow, it was worth trying.

"Give me a *café au lait* and some *brioche*s, please." Then he changed his mind; a whiff of hot chocolate had assailed his nostrils. "Wait! Can you give me a cup of chocolate?"

"Yes, Moosoo."

"Then I'll have a cup of chocolate instead."

He stretched his legs under the table. It was all he could do to repress a smile of childish satisfaction at the treat in store; a mug of chocolate and some of those appetizing buns.

Really, what he should have done was to fix up some sort of . . . of programme. He preferred this neutral term to its crude alternative: a compromise. For instance, he could make a practice of coming to Papeete once a week; there could be no possible harm in that, and it would give him an opportunity of buying some of the oddments which make camping out less irksome; after which, of course, he would return to his eyrie for the next six days.

The trouble was, that to carry out this programme money was needed. For the present all was well, but one day his funds would run out, and what then? There was no means of earning money while he lived near the waterfall, or, for that matter, anywhere else, unless he took a "job." It wasn't enough, learning how to spear fish, or to cultivate a patch of land. Here he was up against the same difficulty as everywhere else; one had to have some calling, like the Chinamen who kept grocery shops or roamed the country in carts, selling their wares; or like that old Austrian who had set up at Punaauia as a "Gents' Tailor."

Or one could be a gendarme, or an employee—clerk in an office, for instance.

Well, he could think all that out later; meanwhile he was thoroughly enjoying himself as he dipped his *brioche* in the chocolate and took large bites of the sour-sweet, doughy pith. He had always

had a good appetite, and made no secret of it. In the old days at Big Hole City, motherly Mrs Goudie seldom failed to keep a second helping of pudding in reserve for him.

Suddenly a long-drawn stridence filled the air, jolting him out of his reverie. It was a ship's siren and, leaning forward, he saw, above the housetops and the trees, the black, red-banded funnel of a steamer. But what could that matter to him . . . ?

"Some more *brioches*, please."

He regretted yielding to his appetite, but only because of the Chinese boy, who probably drew the conclusion that he'd had nothing to eat for several days.

"And another cup of chocolate."

The pungent, sugary drink gave him a comfortable glow, "like a warm bath inside," as he used to say when he was small, and he went on eating *in* a pleasant coma of no thoughts, letting his gaze roam over the moving, chattering crowd, the fish and fruit, the play of shade and colour bathed in sunbeams that, too, seemed unable to keep still.

"What do I owe you ?"

His stomach was distended, his mouth gummed up, but all the same he felt in wonderful form, and it struck him he might as well buy some more *brioches* from the Chinaman before leaving. As he walked away he heard an unfamiliar sound, the jingle of coins in his pocket, and he decided to postpone thinking out his problems for yet awhile. Indeed, he was in no mood to think to any purpose. At every turn some new detail caught his eye, forced him to stop and gape with wonder; often some quite simple, trivial detail, whose fascination lay only in its unexpectedness.

For instance, walking through the part of the bazaar reserved for fruit and vegetables, he observed an elderly European with a trim white beard, walking very slowly with a lady on his arm; they seemed to be in their sixties, and one could see their devotion to each other—they might have posed for a French Darby and Joan—as they confabulated smilingly before deciding what to buy, then called up a native boy who was following them and pointed to the fruit, which he stowed away in a basket.

Then there was the moving splash of vivid red made by the dress

of a plump brown girl; a close-fitting dress that, round the loins, stretched almost to breaking-point at every step, while below it the sinewy legs glowed like burnished bronze, and now and again one had glimpses of the yellowish-pink flesh of her soles.

Up there, by the waterfall, when Donadieu looked at his surroundings, he felt crushed by their immensity. Here, however, things were scaled down to man's measure; prettiness in a hundred forms, a host of charming fugitive impressions, replaced the grave beauty of the mountain-side.

At a street corner he came on a group of English visitors, equipped with the paraphernalia of the globe-trotter: cameras and field-glasses, panama hats and white umbrellas. For some reason the encounter thrilled him, and he even slowed down to hear what they were saying. All he caught was:

"How much did your bar-bill come to?"

"The best part of a tenner; but then I'd had

These people had just landed, and he wondered if it was off one of the Sydney-San Francisco liners or a French boat.

Donadieu had no reason whatever for wanting to discover which. But deliberately he turned towards the wharf, out of a sort of bravado. And a similar feeling kept him smiling as he walked, like someone well pleased with life and with himself.

Some more tourists passed, in a car; amongst them a girl in white who turned back to stare at him, and he thought: Probably she takes me for a native!

A short walk brought him to the sea-front, with its palm beach and the liner moored at the quay, towering above the Customs sheds and all the houses of the town. There was the usual swarm of residents and curio-sellers, with passengers elbowing their way through and stepping into taxis.

He fell to picturing the first steamer that had made Tahiti, looming up out of the silvery haze of sea and sky, to the wonder of the natives; then the series of larger and still larger ships, the hundreds and thousands of people coming from all parts of the world to this South Seas island, where the native blood was growing ever more diluted with that of whites of every nationality.

What had become of all those people? Many had stayed, and

somewhere on the island there must be a cemetery with the graves of Europeans who had left their bones here.

The *Relais des Meridiem* was near by, less than a hundred yards away, but he resolutely turned his back on it. Nor would he approach the ship. Already he had come too close; he could hear a woman saying:

"I don't know. Take me to an hotel."

"The *Hotel des Iles* ?"

"Yes, I expect that will do."

"Have you any heavy luggage ?"

No.

The woman, who looked about sixty and was alone, stepped into a taxi with a sigh of relief. She was stout and seemed to feel the heat, especially when hemmed in by the crowd on the landing-stage. She was wearing a dark silk dress, an old-fashioned hat, a gold locket pinned to her blouse. Her first impressions of Tahiti seemed at once sorrowful and hostile.

Donadieu wondered what time it was; for some weeks his watch had been out of action, but at the waterfall that had no importance. Just then he did something that he hadn't done for ages, and which made him smile; he belched. No doubt the Chinaman's chocolate was responsible.

The shop-windows were full of the objects dear to tourists: wooden statuettes, carved coconuts, slabs of highly polished mother-o'-pearl, shell necklaces and so forth.

Presently he came on a little white handcart blazoned "*Ice-Cream*" doing a busy trade with natives of all ages. To escape from the glare and heat he turned left into a shady street, then left again. Here he was surprised to see some twenty or thirty people ahead of him, advancing in twos and threes, like church-goers on their way to Mass.

Just in front was a high wall with five or six cars drawn up in its shade. Coming closer, he noticed that everyone was turning off here into a sort of park, behind which stood a big red-brick building. It seemed to be a barracks; on each side of the wrought-iron entrance gate was a gun, a native soldier stood in a sentry-box, and other soldiers could be seen lounging on the grass under the trees.

Donadieu was puzzled. What could all these women—smartly dressed by local standards—want to do in the barracks ? More and more were coming, and amongst them he observed two girls he had seen at the *Relais des Meridiens*.

He went up to the sentry.

"What's happening?"

The man may or may not have understood; probably the latter. Grinning, he pointed to the end of the central courtyard.

Though slightly worried by the thought that he might be going somewhere where he was not wanted, Donadieu yielded to his curiosity and followed the others. They went up an iron staircase clamped to the outside wall of the building, then along a verandah extending its full length. Most of the doors were open and one could see clerks at work and rows of file-cases, and, in some offices, the flash of typewriters came from the shadowy interior.

Then the glimpse of a man in a lawyer's black gown turning in at one of the doors made it clear to Donadieu that these were the Law Courts, and presently he came up against a policeman who asked:

"Have you an admission card ?"

An admission card ? No."

"That way, then."

After passing through the entrance to which the man had pointed, and pressing forward as far as he could, Donadieu found himself wedged between a native's naked back and the flagging breasts of an elderly woman. Her sleeves were sticking to her arms, and the air reeked of sweat. There were some fifty people crowded into a space capable of holding twenty at most in comfort, and whenever anyone stirred, a ripple traversed the serried mass. In front was a roped-off space, with benches and a few chairs; the Europeans occupying these were greeting each other with smiles and chattering amongst themselves. Ticket-holders, evidently!

Beyond them were three raised platforms: a large one flanked by two smaller ones. The air was loud with flies, and now and again one would settle on a brown, sweating face. . . .

Justice Isnard was wearing only trousers and a light vest under his red robes; indeed, one had only to look at his neck to see he had

no shirt or collar on. He was feeling the heat, and sucking the peppermint drops that his wife had sent round to him in his chambers behind the bench.

"Will he be coming to the trial?" he nervously enquired of the Chief Secretary, who had just entered the office.

"Not till the afternoon, anyhow. He's doing an inspection of the Secretariat this morning."

"Has he—er—said anything?"

What shocking mismanagement, the Judge was thinking, to have fixed the Lagre trial for the very day a boat came in—especially a boat on which the High Commissioner was travelling! It brought the proceedings under the spotlight of publicity, which was the last thing wanted in such a case. He had toyed with the thought of going to the boat to interview the Commissioner before he came on shore, but, on consideration, it seemed wiser to refrain. Thank goodness, the Chief Secretary had promised to sound the great man as to his views on the Lagre case, and to let him know them in good time.

"Look here, Isnard! The best thing you can do is to make the opening formalities drag on, so that the case doesn't really start till after the luncheon interval."

"Very well, I'll see that's done. . . . Are there many people in court?"

"Yes. I hear the place is packed already."

Like an actor peeping through a spy-hole in the curtain, Isnard opened the door of his office a cautious inch and scanned the crowd. He saw his wife in the front row, and Tamatea and Hina, in their best dresses, with gloves and hats, two rows behind. Maniere, who was with them, was, for once, wearing a tie, and somehow gave the impression that he had mainly come to keep an eye on the two girls who lived at his hotel.

"Shall we make a start?" The Public Prosecutor had just come into the Judge's room, gowned and banded.

"Is everybody ready?"

"I believe so."

"**What** about Joe Beaudoin?"

"**Present, sir!**" Joe put **his head in**, grinning, **through** the

doorway. "And at Your Honour's orders!" He extracted a flask from a pocket under his gown and took a pull at it.

"What's that?" promptly asked Moutonnet, eager as a boy who has just seen a schoolfellow in possession of some new gadget and must know what it is.

"Oh, nothing exciting. Just some lemon-juice and water with a dash of rum."

"I've never tried it. Is it good?"

"It quenches thirst, anyhow. Maniere will fix up a bottle for you, if you like, for this afternoon. One's only got to stoop and have a nip now and then. Nobody can spot what you're up to, once you know the trick."

Isnard had sent for his bench clerk, a half-caste from Martinique who had recently come to Tahiti. Though grotesquely fat, he always wore a melancholy air; he claimed to have started life as a schoolmaster.

"You understand?" the Judge said. "You must read out the charge in full, very slowly. Time it to last forty minutes."

"And suppose I can't hit off the forty minutes?"

"Oh, a minute or two one way or the other won't matter."

The half-caste put back his watch to the hour, deciding to place it on his desk and keep an eye on it as he read the charge.

"Well, gentlemen, shall we make a move? Where are the assessors? Monsieur Dupain! Monsieur Laroche!"

In Tahiti there are no juries, and the verdict is given by the trying Judge, sitting with two assessors.

"The accused is here, I suppose?"

"Yes. I saw him in Laroche's office. He's being kept there."

"How's he looking?"

"Just as usual."

"Right! . . . Well, let them know I'm ready."

There was no proper bell, but an elderly police-officer banged the floor with a stick—which did quite as well. Then he shouted:

"Stand up, there! The Judge is entering."

The courtroom lacked dignity; for one thing, it was much too small, and the public were allowed far too near the bench. Isnard had his wife immediately in front, not more than seven feet away,

and, as if this were not enough, **she** kept making signs, whose meaning he completely failed to interpret. At first he supposed he must have a smut on his face, and he ran his handkerchief over it. But the signs went on. What could the woman mean? Anyhow, it was time to start.

"Guard, bring in the prisoner."

Lagre was in uniform. He had had himself shaved, and his cheeks were fatter than at the time of his arrest. But it was the unhealthy pink-and-white plumpness of a man used to the open air who has perforce been leading a cloistered life. His eyes, too, seemed to have grown larger and, in so doing, lost the keenness characteristic of the seafaring man. Indeed, at first sight he gave the impression of being half dazed, and so much abashed by his surroundings that he dared not look anyone in the face. A chair was provided for him, and he lowered himself slowly on to it.

Beaudoin, who had greeted Tamatea and Hina with a wave of his hand, got up and spoke in his client's ear. Not that he had anything particular to impart, but it seemed best to let the public know, at the outset, his function at the trial.

"There'll be nothing much at this morning's hearing," he whispered.

And Lagre murmured absently :

"Thanks."

Isnard was still wondering what his wife was trying so persistently to convey to him. At last she pointed to a window on his left, and he understood. A sunbeam was entering in such a way as to make a patch of glowing yellow on the Judge's cheek.

He shifted his position and called his clerk, who summoned a policeman. For some minutes everyone was speculating excitedly as to the cause of the delay—which involved no more than the adjustment of a curtain. The trouble was that, to move it, a longish **rod** was required, and none could be found in the courtroom. After waiting for a moment, the Judge coughed and spoke.

"Prisoner, stand up! Your name is Lagre; Ferdinand Desire Hubert Lagre. Is that correct?"

Yes, sir.

The Judge turned to the Prosecutor, who gravely nodded.

"Yes, Your Honour."

"You were born at Jonsac in the Charente District, and your age is fifty-seven. You are a married man with a family."

"Yes, Your Honour."

There came an interruption. The native policeman had at last procured a pole and, standing on a chair, was trying to reach the curtain-rings. During the lull that ensued everyone could hear words of command echoing in the courtyard where a company was being drilled:

"Left-Right. Left-Right. Halt."

"The Clerk of the Court will now read out to you the charge, after which evidence will be taken. . . . What is happening there?"

A confused murmur at the far end of the courtroom had attracted the Judge's attention. It came from the mass of bodies into which Donadieu was wedged.

"I must warn the public," the Judge said severely, "that no sort of demonstration will be permitted. I shall not hesitate to clear the Court if necessary." Turning to an Inspector of Police, he added: "Go and see what it is."

Then he took a lozenge from his pocket and put it into his mouth.

There was ample time in hand and everyone could follow up the train of his own thoughts, except the Court Clerk, who was reading out the charge, giving each word its full weight, and pausing frequently to cast an anxious glance at his watch. Now and again he would feel the thickness of the sheaf of papers remaining in his hand, to make sure enough remained to last out the forty minutes.

Joe Beaudoin was the first to make a move, not even troubling to do it quietly. But that made no difference; the rigmarole that was being read out had no interest for the public. He went to the benches reserved for ticket-holders and, bending over Tamatea, started talking to her.

Isnard and Moutonnet followed him with their eyes and, to while away the time, tried to catch what he was saying to the girl.

"Your wild man of the woods is here," Joe informed her with a wink. "At the back."

"My wild man? Who do you mean?"

"Why, Donadieu, of course. He's jammed amongst the natives, and I don't envy him."

She glanced over her shoulder, but failed to discover him; then half rose from her seat so as to see over the heads of those immediately behind. Isnard looked in the same direction; so did Moutonnet. Then they exchanged glances. The Judge wrote on a slip of paper: "*That is the young man we were talking about; the one the Governor's interested in.*"

He called a police-officer, and the man took the note to the Prosecutor, who nodded to show that he understood.

Mme Isnard could be seen fidgeting in the front row, exasperated by her ignorance of what was going on.

Tired of staring at the floor, the prisoner was now looking straight in front of him; presently he turned his head and gazed at the public, but without real interest—simply because he had nothing better to do.

"How about asking him to lunch?" Joe suggested.

"Right-o," said Tamatea.

Hina bent towards her and asked :

"What's up?"

"It's that Donadieu boy. He's there at the back. Joe's going to ask him to lunch."

A moment later, while the Clerk was still reading, Joe slipped out by a side door, went down a passage, and re-entered the courtroom from the door at the back, by which the general public had been admitted.

"Hi there!"

Donadieu failed to hear; he alone of all those present was listening eagerly to what was being read out, not missing a word. Finally the man beside him gave him a nudge and, looking round, he saw the lawyer beckoning. Surprised and slightly perturbed, he forced his way through the mass of sweating bodies to the door.

"You must be dreadfully uncomfortable here. Come along with me. I'll find you a seat."

"What does he say?"

"Who?"

"Captain Lagre."

" Oh, one can't get anything out of him. He seems quite dazed. There's no hurry; we've time to smoke a cigarette. The Clerk of the Court has orders to make it last out forty minutes at least."

" I don't follow."

"It's because the trial proper mustn't start until this afternoon. There are special reasons for that. . . . Look here, old chap, will you come and have lunch with me at the *Relais* ? Yes, do. Tamatea and all the others will be there. Then we'll come back here together."

They were in the passage, and Donadieu was itching to return to the courtroom. He did not wish to miss anything of the drama that was being enacted there, and that he alone, apparently—regarded as a tragedy. Never had his cheeks been so flushed as when, shepherded by Joe, he entered by the side door and went to the seat pointed out to him, next to Tamatea. He had an absurd impression, not only that he was disturbing the course of justice, but also that he was failing in respect towards the man whose life was at stake and at whom he hardly dared to look.

"He seems quite flattened out," the lawyer had said. " As if he'd lost his wits altogether."

Donadieu, however, felt sure that this was not the case, and he kept trying to understand, to put himself in the place of the man standing there, only a few feet in front of him, isolated from the outside world not so much by the rails of the dock as by a barrier of incomprehension.

For, when all was said and done, it was he, and he only, who had killed a fellow-man. He alone could know what it really meant, and how little to the point were all these tedious formalities and long-winded phrases.

"Hullo ? How are you ?" Tamatea was leaning towards him, touching his hand. "I must say you took your time about it; coming back, I mean."

Lagre was looking at them, and one had a feeling that he knew what the girl was saying, though his face was quite expressionless. It was impossible even to be sure if he had recognized Donadieu. Joe, who was getting bored, rose and went to his client, and could be seen offering him a drink from his bottle of rum and lemon-juice.

Lagre shook his head. Drops of sweat were trickling down the

cheeks of the assessor seated on the right. He was a youngish, red-faced man, with something so frankly lecherous in his gaze that it made one feel embarrassed.

The Prosecutor scribbled on a slip of paper and had it taken by a policeman to the bench. "*I suggest the Court adjourns after the written depositions have been read. Then we can go together to G. H.*"

Isnard nodded. Meanwhile the Clerk was reading steadily, lingering on each word, for, despite his efforts, he was ahead of time.

"At this moment the accused took a revolver from the drawer of desk, with the intention, as he subsequently stated, of. . ."

Lagre mopped his brows.

From the park came the stentorian tones of a sergeant:

"Slope ... arrrms ! ... Order arms!... As you were !"

"... and you stand charged upon this indictment with the wilful murder of the said Henri Clerc.

There was a ripple of Isnard's gown, a premonitory sign that he was about to move. He rose slowly to his feet.

"The Clerk of the Court will now call over the names of the witnesses to be examined. I would point out that, as the principal witnesses are fellow-officers of the prisoner, and the *Ile-d' Oleron* is now somewhere on the high seas, they are unable to attend in person. Their statements have been duly recorded on oath, and these will be read out in court. May I take it that the learned counsel for the defence raises no objection ?"

"None whatever, Your Honour," responded Beaudoin deferentially.

The names of the witnesses were called over.

"Jules Maniere."

"Here, sir."

"Tamatea Aiomava."

"Yes, I'm here."

"I will ask the witnesses to leave the Court and remain in the waiting-room placed at their disposal until they are called in to give evidence."

Maniere held up his hand, like a schoolboy asking permission to leave the room.

"What is it ?" Isnard asked.

"The boat came in this morning. I expect at least fifty customers to lunch."

"Very good. That being so, you can leave for the present. Your evidence will be taken this afternoon. But I must ask you to attend at three punctually."

"Thank you, Monsieur Isnard." Maniere hastily corrected himself. "Your Honour, I should say."

One could hardly believe that behind this exchange of banalities was a man's death, the death of a young fellow of twenty-five, whose body now lay somewhere on the Pacific sea-bed; and it was almost equally difficult to realize that this other man in the prisoner's dock, to whom nobody was paying the least attention, was on trial for his life, or anyhow for his liberty during the remainder of his days.

"Have the witnesses left the court? Good. We will now hear the written statements."

Depositions given by officers of the *Ile-d'Oleron*, by a steward and some members of the crew, and finally that of the captain of the *Ile-de-Re*, were then read out. None of them had any great interest.

Hina and Tamatea having left, Donadieu was almost by himself on the bench in the second row, just in Isnard's line of vision.

The crowd at the back had thinned out; those remaining were showing signs of restlessness, shuffling their feet, coughing, and exchanging remarks in undertones. Now and again the Judge rapped his desk with his pencil and gave them a reproving look, but there was not much sternness in it. He, too, seemed little interested in this part of the proceedings.

Raphael entered, so abruptly that Donadieu swung round to observe him. The Public Works Overseer, who had an agitated air, walked straight to Joe, who got up promptly and went outside with him. They were absent for five or ten minutes, and on their return the lawyer approached the bench and said something to the Judge in a low voice. Isnard, too, looked perturbed and began to stare frowningly at the prisoner.

By now nobody was listening to the depositions that were being read out by the Clerk of the Court. Even he seemed flustered and

was stumbling over his words, while Moutonnet, with whom Joe had had a word, pulled a long face.

Thanks to Mme Isnard, Donadieu learned what it was. She was sitting almost immediately in front of him, and he saw her beckon to the lawyer.

"What's happened ?"

"His wife has just turned up. She landed this morning from the boat."

"Do you think . . . ?"

"We've no idea what her plans are. The Chinaman at the *Hotel des Iles* told Raphael and he came straight here to warn us."

"Do you think *he* knows ?" She pointed to Lagre. But he was almost the only one present in the courtroom who had no inkling of this new development, and he continued gazing straight in front of him with dull, lethargic eyes.

The Clerk droned on. At Government House the extra staff hired for the official luncheon-party were being put through their paces by the butler, and the Governor's wife had only just left the kitchen and gone up to her room to dress.

When he least expected it, Donadieu had a come-back of the chocolate he had drunk, and hastily put his hand to his mouth.

IX

MERELY to say he was in a particularly observant mood would be to understate it. There was something uncanny about the vividness with which Donadieu registered impressions all that day; every sense was keyed up as never in his life before. Though everything was drenched in sunlight, shimmering with heat, each detail stood out as sharply before his eyes as the details in certain Flemish paintings, in which, through an open window, we see as it were a second picture, studded with minute but marvellously clean-cut figures.

Nothing escaped him, and everything stamped itself on his memory. Chinamen look much alike, but never could he mistake another Chinaman for the one who had brought him his chocolate that morning. He remembered the exact appearance of that fat

woman who had laughed so much in the 'bus; even the tiny earrings, like forget-me-nots, that she was wearing.

"How much did your bar-bill come to?"

Those people, too, he would recognize at once if ever they came his way again; also the girl in white who had turned to stare at him as she went by in the car.

And he could have given a full account of the scene in the courtroom, down to the last detail; of Isnard's gestures and grimaces, Joe's comings and goings—he seemed as much at home in court as in the *Relais des Meridiens*—and, finally, Lagre's set face and heavy, brooding stare.

Why had Joe Beaudoin asked him to lunch and even called him "old chap"? Was it merely because the sensation of being in the limelight, a prominent figure at the trial, had put him in a good humour towards the world at large; or was there more behind it? He had been quite pressing. "Yes, yes. You really must have lunch with us. I won't take 'No' for an answer."

The natives had moved out of the courtroom, and now were massed on the verandah, waiting for the resumption of the trial. Accompanied by Raphael, Hina and Tamatea, Donadieu got into the lawyer's car.

The *Relais* restaurant was packed with people, new faces for the most part, passengers from the ship which had just come in and was not leaving till the following morning. None the less, Raphael and Joe shook hands with many of them, and waved greetings to old friends at the other side of the room. One was conscious that Tamatea was a focus of interest and everyone was discussing the trial.

"What a crowd!" Joe grumbled. "We'd have done better to go on board for lunch. But then I wouldn't have had the 'phone. Order for me, please. I'll be back in a moment."

The telephone hung on the kitchen wall, and every word he said was audible in the restaurant.

"Hullo? I want to speak to Monsieur Cande. . . . That you, Cande? What? They're just starting lunch? Oh, you're invited, are you? . . . Yes, I'm listening." There was a longish pause while the man at the other end was talking. Then Joe said; "O.K., I'll

do my best, but it won't be too easy. Yes, you can get me here, at the *Relais*"

It was at this moment that Donadieu felt himself split, as it were, into two personalities. With one of them he observed the crowded scene around him, took stock of every movement, of each remark, even the tone in which it was made; of the play of light and shade on moving forms—while, at the same time, as in dreams, he seemed to stand outside himself and watch this other Donadieu having his meal at a restaurant table.

They were eating fish, served with a strong, peppery sauce. Tamatea asked:

"Didn't you used to get bored, all by yourself up there, beside the waterfall?"

He noted that she employed the past tense, as if taking it for granted that he would never go back. Joe bustled in, looking worried, and Raphael turned to him at once.

"Well, what's the latest from G. H.?"

"They're starting lunch. The Governor has invited Moutonnet and Isnard to meet the High Commissioner, and he wants me to join them for coffee."

One Donadieu was eating heartily; the other was beginning to wax indignant, to prick up his ears, mutter to himself. But this latter Donadieu was neither seen nor heard by anyone. It was the Donadieu that Donadieu would have wished to be.

"That damned old woman," mumbled the lawyer, with his mouth full, "is the snag. They want me to tackle her."

The unseen Donadieu grew more exasperated.

"What they'd really like," the lawyer continued, "is to prevent her coming to court. A white man is on trial, and we don't want any painful scenes, with all those natives looking on. It's bad enough as it is."

He glanced up at the clock. Though it was almost two, he ordered a slice of the joint and some asparagus, a consignment of which had just come in by the boat.

"Ring up the *Hotel des Iles*," he said to Raphael, "and tell her that I'll be coming round to see her presently____Hi there, Maniere! Didn't they bring you any apples this trip?"

Three Chinese boys were in attendance, and *the incessant* chink of glasses and babble of voices brought to mind a suburban cafe on a Whitsunday or an August bank-holiday. When a young man wearing horn-rimmed glasses came up and asked Tamatea if he might photograph her, she smiled consent. Meanwhile Raphael was at the 'phone.

"Yes. Tell her that her husband's counsel will be coming to see her. No, she'd better wait for him at the hotel."

When Raphael came back he was grinning.

"It was a near thing! She was just going to start off to the court."

"She'd have found nobody there, anyhow."

It was shameful—yes, that was the only word for it!—shameful to be sitting here, eating with Tamatea, Raphael and Joe, and merely to listen like a dummy or a dolt too shy to say a word. Why, though inwardly seething with revolt, should Donadieu, the true Donadieu, refrain from uttering the faintest protest? Why was he so ready to let himself sink into this state of sluggish physical well-being, bestial satiety? He was eating meat, and relishing it. He could smell Tamatea's perfume. He knew that apples were coming; they'd appeared already on some of the tables.

And, all the time, he realized exactly what he should have done, and pictured himself, the real Donadieu, rising from his seat, pale with indignation, flinging his challenge at these callous brutes.

"Is it your idea of French justice that, while a case is under trial, the Judge should go and lunch with the Governor and try to find out his wishes as to the verdict? Is it the right thing for the defending counsel to hobnob with the Prosecutor over coffee and liqueurs? And can you explain why the presence of the prisoner's wife—whom you refer to as 'that damned old woman'—should be thought undesirable? Poor Madame Lagre has crossed two oceans to come to her husband's aid. And now you want to exclude her from this trial, in which her husband's liberty, perhaps his life, is at stake!"

Wiping his lips with his napkin, Joe stood up.

"If I'm wanted at the Courthouse, tell them where I've gone."

He gulped down his coffee, standing, and patted Tamatea's shoulder.

"See you presently."

They listened to the sound of his departing car, and Tamatea sighed:

"Poor woman!"

"I asked the captain of the ship about her," Raphael informed them. "It seems she kept on crying all the way out; and, as she persisted in staying in the saloon, that wasn't very cheerful for the other passengers, as you may imagine. She'd sit for hours in the same corner, snuffling away, wiping her eyes, muttering to herself like the old dames one sees praying in churches. Then suddenly she'd give a sort of whimper and dash on to the deck and cry her heart out."

Donadieu was fidgeting in his chair, but he made no move, though he knew he ought to have made one at the same time as Joe. He should have taken a taxi and, by now, been at the *Hotel des lies*, saying:

"I'm young Donadieu. And I'm your son's godfather, as you may remember. It so happens that I know all the dirty work that's going on behind the scenes in connection with this trial. At this very moment they're sitting round a table at Government House, swilling drinks and fixing up between them what the sentence is to be. Your lawyer's letting you down; he's going there too, to get his orders. He isn't even trying to defend his client. It's for you to make a protest and insist on a proper trial while there's still time. . . ."

But he did not stir, and remained seated between Raphael and Tamatea. Though there was an electric fan buzzing just above him, his forehead was moist with sweat. A moment came when he caught himself deliberately picking out the largest, rosiest apple on the dish! Behind him he could hear an Englishman saying to his wife:

"We needn't hurry. There's no chance of the show starting till half-past three at the earliest—so I've been told." He was obviously referring to the afternoon hearing.

Munching an apple, Tamatea remarked:

"Did you notice Madame Isnard ? I couldn't help laughing, it was so funny! She had her back to me, but she knew I was there all right, and I'm positive she gave her husband a nasty look each time he turned my way. I could see her sort of bristle up.

There was not a breath of air outside, not a leaf stirred. The gorgeous beauty of the scene seemed fixed for all time in a calm so trancelike that the shrill call of a bird from the green depths of a flamboyant took one by surprise.

"Well, I think I'll go and have a little nap," Tamatea announced. "I'm that sleepy I can hardly keep my eyes open. Half an hour will do." Her sleeves were sticking to her arms and a line of perspiration showed down the middle of her back. "You coming too, Hina?"

So now only Raphael remained with Donadieu, who was leaning back in his chair, half stupefied by the heavy meal. But his mind was active still; in spirit he was confronting Beaudoin at the *Hotel des Iles*.

"You are counsel for the defence, I believe ? Well, that being so, it is your duty to defend your client. What did you say ? That Lagre's a murderer, that he's killed a young man, and admits it ? Certainly; but that's no reason to make his trial a travesty of justice."

He heard Raphael beside him saying carelessly :

"Ten years; that's what he'll get."

Donadieu kept silent, sighed and took a cup of coffee from the tray the Chinaman held out to him. He caught himself listening to the two girls' footsteps overhead, a creak of mattress springs, and pictured them lying on their beds, their naked bodies dappled by the light creeping in through the Venetians. Sweat was steaming off them, their eyes were closed, daydreams light as summer clouds drifting across their minds. Now and then they would exchange some desultory remarks.

"Think he'll stay, now that he's come back ?"

"Of course he will."

Yet how could Tamatea be so cocksure, considering he, Donadieu, himself was far from certain what he would do. His eyes

fell on Maniere, who was standing beside the table next to his, and he idly listened to what he was saying.

"If you leave at once, you'll be back by eleven tonight. I can get you a good car and a reliable driver. If you want some ukulele-players with you, I can fix it up—but you must let me know at once."

And meanwhile, at the *lies*, Joe was using all his blandishments to hoodwink that poor woman!

Cande, the Chief Secretary, strolled leisurely in and, after touching Raphael's hand, shook Donadieu's with some heartiness.

Glad to see you. I told the Governor you were in town. He's afraid he must ask you to wait a bit, as he will be so busy with the High Commissioner for the next few days. But he's bearing you in mind."

Why tell him this? Had he asked to be "borne in mind"? Had he even declared his intention of remaining in Papeete?

Sitting astride a chair, Cande began whispering to Raphael, but not so softly that Donadieu failed to catch some of his remarks.

"Nothing doing today, of course, because the boat's in. All the passengers will be at the *Lafayette*, and the girls won't have a minute to spare. But tomorrow you might send some of them along—the prettiest, needless to say. The Governor will be introducing you and Joe to him presently, and you're to act as a sort of Cook's man, show him the sights and so forth."

They were talking of the High Commissioner, in whose honour elaborate festivities were being arranged—the usual window-dressing, with displays of native loyalty to order.

"By the by, how's the little girl?"

"Still at the convent school," Raphael replied.

For some moments the conversation turned on this "little girl," but Donadieu could make nothing of it. As a matter of fact, they were referring to a native child of thirteen who had caught Raphael's eye on one of his up-country tours. To make sure of reserving her for himself, he was paying for her schooling at the convent—pending the day when she'd be ripe for him.

"Joe's taking **the** devil of a time," Cande remarked. "**That woman must be damned obstinate.**"

"They say," Raphael repeated, "that on the way out she was crying all the time."

It was not slackness on Donadieu's part; nor was it cowardice. Nevertheless, he sat on with the others, instead of hastening to Mme Lagre and giving her what help he could. Only in imagination he pictured himself escorting her to the courtroom and, after a bold, defiant glance at the bench, addressing the court. . . .

Now that the rush was over, Maniere came and joined them. Donadieu gave a start when the hotel-keeper tapped him familiarly on the knee.

"Staying here?" he asked.

"Well, I hardly know yet."

"Anyhow, as Hina and Tamatea are sure to be out all night, there'll be a bed free if you need it."

Somehow it reminded him of a dream or, rather, a nightmare; one of a group of dreams which, for as long as he could remember, had been recurring more or less frequently in his sleep. Its setting had no semblance of anything he had seen in waking life, yet he had a feeling that, somewhere in the world, this place must actually exist, and he would recognize it immediately, if ever he set eyes on it. He approached it in a row-boat, but no sooner had he landed than the water changed to some sticky, glutinous substance that welled up round his feet. The light came neither from the sun nor from the moon. He wanted to walk on; he knew that, at all costs, he must make a move, but, try as he might, he could not stir. Heavy as lead, his feet stuck *in* the viscous soil. At last, with a tremendous effort, he opened his mouth and gave a call for help.

When he was little, his mother used to come and wake him. He would open his eyes and ask:

"What is it?"

"Nothing. Everything's quite all right, darling. . . . You were walking in your sleep again."

At Mrs Goudie's boarding-house in Big Hole City no one waked him. But in the morning the girl who slept in the next room, a typist, would say:

"I heard you talking in your sleep again, Mr Donad. You shouldn't eat so much at night."

"Sorry to have disturbed you."

"Oh, it didn't matter. I got to sleep again at once."

Maniere's rasping voice broke through his musings.

"Ten years, of course?" he was saying to Raphael.

How could they all know the sentence in advance? They spoke of it as a foregone conclusion—and, when all was said and done, a desirable one.

"Listen! That's Joe's car, isn't it?"

And Donadieu remained rooted to his chair, as incapable of movement as in his dream. His limbs seemed numb, and in a sort of coma he watched and listened. A sound of splashing overhead told him that Tamatea was having a shower-bath.

"Well? What news?"

Joe, who was sweating heavily, went to the bar and gulped down a tumbler of iced water.

"I've had the hell of a time," he said. "I told her that it wouldn't do her husband any good if she showed up at the trial; in fact, it might make things worse. But she didn't seem to listen, and I haven't a notion what she intends to do. She kept on saying that it was unthinkable, Lagre can't have known what he was doing. He's the mildest of men, and the best of husbands—and so on and so forth." A new thought waylaid him. "Haven't they sent for me yet from G. H.?"

Just then, as if in answer to his question, the telephone-bell buzzed. Joe hurried to the kitchen.

"Yes, I'm coming. Right." He went back to the table. "Well, I'm off now. See you all in court, what? Mind Tamatea gets there in good time; she's the first witness on the list. Bye-bye."

Again they heard the purr of his engine; then the sound of gears let in. Maniere gave a loud yawn.

"They're quite capable of keeping me hanging about that damned court for an hour or more. And it's not as if my evidence had the least importance."

With an effort Donadieu got some words out.

"I think I'll make a move now." But he did not rise.

"Much better stay here, old boy," said Raphael. "It's hot as hell outside."

Sometimes he addressed Donadieu familiarly, as now; there were also moments when he remembered that the young man came of a wealthy and important family.

Maniere asked Raphael:

"Do you think there'll be trouble?" He had in mind the circumstances leading to the High Commissioner's visit.

"There won't be anything at all," riposted the Chief Secretary emphatically. "Though I was only with him for a few minutes, I sized him up all right. We've fixed up a big 'do' for him at Balmoral." (He was referring to a palatial villa built many years before by a rich and patriotic Englishwoman who had settled in Tahiti.) "An all-night show, with the usual trimmings, of course. In a couple of days' time he'll be eating out of our hands."

In his dream Donadieu was unable to stir a limb, but actually he rose at last. All the same, once on his feet, he stayed without moving for a while, casting nervous glances at the others.

"Where are you off to?"

"I don't know." And he added, as if excusing himself: "There's heaps of time, isn't there? The Judge said three o'clock."

"It's more likely to be four or half-past four. They won't be in a hurry to leave after the Governor's luncheon."

Donadieu, standing there, cut an odd figure in his faded khaki shorts, with his hairy legs and crumpled, shabby shirt. Raphael gave him a brief stare.

"Look here! As you're at a loose end, you might go upstairs and tell the girls to start dressing."

How he despised them all! But he despised himself still more. He knew he had no business to be here; at every moment his thoughts kept harking back to Mme Lagre.

But docilely he went up the stairs, whose strident creaks reminded him of his first days in Tahiti; opened a door, then, as the room was empty, tried another.

Tamatea gave a shriek of laughter. From a corner of the room Hina, who was busy with an intimate toilet operation, looked quickly round and said quite calmly:

"That's all right. I don't care if he sees me,".

And, to his own amazement, he not only stayed, but spoke to the girls.

"I've a message from Raphael. He wants you to get dressed at once, both of you."

A sickly-sweet smell of body-oil hung in the air. Hina had nothing on; Tamatea was wearing a thin, grease-stained wrap.

"Who's down there now?"

"Raphael and Maniere. Oh, and Monsieur . . . Cande, I think his name is, from the Secretariat."

"I can't abide that man," Tamatea remarked. "He's a twister."

Standing athwart the narrow rays that filtered in between the slats, dappling her skin with glints of gold, Hina now was sponging herself. Donadieu blushed when he saw her placing a small razor on the table, then powdering her armpits.

"What did you find to do all day long?" Tamatea asked.

"Where?"

"Don't be tiresome! In your hut, of course."

"Oh, nothing much. I kept the place tidy, cooked my meals, and went fishing every afternoon. That's all."

Without realizing it, he was already speaking of his life at the waterfall in the past tense.

"Well, you certainly stuck it out quite a while," Tamatea observed. "Most of 'em come back much sooner—the moment they find out it's no life for a civilized man. But, as I said to Raphael, you're proud; you weren't going to give in. I say, is it a fact that you come of a rich family and you chucked up everything to go and work as a navvy in the States?"

"Yes, it's a fact."

"What a queer boy you are!"

Though it was the hour of siesta, people could be heard going by outside; globe-trotters determined not to waste a moment of their twenty-four hours' stay on the island.

"Will you be coming to the *Lafayette* tonight?" Tamatea asked.

"No."

"Don't you dance?"

"I don't care for it."

"What *do* you care for?"

He made no answer. Indeed, he had none to give. He was still stuck in his nightmare, like a fly on flypaper. And now he realized that he'd been humbugging himself when that morning he deliberately left his suitcase behind, imagining he would return. Yet he must have had an inkling of it even then; else why, just before starting, had he put his father's photograph in his pocket ?

Nothing would induce him to go back to the hut. He couldn't face the prospect of another night of that ghoul-haunted solitude. Yet he knew it was not so much fear that had made that life unbearable as its desolating futility. For weeks he had struggled to fight that feeling down; worn himself out in vain. Now that he was being frank with himself, he could admit that from the very first day he had realized the folly of his belief in his self-sufficiency, and understood that the "return to Nature" preached by adepts of the simple life was a mere city-dweller's dream, and indeed no more admirable than a tramp's aversion from a settled home.

Here in Tahiti, as everywhere else, there were rules of life with which one must conform, and what he had been doing, for all its show of heroism, was little more than playing the boy scout at a few miles' distance from a village.

There were footsteps on the stairs. The door opened and Raphael poked his head in.

"Hurry up, girls. You'd better be getting ready."

"In a couple of minutes," said Tamatea.

Casually Raphael went up to Hina and stroked her bare shoulders. He seemed to hesitate, weighing the pros and cons, and even glanced at his wrist-watch. Then he said to Donadieu :

"Go downstairs, will you ? We'll join you in a moment."

Tamatea stayed behind, and Donadieu left the three of them in her room. It was nearly four. Maniere, who had missed his daily siesta, looked thoroughly exhausted. Cande got up and began to move towards the door.

"What are they doing upstairs?" he asked. Then, seeing that Donadieu was blushing, he smiled. "That fellow Raphael's really the limit!"

The courtroom had been full since three. For an hour a crowd

of perspiring men and women had been jammed together at the back, waiting for the hearing to be resumed. Lagre was seated between a policeman and a native clerk hammering away on an old-fashioned typewriter.

Flies buzzed round their heads. Soldiers could be seen sprawling on the grass under the trees. Now and again a tourist would come, without an admission card, but after a short confabulation with the police-sergeant on duty at the door and when some money had changed hands, he would be given a seat on one of the wooden forms.

Whenever a car was heard approaching, everyone looked round, hoping the Judge and counsel were in it. But though the clock had struck four there was no sign of them as yet. The flies grew more and more aggressive as the sweat thickened on hands and faces.

Donadieu came, with Maniere and the two girls, *in* Raphael's car. Raphael shook hands with the police-sergeant at the entrance. After a glance round the room reserved for the witnesses, where there were only a couple of natives and a Chinaman—none of whom had any important evidence to give—they decided to wait on the verandah, where it was slightly cooler.

"Have our places been kept?" Raphael asked.

"Yes, Maitre Beaudoin has seen to that."

After five minutes or so a big car, flying the Government House flag, drew up, and from it alighted the Judge, the Public Prosecutor, Cande and, finally, Joe, who bustled forward to join his friends, bringing with him a whiff of liqueur brandy and cigar-smoke.

"Well?" asked Raphael.

"Ten years. Take your pews, children. We're starting right away."

While getting into his gown, the lawyer kept glancing towards the verandah; he was afraid that, despite his injunction, Mme Lagre might put *in* an appearance at the trial.

"Let's take our places," said Raphael to Donadieu. "The others will join us after they've given their evidence. Joe has seats reserved for all our lot."

Mme Isnard was in the same seat, in the front row, as at the first hearing. One of the forms was quite empty, **and** Donadieu

placed himself at one end of it. The prisoner was not more than five feet from him.

"Stand up, please! His Honour is entering."

Isnard, the two assessors and Moutonnet took their places rapidly, like men who have a tiresome formality to go through and wish to get it over with the least delay.

"The hearing will now proceed," announced the Judge.

Donadieu, whose sense of smell was, like his other senses, peculiarly acute that afternoon, became aware that they, too, smelt of the Governor's old brandy and cigars.

"Call the first witness."

There was a noise outside, and the people massed round the doorway began to show signs of agitation. For some minutes the proceedings were held up, everyone looking in that direction. Then a policeman approached with a sheepish look on his face, and began talking to the Judge, who beckoned to him to come nearer. After they had confabulated in whispers, Isnard made a gesture of resignation and his lips fluttered. One could guess what he was saying: "Most regrettable. But we'll have to let her in."

Joe had rushed outside. When he came back he was holding Mme Lagre's arm; she was not weeping, but her face was very pale, there was panic in her eyes. He was speaking rapidly in her ear, trying to soothe her, and finally he almost forced her to sit down, between Raphael and Donadieu. To the latter he gave a meaning glance, as if to say:

"You're in charge of her."

"Call the first witness," Isnard repeated, raising his voice.

Mme Lagre's eyes were roaming nervously round the room. One could see she was holding herself in; doubtless Joe had advised her to "behave." But when suddenly she caught sight of her husband, who was screening his face with his arm, she jumped up with a cry.

"Oh, Ferdinand!"

Raphael tried to make her sit down again. The Judge rapped on his desk with a paper-knife and glared at her.

"Madame, I must ask you to keep quiet. I quite understand how distressing your position is, but the Law must take its course, and I shall allow no demonstration of any kind whatever."

Mme Isnard turned and stared curiously at Mme Lagre. Raphael had succeeded in making her sit down—she had submitted meekly enough—and was whispering in her ear:

"I warn you, if you make any disturbance, you'll be turned out."

"But I only want to have a word with him, just one word." She was sobbing again, her face twisted into queer grimaces as she tried to keep back her tears. "Surely I might be allowed to speak to him—just a word or two. No one understands him like I do."

"Silence in the court. The first witness will now be heard."

Tamatea stepped into the box. It was for her that the natives massed behind the barrier had been waiting, and now there was a hum of excitement at the back of the room. The Judge rapped his desk again.

"As I have said already, I will not tolerate any interruption of this trial, no matter from whom it comes." His gaze settled, not on the chattering natives at the back, but on Mme Lagre, so as to make it clear that the remark was primarily addressed to her.

Tears were rolling down her cheeks. When he gave her a timid glance, Donadieu noticed that Raphael had his hand on her shoulder, presumably to steady her, or to prevent her from rising again. And only half an hour before, in Hina's room, the young man had . . .

"Hold your hand up!" The Clerk of the Court was addressing Tamatea, who was standing in the box, gazing calmly in front of her. "Now, repeat what I say. 'I swear that I shall speak the truth . . .'"

"I swear that I shall speak the truth . . ."

Donadieu, who had his eyes on Lagre, noticed that he raised his head a fraction of an inch; just enough to see over his folded arm. But he was looking, not at the witness but at his wife, who, when at last she saw his eyes, gave an involuntary cry:

"Oh, Ferdinand!"

Then he raised his head altogether and gazed directly at her. Donadieu choked down an exclamation of distress; for the first time in his life he saw a man—no youngster, but an elderly, stern-faced man—shedding tears. His features were working convulsively, his cheeks glistening with streaks of moisture.

"Oh, my dear! Oh, Ferdinand!"

"Madame, I regret, but I shall be obliged . . ."

Joe hurried forward.

"Remember what I told you. If you don't keep quiet I shall throw up the case."

"But—"

"Keep a hold on yourself for just one hour; that's all I ask. After that I'll arrange for you to see him."

"But -"

"Hush!"

The prisoner's sombre eyes, half hidden by the bushy grey brows, were still fixed on the woman with the dowdy, old-fashioned bonnet. Donadieu was in their field of vision, and he too felt the heavy impact of Lagre's gaze. Almost he raised his arm, as if to ward off a blow. Joe's warning had taken effect, and beside him there was no more than a trickle of small tears, flowing as steadily as if a tap were dripping, with now and then a timid, quickly suppressed sob.

"Now, Mademoiselle Tamatea, I must ask you to answer my questions quite frankly. Were you the prisoner's mistress over a relatively long period of time?"

There were smiles at the back, where everyone knew that the Judge who put the question had himself kept Tamatea "over a relatively long period of time."

"I want to get it quite clear. Had you reason to regard yourself as his mistress in what I may call a permanent capacity? Or was the intimacy between you of a merely casual order?"

Mme Lagre seemed unaware of what the Judge was saying; her eyes were fixed on her husband, who was crouching motionless in the dock, like a trapped animal. As Tamatea made no reply the Judge continued:

"Let me make my meaning clear. Was he keeping you in a permanent manner? Would he have been justified in expecting you to be faithful to him and have no dealings with other men?"

One guessed that Mme Isnard was watching the Judge intently, and that very probably these questions would give rise to a domestic scene once they were at home. At last Tamatea got some words out.

"I really couldn't say."

There was a ripple of laughter amongst the people at the back, and she swung round on them indignantly as if to protest: "I'd like to see what you'd do if you were in my shoes!"

"Silence, there! Answer my question, please, Mademoiselle Tamatea. I will put it still more simply. Did the prisoner know that he was not the only one; that you were having intercourse with other men as well?"

"How can I tell?"

"Had he reason to think that you were faithful to him, exclusively?"

The girl turned to Joe, as if to implore his aid. She was getting flustered.

"I couldn't rightly say. He may have thought so."

And all the time Donadicu was picturing another Donadieu, the real one, rising to his feet—a tall, commanding figure, tanned by the fierce sunlight of the mountain-side, with a rough shock of hair hacked into shape with clumsy scissor-strokes, and a frayed khaki shirt—rising and with a sweeping gesture claiming the attention of the Judge and his subordinates. He heard that other self, his true self, saying in a clear, incisive tone:

"Your Honour, in the name of justice I ask you to stop these proceedings. You, sir, know as well as I do that

But he remained seated, and with each sob of Mme Lagre a nervous spasm passed through his body, as if he too were sobbing, so near she was to him. All the time he felt convinced that Lagre's eyes were fixed on him as well. The three of them were linked together—Lagre, his wife, and Donadieu—partners in calamity. Too simple, too little self-assertive, they were at a hopeless disadvantage amongst these people, and outmatched at every point. And this knowledge of their plight had a curious physical effect on him; all the strength seemed ebbing from his body, he found he could not even lift his hand to wipe the sweat off his cheeks.

Meanwhile the others were carrying on after their kind; Isnard assuming a severely judicial air as he questioned Tamatea, who, as everyone knew, had been his mistress, and with whom his wife had come to blows in public.

And everyone knew, too, that this appearance of legality was a

mere show; verdict and sentence had been decided on in advance. Maniere had announced quite positively: "He'll get ten years. I wouldn't mind betting on it." And, of course, Joe had agreed to this over a cup of coffee at Government House. Donadieu could almost hear him saying:

"Very good, sir. I won't raise any opposition."

And, by that night, the subject would have lost all interest. At most, someone would remark:

"Well, it went off quite smoothly, after all."

"Except for that old woman butting in . . ."

Donadieu lowered his eyes, embarrassed by the prisoner's mournful gaze that seemed directed on him no less than on the woman at his side. He was bitterly ashamed of having come here in Tamatea's and Hina's company. And even more ashamed of knowing that presently, when the trial ended, he would go down the iron staircase with them, drive back with them to the *Relais des Meridiens*, probably stay talking with them in the restaurant, and . . .

"So it comes to this," said the Judge, glad of an opportunity of having his revenge and in the same breath gratifying his wife, "it comes to this: you admit that your way of life is such that no reasonable man could feel jealous on your account, even if he caught you in the act?"

Between two sobs, Mme Lagre asked Raphael timidly :

"Please tell me what he meant. I couldn't follow . . ."

X

DONADIEU had heard the sound quite early in the afternoon—about half-way through the closing speech for the prosecution, to be exact—and, as always, the thud of galloping hoofs brought back memories of his childhood, the big house near the barracks at La Rochelle. He even caught himself waiting for the bugle-call that he had come to associate with the sound.

And, sure enough, there came a bugle-call five minutes later, after which the horse gave a prolonged whinny, Moutonnet did not seem put out by this unlooked-for interruption; what really

troubled him was the heat, and, in his haste to get things over, he ran his phrases into each other, to the point of unintelligibility.

Joe Beaudoin, on the other hand, was obviously flustered by the noise. Every five minutes or so came that ridiculous disturbance, like a cackle of goblin laughter, and it put him off his stride. To make things worse, on looking towards the verandah, he noticed the High Commissioner in the doorway. At a loose end between teatime and the dinner hour, he had come here to have a look at the proceedings.

The horse bestowed a whinny on every speaker, Lagre included, in the last phase of the trial; and it was like a mocking comment on the whole proceedings. Isnard raced through his judgment at the speed of a village cure despatching a Low Mass. The air in the courtroom was stifling and, like everyone else, he had had enough of it.

"Prisoner," he concluded, "I must ask you to stand up. Have you anything to say?"

And Lagre, who at this moment gave the impression of being yet taller, even more massive, than before, rose at once, like a timid schoolboy, and gave the Judge a dubious look, as though wondering if he really had a right to speak. Then slowly he swung round towards the public and looked straight into his wife's eyes.

"I ask my wife and children to forgive me. I regret most bitterly what has happened."

His eyes were dry, his face was expressionless. People at the back were beginning to move, others rebuking them:

"Wait! Keep still there!"

Everyone was standing, and little Mme Lagre was hidden by those around her. But she could be heard pleading, as she nervously plucked the sleeve of somebody in front:

"Do please let me go by. I'm his wife."

But when she had forced her way to the prisoner's dock, it was too late; her husband had been taken out. Beaudoin pounced on her.

"It's all right, Madame. You'll be allowed to see him. Only do try to keep calm."

"Where have they taken him "

"To a room just over there. He'll be kept in it till the public has dispersed."

"Why can't I go and speak to him at once?"

She had ceased weeping; she couldn't shed another tear. But her eyes were blurred and she saw the people round her as moving shadows.

"When shall I be allowed to see him?" she asked.

"Tomorrow. I'll arrange it for you.... Anyhow, I got him the lightest possible sentence, under the circumstances."

Ten years—needless to say.

There was no sunset; late in the afternoon storm-clouds had banked up in the west. However, according to Maniere, there never was a drop of rain before August, and he should know. He announced this to Donadieu in his usual tone of weary condescension.

He looked exceptionally tired that evening; they had made him wait for hours in the small, stuffy witnesses' room. The moment he had given his evidence he left the court, without waiting for the verdict, as he had to go on board the ship in harbour for his usual clandestine negotiations with purser and chef.

The day ended in desultory wise. In the courtyard Joe yawned and turned to Raphael, who, too, yawned in sympathy.

"Will you see her back to the hotel?" He was referring to Mme Lagre, of whom nobody knew how to dispose.

"Sorry, I haven't time. I'm dining on board."

So m l.

Donadieu was listening, but he could not bring himself to volunteer for the task. And finally it was someone he had never seen before, a small stout man whom Joe called by his Christian name, who took charge of Mme Lagre and helped her into a taxi. She gave the others a piteous look as the car drove off, as if to ask why she was being hurried away like this and where she was being taken. Joe mopped his cheeks, and sighed :

"Just too bad, isn't it!"

Then he turned to Donadieu, and scanned his face in a peculiar

way, as though something about it had struck him and he was trying to understand.

"Well?" he asked.

That "Well?" was not a casual question, there were unspoken thoughts behind it—and Donadieu was conscious of this. They were standing on the road beside the Courthouse, jostled by the crowd. The Lagre trial had occupied their minds and activities from an early hour, and Joe had had an unusually arduous day. Nevertheless, his brows were knitted and there was an unwonted earnestness in the lawyer's voice, when, staring hard at Donadieu, he asked: "Well?"

Once before in his life had Donadieu heard the same brief question put to him in much the same tone. It was when he had come home after his first day at school. His father, an even bigger and burlier man than Lagre, had bent down towards his small son, rasping out that: "Well?"

Donadieu could not remember now what he had replied. And this evening he merely looked at Joe with a shy, almost grateful smile, and murmured:

"Oh, I'm quite all right, thanks."

Evidently this did not satisfy Joe; he placed his hand on the young man's shoulder and pressed it in a friendly fashion.

"You'll see," he said. "You'll soon get used to it. Isn't that so, Raphael?"

He left it at that, but one felt that behind these casual remarks lay some unvoiced thought of a graver order. Joe was even moved to add:

"If you're still thinking about that fellow, don't forget that he bumped off a poor young chap of twenty-five."

Donadieu could guess what he'd have said had he spoken out his mind: "Well, now you've spent your first day in our little circle, and I wonder how you feel about it. It may not be a very cheerful life, or a very pretty one for that matter. Still, it might be worse; you've only got to take your time. At the start it's apt to put one off, I grant you. But it's a mug's game taking things too seriously. For instance, that fellow who's just been given ten years was asking for it; what's the point of wasting sympathy on a murderer?"

And Donadieu, like a well-brought-up small boy, said "Yes" in the same tone as he might have said "Thank you."

Indeed, he was grateful for the interest Joe was displaying, especially on such a day, and not a little surprised, when he considered the attitude adopted by the lawyer only a few minutes before towards the unfortunate Mme Lagre.

Neither Tamatea nor Hina was to be seen; they had evidently gone away at once.

"Will you call and pick them up, Raphael?"

"Right-o. But I'll have to drop in at my place first, to change. We'll meet on board."

Joe gave Donadieu another long look.

"Look here! Won't you come with us? The purser's asked us all to dine with him. After that we'll move on to the *Lafayette*"

"No, thanks."

They were still standing in the street, and Donadieu could see, at the entrance of the barracks, the sentry, a young soldier who seemed to take his function seriously. A car on his right moved off.

"Well, good night then. Maniere'll fix up a room for you."

That was all. Donadieu's last words had been: "No, thanks."

A minute later Joe's car, too, was starting, and Raphael, as he walked towards his, shouted: "*Au revoir!*"

By now everyone had left the *Relais*, including Nicou, the gendarme, who had been called in to Papeete to make a report to the Chief of Police and dropped in with his friend Batisti for a drink before dinner. He professed much pleasure at seeing Donadieu again, but found nothing much to say, beyond a vague congratulation on his "return to civilized life."

It might have been a mistake, but Donadieu had an impression that Nicou, like Joe, gave him at one moment a curious, rather troubled look. Anyhow, as Nicou was somewhat drunk, it probably had no significance. Now, presumably, he was on board the boat, with Batisti; the only people left at the *Relais* were Maniere, Donadieu and Hina.

"I'll give you something that will put you right," said Maniere.

Ever since her return from the trial Hina had been complaining

of pains inside. She had refused to eat her dinner or join the others for the "do" at the *Lafayette*. So had Maniere, who was in much the same state.

Ambling across the room in his slippers, he went behind the bar, selected a bottle, and poured out a wineglass of *creme de menthe*.

"Drink this." He turned to Donadieu. "Won't you have some, too?"

"No, thanks."

The kitchen door stood ajar, and one could see the Chinaman reading an American paper that had come in by the boat, as he slowly ate his meal.

"Perhaps it's the heat," sighed Hina.

Maniere shrugged his shoulders. Little he cared if it was the heat or something else. His one desire was to get to bed, but for that he had to wait till the Chinaman had finished eating and he could lock up.

Hina asked Donadieu: "Why didn't you go with the others?"

What possessed them all to keep staring at him like that? One might have thought that Hina was seeing him for the first time, or discovering something queer in his appearance.

"Oh, I didn't feel like it," he replied.

"Got the collywobbles too?"

No.

Hina wrinkled her brows and murmured:

"It must have been that fish we had at lunch."

"Don't talk nonsense!" grunted Maniere. "If it was the fish, they'd all of them have been ill."

"And so they may be, for all we know—now that they've gone home."

It almost looked as if a squabble would ensue, but they let the subject drop and settled down to wait till the Chinaman, who had just started another page of his paper, thought fit to end his meal.

Donadieu, too, was waiting, and while he believed himself to be thinking about something quite different, a word came back to his memory, one he hadn't heard for years, the word "Limbo."

What was that bit about it in the Catechism?

"The souls of infants who die before they have received the Sacrament of baptism dwell for a certain time in Limbo." And it struck him that this shabby, dreary restaurant, where the three of them sat stolidly waiting, with mosquitoes droning in the languid air, resembled his conception of Limbo : as a sort of grey expanse of emptiness, where life was in abeyance, nothing stirred.

He gave a start, almost of alarm, when at last the Chinaman made a move; and oddly enough, Hina, too, gave a start, as though this sudden manifestation of life took her by surprise.

"Now then!" barked Maniere. "Put up the shutters and lock the doors."

Then he pondered for a while, seeming to be listening to noises in his body, laid his hand flat on his stomach for a moment, and finally decided to pour himself out a glass of *creme de menthe*.

"You see!" Hina observed. "I know that fish was 'off.'"

"Don't be a bloody fool!"

Some minutes went by, then a good many more, and as the time drew near, Donadieu became yet more sensitive to the human voice and the look on others' faces; to the mere proximity of another's body. Thus, when he intercepted a glance from Maniere, a glance that was casual enough, for some reason he almost felt like thanking him. Actually, Maniere was thinking about his accommodation.

"You'd better have Tamatea's room. She won't be back till tomorrow morning at the earliest. And anyhow, she'll be much too tight to notice anything, most likely."

Now the shutters were closed, the air was even stuffier, and everyone seemed half asleep already. The Chinaman turned the front-door key, then handed it to Maniere. Nothing remained but to bid each other good-night and go up to bed.

"I say, can I have another glass of that stuff?" asked Hina. "In case I feel bad in the night."

She went upstairs, holding her glass of *crime de menthe* at arm's length as if it were a candlestick.

"Good night."

Maniere, who had the big tin cashbox, containing the day's takings, under his arm, stood aside at the foot of the stairs to let Donadieu go up first.

"We'll fix up some other arrangement tomorrow," he said. "But quite likely Tamatea will be away for a day or two, so you won't have to move at once. Good night."

Donadieu's lips were quivering, though he did his best to hide his agitation.

"Good . . ." Somehow the word "night" stuck in his throat; he couldn't get it out.

As he started up the stairs, Maniere gazed after him thoughtfully; shrugged, and, after a moment, followed him up.

He had no idea how to set about it and, after shutting the door as best he could—there was something wrong with the latch—he stretched himself full length on the bed, face downwards. He had an impression that he was going to weep. But no tears came. He was still in Limbo, adrift, alone, in a vast solitude where there was nothing behind anything. And tired, fantastically tired; tired to—No, he refused even to think that word. And precisely because of this, it forced itself to his lips. He was tired to *death*.

But the time was not yet. Hina could still be heard prowling about the adjoining room, and in another room Maniere was making ugly retching noises as he gargled. He seemed to have some chronic affection of the throat; could it be cancer?

Once before, Donadieu had stretched himself thus, full length, face downwards; but on that occasion he was in the open, and seemed to be trying to weld himself to the soil. It was in the priest's garden at La Rochelle, on a fine May afternoon. High grey walls cut off the major noises of the streets, but now and again he faintly heard the hoot of a car, a rumble of cart-wheels on the cobbles, or cries of children playing; but all these sounds seemed coming from very far away, rumours of another world.

At that time Donadieu was being prepared for his First Communion, and, while waiting for the cure to summon him, he had lain down on the lawn beside a border of carnations. The air was heavy with their fragrance; never afterwards had he known its like, or the same languorous softness in the air, such plenitude of peace. He kept his eyes open, and the blades of grass beside them showed like green, upended swords. A ladybird was **crawling up**

one of them, unconscious probably that the big round object barring its way was a small boy's head. . . .

Suddenly he sprang to his feet. This was not the cure's garden at La Rochelle, but an hotel bedroom at Papeete. Something had roused him from his musings; not a sound, but the abrupt cessation of all sound. Maniere was in bed; so was Hina. The Chinaman was sleeping down in the kitchen on his mattress laid on the floor.

So now he was alone, quite alone; and all was ended.

For the end had come. The others knew nothing of this. He had not breathed a word about it. Indeed, he had given them to understand that all was well with him. As, for instance, when Joe had asked him:

"Well?"

None the less, some sort of instinct or premonition had made them gaze at him in a special way, almost as if they guessed they were seeing him for the last time. Even Nicou, half-seas-over as he was. Did things of that kind stamp themselves on one's face ?

Even the look of the sky all day, dull and lowering, the pent-up storm brooding above the lagoon, the stagnant air, had seemed to match his mood. For was not he, Donadieu, in a like case ? He wanted to shed tears, but none would flow. Somehow the emotion he now felt was not of the kind that finds an outlet; try as he might to cry, he could do no more than make a harsh grimace.

He was at the end of his tether, sick and tired of the unequal struggle. Like Lagre, who had made no effort to defend himself, but, letting his shoulders sag, had muttered now and then :

"It was an accident. A most regrettable accident."

On one such occasion the Judge had waxed indignant.

"I am surprised at the callousness of your attitude. I should prefer to hear you express some contrition, not merely pity for yourself."

Had Lagre understood? Probably not. These people plying him with questions must have seemed to him mere pestering phantoms, figments of a dream. To Donadieu, too, when he evoked them now, they seemed equally dreamlike. Isnard, for instance, and that absurd horse which had kept on neighing all the afternoon, and even poor, fat little Mme Lagre.

But how about himself? Had he, too, not been living in a dream when he spent his days and nights on a lonely mountain-side, in an abandoned hut, like a pariah. What was the idea behind it, why had he deliberately forced himself into acceptance of a life that was not only futile but distasteful? Though he had always been afraid of the dark, he had deliberately chosen that spot, far from everything and everyone, for his habitation. And his fear of the dark was very real; the furtive sounds that came from the night-bound jungle always sent shivers down his spine. Similarly, though mortally afraid of octopuses and stinging fish, he had persisted in fishing in the lagoon.

Heights always made him dizzy, yet he had chosen to enrol himself as a worker on the huge barrage-dam at Big Hole City. He was so shy that he blushed when anyone accosted him, yet in Paris he had trained himself to speak in public on behalf of a political group——

He had not turned on the light, and now he was sitting on the iron bedstead in darkness, but for the silvery gleams creeping between the slats of the Venetians. He did not hear a car come up and halt outside, nor the sound of its door being slammed; but he did hear Tamatea saying to someone with her:

"Wait! _ I'll give her a shout." Then she yelled shrilly. "Hina! Hina!"

Hina was slow to answer. Then she flung her shutters open.

"What's up?"

"Aren't you coming? We're going to the *Lafayette*"

"No, I'm feeling rotten."

"That's too bad. Look here, will you chuck me down my shoes, the old pair? These new ones squeeze my feet something cruel."

"There's someone in your room."

"Who?"

"You know quite well. That boy from the waterfall."

"Hurry up with those shoes."

The quaint thing was that Hina stole in on tiptoe, so as not to wake Donadieu. A good minute passed before she saw him sitting on the bed.

"Gosh! You gave me quite a turn. Why are you sitting in the dark like that? I thought you were asleep."

He made no reply. He couldn't get a word out. Presently she left, closing the door behind her, and he heard her calling from her window:

"Catch!"

Then the thud of a shoe falling on the road.

"Bye-bye, Hina. Hope you're better in the morning."

"Thanks. . . . Don't come 'back too tight."

A clatter of gears. The purr of a receding car. A creak from Hina's bed. And still the void persisted, *his* void, into which something from the outside world might force itself now and again, like a stone dropped in a well, but always it closed in again, almost at once.

He had come to a decision that afternoon, during the trial—at what precise moment he had forgotten. The most he could recall was that a fly was crawling on his forehead, that the Judge was speaking, twiddling his paper-knife, and occasionally a whiff of garlic came from Mme Lagre, who seemed to be having trouble with her digestion.

Several times in the afternoon that thought had thrust up from the depths of his being, and with such urgency that he all but uttered it aloud:

"It's. . . unbearable!"

What was he referring to? No one thing in particular, but—everything! This mock-trial taking place before him. Mme Isnard's broad back, with a streak of moisture in the silk, between her shoulder-blades. And Lagre, who could not even hear what the Judge was saying to him. . . . And then, of course, his own supineness in conniving at it all, and letting himself be hustled off, against his will, to the *Relais*.

No, it was impossible for him to bear it any longer; that was the truth of it. As impossible as it was for Lagre to rise from his seat, take his wife's arm and go back with her to Cognac, or Jussac—or wherever it was they had their home.

Of course there was an alternative. No, that wasn't true. Suppose he took to drinking, living like the others, it would not

help. One day, sooner or later, he would feel disgusted with everything, as now, and with himself as well—which would be still worse. Wasn't it better to get things over before he reached that stage ?

Someone, he remembered, had once told him that bluebottles can smell out people who are going to die. In the same way those men had somehow known that he was ripe for—the *Relais*! Without a word from him, as a matter of course, he had been assigned a room at the hotel, a place amongst them. They knew! They'd foreseen this from the beginning!

"No, I can't bear it any longer."

He locked his hands so tightly that the finger-joints cracked. Yes, it was intolerable that he should have struggled as he had struggled, only to come to this. Cost what it might, he must not give in, yield any farther. Even if it went against the grain; even if there would be a sickening, agonizing moment to endure.

All his life, ever since he was quite small, he had been trying to discover a way of life that was beautiful, pure, serene. Searching for something, or was it, rather, escaping from something ? Perhaps both at once.

When one night he had found a young man in his sister, Martine's, bedroom, when she was only seventeen ... Yes, perhaps it was then it had begun. In any case, it was then that he had run away from home for the first time; what was that word the Bordeaux doctor had used to describe his escapade ? A "fugue."

Were they a family of "failures"? Martine, too, had killed herself, after shooting her husband—when suddenly she realized that all her happiness was founded on the sand; worse, on squalor. Had the true reason of his father's death ever been ascertained ? Might not a day have come for him, too, when he said to himself: "I've had enough. I can't bear it any more" ? And then his body had been found half-buried in the mud of La Rochelle harbour.

Why, even when remembering Martine, even when thinking of his father, could he not shed a tear ? It was not for want of trying. Indeed, an onlooker might have been amused by the contortions into which he screwed his face.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, Donadieu laughed; so loudly that Hina,

lying in her bed in the next room, pricked up her ears. "He must be dreaming," she decided, and composed herself to sleep again.

The reason for his laugh was that he'd just remembered again those carnations in the priest's garden, and it had struck him that quite likely they were responsible for his coming to Tahiti. For, whenever he thought of Nature, and the joy of living in a clean, pure atmosphere, invariably the fragrance of those carnations came back to him ; that soft, calm, sunlit afternoon. Then he had read somewhere that *in* Tahiti one can live the life according to Nature, in the most exquisite surroundings. And somehow, preposterously as he now knew to his cost, he had pictured the island as resembling that little garden-close at La Rochelle.

But, though often and often he had stretched himself full length on the ground, in the green shadows of his mountain-side, never had he regained that first fine rapture.

"I can't bear it any longer!" He was frightened now, half inclined to call for help. Was Hina asleep ? Or had her stomach-ache kept her awake ? It was absurd and despicable, this panic that had swept over him. Perhaps he could sleep it off. . . . No, anything but that! Only too well he knew that, if he woke next morning in this bed, he'd toe the line as they expected. He had not forgotten the look Joe gave him, as who should say:

"So you've tumbled to it, old boy? It's no use wanting the moon, and this isn't such a bad life after all, appearances notwithstanding."

Raphael, of course, didn't understand so well. He was built that way. Rarely, if ever, did a disturbing thought assail him. But Joe, Donadieu felt convinced, had once aspired to something better. Now he, too, refused to think of it ; drank, and fooled about with girls, to put it out of mind. Still, there was an underlying melancholy in his make-up ; he had guessed at once how Donadieu was feeling.

Evidently, without being conscious of it, he had sighed too loud. The door opened.

"You ill too?" Hina asked.

"No. Thanks for coming."

"Because if you ate any of that fish, you'd better . . ."

It was damnable, his inability to shed a single tear; and almost worse, this feeling of unreality and emptiness.

He had no revolver. He had—nothing! At first he had supposed it was quite easy; his clasp-knife would do. Taking it from his pocket, he pulled the blade open. And instantly sweat broke out all over his body, and his spine began to tingle. No, he could never bring himself to do it. He didn't even want to. Or, did he? His mind was in a fog. If only Hina had stayed!

How long had it lasted, the death-agony of that skipper who died standing in the hut? For quite a while, perhaps. Perhaps for hours on end he had gone on calling for help, trying to live, or to have done with life—which is quite as hard. And so, torn between death and life, he had gripped the table, forcing himself to stand, like those animals which, when they fall sick, keep on their feet at all costs, terrified at the prospect of being unable to rise again if once they lie down.

Why was he thinking about that wretched skipper? Why make tilings harder than necessary by conjuring up such visions? After all, it rested with him; he was free to choose. At this hour he might have been at the *Lafayette* with the others, in the pink glow of Chinese lanterns, with music, laughing girls in pareus, white men smoking cigarettes, around him.

That was something else that differentiated him; he had never smoked. Neither smoked nor drank. Nor really made love to a woman. Five times in his life it had happened, but each time it was a casual encounter, not of his choosing. . . . Just now, in this very room, Raphael had been with the two girls. And outside the *Lafayette* at this very moment they were lying in couples on the beach under the palms, fuddling themselves with caresses.

It must be getting on for midnight, he supposed. Rising to his feet, he had, not for the first time, a sense of his ungainliness; his great height and bulk seemed to fill the small, low-ceilinged room. They'd have to step over his body; it would block the way.

With a finger-tip he tested the point of his clasp-knife. There was a tarnished mirror, glimmering sea-green in the dimness of the room, and in it he saw his reflected self, already vague and wraith-like.

"I can't bear it any longer . . . "

Why not go downstairs and have a drink of something, to brace himself up?

How strange to think that all his life he'd struggled to . . . No, it would not bear thinking about. Abruptly he flung himself on the bed—and at last his tears flowed.

In a gust of irritation Tamatea dashed her champagne on the floor.

"Oh, blast it!" she exclaimed.

"What's come over you?"

"I'm fed up . . . with the whole lot of you. And that's straight."

She ran to the exit, not even stopping to call in at the Ladies' Room to change her clothes. No one showed much surprise; Tamatea was often taken like that. She would drink heavily, dance voluptuously with a succession of men, occasionally going to the beach with one of them for the usual interlude. Then, suddenly, her face would darken, her eyes grow hard, mistrustful, and she would ask the man beside her:

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"But—"

"I suppose you take me for a tart? Well, you can go to hell!"

On this occasion, however, she did not trouble to pick a quarrel. She was sitting with some globe-trotters, and one of them had proposed to take a flashlight photograph of her. Perhaps she guessed it was only because of Lagre that they had been buzzing round her all this evening, like flies round a honey-pot; or her "Blast it!"—a favourite expression of hers—may have meant nothing more than one of her fits of nerves.

"Drive me back to the hotel."

They followed her out, pleading with her not to spoil their evening, and so forth. The taxi-driver hesitated; but she had already slammed the door and was shouting: "Hurry up!"

"They're a lot of stinkers," she added on the way. Then relapsed into a half-drunken stupor.

"Wait!" she said to the driver when he stopped at the hotel. "I mayn't be able to make Hina hear."

Then she yelled at the top of her voice:

"Hi there, Hina! Wake up **and let me in!**"

But when the door opened, **she saw** Maniere on the threshold.

"Shut that blasted noise," he growled.

"Why didn't Hina come down to open the door?"

"She's had the belly-ache. I expect she's sleeping it off. Anyone with you?"

She did not answer. Then she turned to the taximan.

"I'll pay you tomorrow."

The man grunted something, and let his gears in.

The door closed and, key in hand, Maniere tramped upstairs. Tamatea had to cling to the banisters to get herself up.

"Don't kick up a shindy, anyhow," the hotel-keeper said.

"Shindy your—!"

The first thing she did on entering her room was to take off her shoes and dress. In doing so she trod on a small knife lying on the floor, and she was not surprised to find Donadieu in her bed.

"Shove up a bit," she said, giving him a lunge with her buttocks.

Lying down seemed to make her still drunker, she could hardly keep her eyes open, and muttered thickly :

"What are you up to ? . . . No, do let me be. I'm so tired."

She said no more, but presently her breath began to come in gasps, faster and faster, and, pressing herself to him, she uttered a low cry of pleasure. All the odours of the *Lafayette*, the sickly-sweet fragrance of tiare-flowers, the aroma of American cigarettes, all the perfumes of a South Seas night, seemed clinging to her body, impregnating the air in the little room.

The shriek was audible as far as the Colonial Club, a good hundred yards away. It was pitched so high, and had such a curious timbre, that no one could be certain if it came from a human being or an animal.

The clock at the *Relais* had just struck eleven. Hina had crept downstairs in her dressing-gown, and Joe was mixing himself a prairie oyster at the bar, to correct his hangover.

And, when he was raising it to his lips, a door above was flung open, and someone came charging down the stairs. It was Tamatea, stark naked, her face convulsed with horror, her hands dabbled with blood, and blood on her breasts and thighs.

"Quick!" she cried. "My room!"

On the bed, pressed full length against the wall, lay a body, like the girl's, stark naked; a white man's body, brown all over but for what the shorts had covered, lividly white, in contrast with the rest. The face was turned to the whitewashed wall, which, too, was splashed with blood.

Hina had come and, standing in the doorway, was screaming almost as loudly as Tamatea. Maniere approached the body; he had all the professional calmness of the inn-keeper, used to handling startling situations.

"I suspected as much," Joe observed. He had joined Hina in the doorway.

"Suspected—what?"

"Oh, never mind. But it's my fault." He kept his eyes averted from the body. It was Maniere who bent over it and, after putting his hand on the left breast, observed:

"He's almost cold already."

Then he stooped and picked up a small old-fashioned razor lying at the foot of the bed. It was the razor used by Tamatea and Hina for toilet purposes.

"Really, he might have had the decency to do it somewhere else," grumbled Maniere as he locked the door behind him and strode heavily to the telephone.

Meanwhile Tamatea had stopped screaming and was trying to explain.

"We—we had some fun together, at least, I think so. I was a bit tight. Then I went to sleep. I must have slept like a log, as I didn't notice anything till I woke up just now. I felt my leg all sticky-like. I sat up to see and—Oh, my God!" She started howling again.

Maniere, who was turning the handle of the telephone, looked round.

"Stop that noise! Go and get yourself a glass of absinthe, neat. . . . And you"—he turned to the Chinaman—"see that nobody else comes in. We don't want a crowd here."

"By the way, where's Raphael?" asked Hina, but without much real interest.

"Asleep, I expect. At Angele's."

And that was all.

Translated from the French:

CHEMIN SANS ISSUE

BLIND PATH

I

NATURALLY it is only in retrospect one realizes that such **hours** were, in fact, momentous. This particular hour seemed steeped in the colour of the sky, a dark grey sky, with rain-clouds scudding low before an easterly gale. And, looking up, one knew that there was more rain to come, days and days of it most likely.

Nobody had the energy left even to grumble at the weather, or to remark that *it* was the Sunday before Easter. What good would it have done? One has to take the weather as one finds it, and on the Riviera it had been atrocious for months on end; the newspapers full of stories of floods, landslides, embankments washed away.

The most sensible thing was to shrug one's shoulders and keep silence—as Pastorc, the Town Clerk, was now doing, standing just inside the doorway, hunching his back, and staring gloomily at the rain.

It was only ten in the morning, and the Town Clerk had not yet dressed. His house was next door to the cafe, and he often dropped in like this, the first thing in the morning. He had put an old suit over his pyjamas, and his feet were bare in down-at-heel leather slippers.

At the bar-counter Lili was washing glasses and aligning them on a shelf behind her, while Tony the fisherman, sprawling on the imitation-leather wall-sofa, sleepily watched her movements.

Each time there was a gust the metal sign hanging outside the cafe gave a squeak that set one's teeth on edge, and rain was streaming down **the gaudily painted emblem on** the facade: **a** steaming *bouillabaisse*, fish-replete, with **the** restaurant's name above: *Chez Polyte*."

Polyte, the proprietor, was in a vile humour. He, too, had neither dressed nor shaved as yet. Surlily he shovelled coal into the big stove, which, in a normal season, should have been out of action

for a month or more. Then he disappeared into the kitchen—it was a step lower than the restaurant—and could be heard clattering pails and saucepans.

There was a peal of bells from the Golfe-Juan church.

"It's Palm Sunday, isn't it?" the Town Clerk remarked. "They're blessing the palm-branches, I suppose. . . . I've half a mind to go and see the show."

An old woman in black, huddled under her umbrella, went by, prayer-book in hand.

Tony looked up sleepily.

"No," he said. "It's the day they consecrate the taper."

"What taper?"

"Well, when I was a choir-boy . . ."

"What! You were a choir-boy, were you?"

"Why not? Anyhow, I remember there was some business with a taper—a big wax candle, you know, but that's what they called it. The priest hammered nails into it."

"Hammered nails?" exclaimed the Town Clerk, who, try as he might, could recall no ceremony of this order. "You must have dreamt it!"

The window overlooked Golfe-Juan harbour, and they could see the pleasure-craft bobbing at their moorings, their bows head-on to the gale. Only a few miles out, *in* the open Mediterranean, beyond the shelter of the Cap d'Antibes, heavy seas were running, and long white squalls racing westwards.

Lili, to whom no one had been paying the least attention, put a word in.

"He's right about that candle. I remember it too."

The Town Clerk made some facetious remark, guffawed, and flung the glazed door open. A flurry of rain-drops, bouncing off the pavement, began to form a pool on the cafe floor.

"Shut that door, blast you!" Polyte bawled from the kitchen.

"I'll shut it when I damn' well please!" retorted the Town Clerk, but a moment later he had done so.

Now and again a car passed on its way from Cannes to Juan-les-Pins, whiskered with muddy spray. Then a big blue saloon, driven by a liveried chauffeur, drew up, and a man wearing white trousers,

black oilskins and a sailor's cap, stepped out of it. With a wave of his hand to the chauffeur, he hurried into the cafe.

The Town Clerk made way for him to pass, murmuring:

"Morning, Vladimir."

The car started back in the direction of Cannes. Vladimir shook the drops off his oilskins and went to the bar, frowning, unable to make up his mind. Every morning it was the same story. He stared at the array of bottles with distaste. At this hour his cheeks were puffy, his eyelids red and swollen. Holding a glass, a duster over her arm, Lili waited, smiling.

"A whisky?"

"No."

Slumped on the wall-sofa, Tony, too, was watching Vladimir. And the Town Clerk had swung round, and now had his back to the doorway. Vladimir seemed to come out of a dream.

"All right, then. Give me a whisky."

Lighting a cigarette, he gazed at Tony, but could not bring himself to say "Good morning." What was the point, anyhow, of saying it to a man one would be seeing off and on all day? Then he looked out at the yacht outlined against the greyness, alongside the jetty.

"Seen Blinis about?" he asked.

"No."

Vladimir entered the kitchen, where Polyte was putting potatoes on to boil. He opened a cupboard, took down a keg containing salted anchovies, and scooped some out with his fingers.

"Get to bed late?" Polyte asked.

"It must have been four or five, I should say. I forget..."

"Are there many people at the Villa?"

"A fair lot. From Marseilles. I believe they're going back tonight."

He returned to the cafe and, leaning on the bar, munched the anchovies, without troubling to remove their crust of salt. Now and again he took a sip of whisky. Then he looked again at the white yacht, and sighed. The Town Clerk sighed in sympathy, **and remarked:**

"I suppose it's time I went to dress."

This was the third time he had made the announcement, but he couldn't summon up the energy to leave the cafe and go next door, where he lived.

Without moving, Tony exclaimed:

"There's Blinis!"

Someone had just come ashore from the yacht, a man dressed like Vladimir, in white trousers, black oilskins, and a cap with a gold badge. He was carrying a shopping-bag and moving at a brisk pace towards the town, his head bent, his collar up. Crossing the street, he peered into the cafe; then, having seen Vladimir, went in the direction of the market.

"He must be having a good time with that girl on board," the Town Clerk remarked. "I shouldn't mind being in his shoes."

Vladimir made no reply. Without waiting to pay, he flung his oilskins over his shoulders and strode rapidly towards the *Electra*.

The others had noticed nothing exceptional; to them he seemed exactly the same as on other mornings, neither more nor less morose. He had been captain of the *Electra* for several years and they had got used to his ways. Thus Lili had promptly poured out a glass of whisky, though he had begun by saying "No." And now everyone felt sure he would not stay on board for long; very soon he would be back for another drink, this being the only means he knew of dispelling his invariable morning gloom.

The little group at the caft, who had now resumed their doleful contemplation of the rain-swept quay, had no idea that this was an exceptional morning. They watched Vladimir approaching the yacht, then outlined against the grey horizon as he crossed the gangway, and finally disappearing down the for'ard hatch.

"Some folks have all the luck," sighed Tony the fisherman enviously. "That's a nice, soft berth that would just have suited me."

"So you think," rejoined the Town Clerk. "But I should say it's not a bed of roses all the time. What with 'Ma Electra' and the chores. ..."

Lili had finished cleaning the glasses, and now was **wiping off the film of moisture that had gathered on the varnished tables.** *Chez*

Polyte was neither a fisherman's caft nor one that catered solely for Riviera tourists, but a mixture of the two. *Polyte* had retained the old-fashioned zinc-sheathed bar, with its beer-plugs and an automatic gambling machine at one corner. And there was still the red-tiled floor one sees in most Provencal taverns. But the dark oak tables in the rustic style had been supplied by a well-known decorator, the chairs had thick straw bottoms, and dainty check curtains hung in the windows.

"Lili!" called *Polyte*. "Run out and get a pound of bacon."

"Can I take your mack?" she asked Tony.

Throwing it over her shoulders, she hurried down to the group of shops clustering round the church and picture-house. Noticing *Blinis* feeling with a housewifely expertness the pumpkins outside the greengrocer's, she waved and shouted:

"Cheeri-o, *Blinis*!"

Ragged clouds were racing under a canopy of darker grey that seemed fixed there immutably, and the gale showed no sign of abating. Vladimir was standing in the fo'c'sle cabin of the yacht, as motionless as a sufferer from heart-disease who has just felt a sharp twinge.

On his right was *Blinis*'s bunk; on the left, his own. Actually there were two bunks, one above the other, on each side of the cabin; they used the upper ones as shelves on which to store their personal effects.

On Vladimir's side chaos reigned; coats and trousers, undergarments, and even bottles of Vittel water, littered both bunks. *Blinis*'s side of the cabin was in striking contrast, with everything in apple-pie order, trim as a soldier's kit laid out for inspection. The clothes on the upper bunk were in neat, symmetrical piles, and between them were knick-knacks carefully disposed, including some small coloured views of Batum and the Caucasus, garlanded with blue silk ribbon.

Vladimir had his right hand in his coat-pocket. He was swaying a little as the yacht rolled in the swell. Rain was coming in through the hatch and forming a patch of moisture on the floor.

Suddenly he sighed, muttered something in Russian, and reached towards a small poker-work box placed beside *Blinis*'s pillow. It

was the type of box in which schoolgirls keep their trinkets, love-letters and so forth.

For a moment something sparkled in the greyish light; a large diamond set in a gold ring.

There was a sound on deck, and Vladimir hastily put back the box beside the pillow. He had hardly time to swing round and bend over his own bunk before a form loomed in the hatchway opening overhead.

"Are you there?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

His cheeks were scarlet, and he could feel his heart thudding as he picked up some clothes from his bunk and pretended to be folding them. Then he scrambled up the iron ladder on to the deck.

The girl had moved away and was standing in the bows. She, too, wore oilskins and had her hands in the pockets. Her brown hair was soaked with rain, but she seemed unaware of this. She had a slim, clean-cut figure; her face was grave, serene. Like the Town Clerk in the doorway of Polyte's cafe, like so many others that morning, she was watching the downpour.

"Mademoiselle Helene. ..."

She turned towards the man who had addressed her, but her look betrayed no interest.

"Your mother gave me a message for you," Vladimir continued. They could see Blinis coming back from the town, his shopping-bag bulging with vegetables. "She wants you to come to lunch at *The Mimosas*. She'll send the car for you at twelve."

"Is that all?"

Vladimir put on his cap again and walked to the gangway. He met Blinis half-way down the jetty. Both men stopped.

"Going back to the cafe?" Blinis asked, in Russian.

"May be."

"Will Madame be coming?"

"I couldn't say."

They had begun to walk away, in opposite directions, when Blinis turned and shouted over his shoulder, still in Russian:

"If you see her, ask her for some money, I'm cleaned out."

Grunting some vague reply, Vladimir strode on, **flung** the door of

the cafe open and sat down near the window, drawing the curtain to one side. The Town Clerk was still there; he had not yet developed energy enough to go home and shave. . . .

An hour later, when Lili was spreading a felt cloth on one of the tables for a game of *belote*, he harked back to his previous topic.

"Tony makes out that this Sunday they bless a candle. But I'm positive it's the palm-leaves that are blessed. . . ."

The "Italian"—everyone referred to him thus, though he was as much a Frenchman as the others—puckered his brows.

"What Sunday is it today ? I'm damned if I know. . . . Hi there, Polyte ! Give us the calendar."

But no calendar could be found. The Town Clerk shuffled the pack, and said, "Cut, please." He had at last brought himself to dress and shave, and there were still traces of powder on his cheeks.

"Come and make a fourth, Polyte."

"Presently. The dumb chap can play my hand till I'm ready." He went to the fire, poked it vigorously and put more coal on.

The dumb man smiled and drew up a chair, making signs which everyone understood.

"What's the idea of hammering nails into a candle, anyhow?" The Town Clerk was still cudgelling his brains about the curious rite described by Tony.

"That I don't know. But I can swear I've seen it done."

Vladimir knew. He was sitting near them—only two tables away—with a saucer of olives and a half-full glass in front of him. Resting his elbows on the table, he conjured up a picture of the past; the great Easter candle at Moscow into which were driven long black nails shaped like a crucifix, in an atmosphere laden with incense and deep organ-notes.

Now and again a tremor ran through his body, and he shot a glance at the yacht's empty deck. The girl had gone down with Blinis to the galley and was, no doubt, watching him cooking, while he chattered away, telling her stories.

Would he, Vladimir wondered, have occasion to open his box ? Could Helene have noticed what he, Vladimir, was up to in the cabin ? Or that he had blushed like a boy caught doing something **wrong** when he heard **her** voice ?

More probably she had noticed nothing; she despised him far too much to trouble how he looked. Her only reaction had been one of surprise; she hadn't heard him coming on board.

"This way. And that way. *Sol*" An idiotic phrase that was always on Blinis's lips. Though he had been in France for years, he had never made an effort to learn the language properly. He had no taste for study in any form; what he liked was jobs requiring patience and dexterity, like polishing the fittings of the yacht's dinghy, and cooking dainty little dishes, preferably Caucasian specialities.

That was how he had acquired his nickname, "Blinis." He was an expert at concocting the national Russian pancake, served with cream, that goes by this name.

"This way," he would say, with a cheerful smile, and twirl his spoon in the batter. "And that way. *Sol*!"

He was always cheerful. His big red mouth would split in an enormous grin on the least pretext, disclosing brilliantly white teeth. His black hair was slightly frizzed, his eyes were a dark lustrous brown. One day Vladimir had overheard a girl saying of him: "What a darling boy! He has such *melting* eyes!" The remarkable thing about him was that, though well over thirty, he still had the mentality and appearance of an adolescent.

In some ways he reminded one of a mulatto, but mulattos lose their animal grace, their gaiety and childish ways, at quite an early age. "Whereas Blinis, at thirty-five, had still the rather girlish charm of an Egyptian lad of thirteen.

This way. And that way. *So*!"

Vladimir pushed away his empty glass, and at last looked up.

"The same again, Lili."

The dumb man observed him smilingly; then twirled his thumb drolly and pointed to his forehead—to signify that Vladimir was going to get soused again.

Meanwhile the *belote* players were cracking jokes, exchanging back-chat, slamming cards down on the table with noisy gusto.

But Vladimir did not even hear them. He picked up a local paper lying on the next table, and let it fall after reading the headlines. His mind was in turmoil; the suspense was telling on his

nerves. If only "it" would happen at once—and he could cease being tempted to go back on his plan!

"Isn't 'Ma Electra' coming today?" asked Polyte from his kitchen door.

"Don't expect so."

"What's up with her? Has she sworn off the booze?"

Vladimir shrugged his shoulders. When he had left the Villa in the small hours, his employer—"Ma Electra," as Polyte disrespectfully called her—was dead-drunk. Now, presumably, she was sleeping it off in her bedroom, while her guests mooned about the house, wondering what to do with themselves. The first thing on waking, she, too, asked for a glass of whisky. Her mouth was gummed up, her lips parched, and she felt "like death,"—so what else could she have done?

Now and then Vladimir glanced at the card-players, each of whom had a glass of Pernod beside him. Rain was still coming down in torrents, streaming off the deck of the white yacht. She was a converted submarine-chaser, stream-lined, with a narrow beam, and her first private owner had spent half a million francs on her. All the same, she never went to sea oftener than twice a year, and only for short cruises along the coast.

Her present owner, "Ma Electra," spent half her time on shore, in her Villa at Super-Cannes, and the other half on board—in harbour. What would have been the point of travelling, since, whether on land or at sea, her mode of living never varied?

The Town Clerk looked at Vladimir with surprise when he heard him ordering a third whisky. His normal ration was two drinks before noon.

"Feeling so-so?" he asked amiably, and failed to notice that the harmless question had brought a blush to the Russian's cheek.

Anyhow, he consoled himself, it would very soon be over. Within the next hour or so Jeanne Papelier would wake up and find that her diamond ring was missing. There were few things she set much store by; the diamond ring was **one** of them.

Once a week at least she would imagine that she had lost it, only **to** discover it in **the** place where she herself had put it the night **before**. **On each occasion she followed the same procedure, sum-**

moned the servants, and her guests as well, and eyed them truculently.

"Which of you nabbed my ring ? Own up at once, or I'll call in the police!"

Then she'd storm through the house, ransacking first the servants' rooms and then her guests'.

"If any of you are short of money, they've only to say so, and you all know it. I'd give away the chemise off my back if anyone asked me for it."

That was so. She was a lavish giver. There were usually five or six people, sometimes as many as ten, staying at *The Mimosas*, Slight acquaintances would come for a week-end, and stay a month or more. Men and women, but mostly women.

"What ? You haven't brought an evening frock, dear, and you want to go to the Casino ? Come along. . . . Take any one you fancy."

She gave away her dresses, her cigarette-cases, lighters, vanity-bags. Once she had had enough drinks, there was nothing she wouldn't give away to anyone who happened to be with her—though in her sober moments she would grumble:

"These people only come here for what they can get out of me!

She gave presents to her servants, to everyone in contact with her—except Vladimir. Vladimir was different.

He was like a part of herself, or a second self. They drank level and, after a few glasses, he, too, grew lachrymose; kindred souls, they understood each other, and he shared her profound disgust with their surroundings, her equally profound self-pity.

"You know, Vladimir darling, life doesn't amuse me the least bit. The trouble is, I can't bear being alone."

And in the final stage they would fall heavily on to the same bed, side by side.

"What on earth am I to do with that daughter of mine ? Wasn't it absurd of her, coming and planting herself on me like this ? She'd have done much better to stay where she was, don't you agree ?"

Jeanne had had at least three husbands. Of the first she never spoke. She had made the acquaintance of the second in Martinique,

where he held a high official post; he was one of the small political group who can count on a place in the Administration, at Paris, every two or three years. His name was Leblanchet. As for Papelier, her present husband, he spent every Tuesday at *The Mimosas*, but preferred staying the rest of the time in his flat at Nice. He was a white-haired old gentleman who had spent much of his life in the tropics, and he had a way of falling asleep in the most unseemly places, on public benches in the parks or on the sea-front. His wife maintained that he suffered from sleeping-sickness.

Vladimir did as the Town Clerk had done some minutes before; he glanced up at the wall-clock. But, though it was time to go back to the yacht for lunch, he did not move.

"This way. And that way. So!"

He did not relish the prospect of having to face Blinis; his friendly smile, his tender, fawn-like eyes. Anyhow, he knew Blinis's secret; the reason of his delicate, almost feminine appearance was that he had T.B. Blinis had never spoken about it, but there was always a bottle of medicine that smelt of creosote under his mattress. Well, that was his look-out!

Vladimir was not jealous, nor did he cling to his prerogative as lover-in-chief of his employer—whom he called by her first name, Jeanne. Twice he had found Blinis in her bedroom, and on each occasion he behaved as if he had noticed nothing. Sometimes, indeed, when he came across an attractive-looking young man, he would suggest to Jeanne:

"You should ask him round this evening."

In fact, he took it quite naturally, being at once her lover and her employee. Though he was styled "Captain," it was a mere title, and carried no exemption from menial duties. With Blinis he cleaned up the yacht and, once a year, scraped the hull before repainting her.

Actually, Vladimir arranged things so that the bulk of the hard work fell on Blinis; but that was a different matter. No, what really mattered was—Helene.

With Desire at the wheel the car went **past** the cafe and drew up **at a few yards' distance from** the yacht. **Reluctant to** sally forth in the rain, the chauffeur hooted several times.

But no one appeared. What could they be up to, the two of them, in the yacht? At last Desire got out of the car and crossed the gangway. Then he went down to the saloon, where he remained some time, doubtless in argument with Helene.

He came back by himself, put the car into reverse, and stopped outside the cafe.

"A glass of white wine, please," he said to Lili. Then he sat down at Vladimir's table, and murmured: "Nothing doing."

"What's that? She refuses to lunch at the Villa?"

Desire shrugged, rolled a cigarette and lit it before answering.

"You've said it! And there's some folks come for lunch. But Madame ain't up yet, and she left strict orders she wasn't to be waked. Sleeping it off, as per usual." He guffawed. "And now the girl says she won't come. I suppose she'd rather stay with our friend Blinis; looks like there was something doing there, don't it?" He accompanied the remark with a gesture that made Vladimir blush.

Blushing was a weakness of his. Like most men from the Baltic coast, he had blue eyes and a very fair complexion. The least emotion brought the blood to his cheeks, just as his eyelids grew puffy after no more than a couple of whiskies.

"Coming back with me?" Desire enquired.

"No. I'm staying here."

"I found the two of 'em busy cooking something in the galley. The young lady had one of Blinis's aprons on. I couldn't help laughing."

A moment before, Vladimir had resolved to lunch on board the yacht. Now he found he had no heart to do so. He had never tried to analyse his feelings and decide whether or not he was in love with Helene. She had entered their lives abruptly, three weeks before, on the death of her father, presumably Mme Papierier's first husband.

"You're not looking too good, old boy. Have one with me?"

"No, thanks."

"O f f the drink, eh?"

Vladimir made a fretful gesture. Why must the fellow go on making conversation, just when he had so much on his mind Or,

rather, so much he was trying to keep out of his mind. He was waiting, and **the** suspense was growing unbearable.

The diamond ring was in the box. At any moment now Jeanne would be getting up, and discover it had vanished. . . . So much the worse for Blinis!

Smoke was rising from the funnel of the yacht, but because of the wind one hardly noticed it. Sometimes, once every hour or so, there would come a sudden lull and the rain stopped; five minutes later another, fiercer squall would break, making one forget the interval of calm.

"Will you be lunching here?" Polyte asked, and Vladimir nodded.

He had no appetite and ate lethargically, his elbows planted on the table. Then, after several more drinks, he lay down full-length on the wall-sofa. The light stung his eyes, so he spread a newspaper over his face.

The Town Clerk returned soon after lunch, hoping to find someone to join him in a game of some sort. He settled down in a chair near the Russian and began reading a newspaper, but his eyes kept wandering disconsolately round the room. At last Polyte had compassion.

"How about a game of backgammon?"

They started a game, but neither had much heart in it—backgammon was a poor substitute for *belote*—and they soon stopped playing.

Cars were passing along the road, but none stopped at the cafe. A church bell started ringing, for Vespers, and the Town Clerk wondered once more what it was that was being blessed today: a candle, or palm-branches.

Lili was polishing glasses again, and replacing them on the shelf behind the bar. Presently she heard snores coming from the Town Clerk's corner, and saw that he had put his feet up on the wall-sofa.

Her eyes moved over to Vladimir. Was he, too, asleep? There were mud-stains on his white trousers; he was wearing a blue-striped jersey, and his face was hidden by the newspaper. She noticed that his flaxen hair was thinning on the top.

Polyte moved off to his bedroom, saying to Lili:

"Wake me at four, please."

A ribbon of smoke was still issuing from the *Electras* funnel. At *The Mimosas* Mme Papelier was ringing for her maid. When the girl came she promptly asked for a glass of seltzer water. Her voice was so hoarse that she could hardly get the words out. After that, she enquired:

"Anyone downstairs?"

"Yes, Madame. The young Swedish lady has come, with her fiance. I gave them lunch, and they're in the drawing-room now."

"What are they doing?"

"Nothing, as far as I know."

"All right, you can go now. I want to sleep a bit."

"Won't you be getting up, Madame?"

"Not for an hour or two. Has my daughter come?"

"She sent a message by Desire to say she'd rather stay on board."

"Where's Vladimir?"

"He went away at ten, and he's not come back."

"Mind you see I'm not disturbed. I must get some rest."

Her guests had been hoping for a rubber of bridge, but no fourth was available. The Swedish girl had cleared a table in the drawing-room, which was Uttered with magazines and novels, and settled down to a game of patience. Her fiance, a man of forty-five, wearing plus-fours, was looking at the pictures in a film magazine.

In the kitchen the butler was at table with the cook, slowly eating his lunch, while he skimmed the columns of his paper.

"Will they be dining here tonight?" the cook enquired.

"Ask me another!"

In thousands of hotels and villas on the Riviera people were gazing from their windows at the incessant downpour, and wondering what to do with themselves. At Cannes, Nice and Antibes there was a constant clicking of umbrellas in the vestibules of the picture-houses.

The Town Clerk woke with a start, at four; he had been in the throes of a bad dream, but could not remember what it was about. He saw Vladimir sitting at a table, his chin propped between his palms, staring in front of him.

"Feeling seedy?"

"No. I'm quite all right, thanks."

What could they be up to on board, the pair of them ? Of course, it would have been quite easy for him to go to see. But suppose nothing was happening ?

As a matter of fact, nothing much *was* happening. In the small saloon, the walls of which were hung with Japanese colour prints, Blinis and Helene were playing cards; more exactly, Blinis was teaching the girl the Russian game of* 'Sixty-six.' Already, on the previous Sunday, Vladimir had found them thus occupied.

"Like this. And like this. So!"

Blinis chuckled loudly. He was winning, and his blue eyes had such a look of childish exultation that Helene, too, laughed. Suddenly she said:

"I don't like your friend Vladimir."

"That's because you don't know him yet. He's a wonderful, wonderful fellow; a true Russian. But, for sure, one has to comprehend him."

"Anyhow, he lets you do all the work."

"He's a true Russian," Blinis repeated.

"He's jealous of you."

"Jealous ? That's a good one!" Blinis was greatly tickled at the idea: What had Vladimir to be jealous of? After a moment he said : " Shall I tell you a story ? It's about something that happened to me in the Caucasus, years ago, one Easter Day. We were rich then. . . ."

Vladimir was standing by the window, watching the drops glittering down the panes. He stretched himself, yawned, and beckoned to Lili.

The same again.

II

"WHERE'S he off to ?"

The Town Clerk had hardly time to ask the question before, to the general surprise, Vladimir opened the door and hurried out. Lili, who was bringing him his whisky, gazed after him in wonder.

A motor-'bus was passing the cafe. Vladimir waved to the driver,

who stopped with a squeal of brakes. A door slammed to, and the bus started off at once, with the Russian sitting beside the driver.

Ten minutes later, at Cannes, Vladimir alighted and, in the pouring rain, trudged up a steep road between high walls, leading to the upper town. After a while he came to a wrought-iron gateway flanked by stone lions, beyond which lay a gravel drive, lawns and flower-beds, and a pillared terrace.

When he reached the terrace, he stopped to listen. A gramophone was playing in the drawing-room of the Villa. He opened the door, and hung his cap and oilskins on a peg. From the hall he could see into the drawing-room, the door of which was open. The Swedish girl was inspecting lackadaisically a pile of records, while, in an armchair near by, a tall, well-groomed man was reading the evening paper. Now and again his eyes would shut; he, too, seemed bored. It was Edna's fiance, Count de Lamotte.

The third person in the room was sitting at the bureau, writing a letter, evidently a long one, for several sheets covered with tall spidery writing lay beside her. Vladimir recognized her as a woman whom everybody called "Jojo"; recently divorced, she still spent much of her time writing rancorous letters to her ex-husband.

Noticing the Russian walking up the hall, Lamotte called:

"Hullo, Vladimir!"

Vladimir stopped and eyed the Count lugubriously.

"Going upstairs?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I wish you'd get Jeanne to come down. Think of something to persuade her. It's been deadly here all day. . . . Look here! How about suggesting a jaunt to Nice or Monte?"

Without speaking, Vladimir fluttered his eyelids, then went up the stairs. The Villa was in the typical pre-war Riviera style, with a profusion of marble, bronze statuettes and mural paintings. When originally built, it had doubtless been furnished according to some set plan. But thereafter it had been let every season; the furniture had been shifted from place to place according to each successive tenant's whim, and the decorations modified. Then a day had come when Jeanne bought the place, lock, stock and barrel, and proceeded

to clutter it up with an overflow of furniture from her houses at Nice and Paris.

On reaching the first floor, Vladimir put his ear to a keyhole and listened. Hearing no sound, he slowly turned the knob, and found himself face to face with Jeanne.

She was sitting on the bed, her hair tousled, a tray with tea and toast resting on her lap. The curtains were still down and the room was in semi-darkness.

"Ah, here you are at last!" was all she said.

The guests below, used to seeing her fully dressed, would hardly have recognized her as she now was. She was nearing fifty, and at such moments as this looked her full age or more. The lines of her face showed in harsh relief, and under her thinning hair one saw the high, imperious forehead.

"What are they doing downstairs?" she asked Vladimir, who, without a word, had seated himself at the foot of the bed.

"Edna's fooling about with the gram. Lamotte's reading. Jojo's writing a letter."

"Have you been on board? . . . Wait! Take this tray, please."

On waking, she was always languid to the point of evanescence; it was as if she needed a certain time to resume her personality. Her eyes, like Vladimir's, were swollen and red-rimmed.

"Did you see any of the servants? It seems that Pierre and Anna have just gone out, without asking leave." Pierre was the butler; Anna the cook, "What's wrong?" she added, after gazing for a moment at Vladimir's face.

"Nothing."

Nothing was wrong with him, but his nerves were on the stretch. He was haunted by the thought that at any moment "it" might happen. The jewel-case lay on the dressing-table. Jeanne got up and fumbled with it, then seemed to change her mind.

"Lamotte," said Vladimir, "wants to go to Nice or Monte Carlo for dinner, so he told me."

"What's the weather like?"

"Worse than ever."

"Then, nothing doing. In any case, Desire loathes taking the car

out on a Sunday evening. We'll have to make do with what's in the fridge. There's bound to be enough."

The room was in disorder. Jeanne, who had sat down again on the bed, asked for a cigarette, then, remembering the servants' escapade, murmured resentfully:

"Really, they'd no business to go out like that, without letting me know. The truth is, I'm too lenient with them, and they take advantage."

It was the usual story. The servants did exactly as they pleased—until a day came when she flew into a rage, dismissed them *en bloc*, and went to stay at an hotel until she had assembled a new staff.

"For goodness' sake, don't keep prowling about the room like that!" she grumbled. "It makes me feel quite dizzy. Wait! While you're up, you might draw back the curtains."

It was even more depressing than before, with the grey light of a wet evening entering the room.

"No. Close them again. Turn on the lights."

She had no feminine coquetry with Vladimir, but let him see her as she was, temperamentally as well as physically. Little she cared if, frowning as she was now, she looked a really old woman.

"You haven't told me yet if you went to the yacht."

I went.

"Did you see Helene?"

"Yes, she was on board."

"What was she doing?" She began scratching a pimple on her neck, indifferent to the man's presence.

"Oh, nothing in particular."

"Tell me. What do you make of her?" Jeanne fixed her eyes on his, as if to wrest an answer from him. Then, as he said nothing, she added: "Has she said anything to you—about *me*?"

"She never talks to me."

"Then whom does she talk to? She never has a word to say to any of my friends."

"She talks to Blinis."

"And you've no idea what she says to him?"

He **was** growing more and more uncomfortable. A picture had risen **before** him of the smoke rising from **the** yacht's funnel; **then**

of Blinis and Helene amusing themselves like a pair of children in the saloon, playing that absurd game "Sixty-six."

"No idea at all," he replied at last.

"Isn't it ridiculous! She's my daughter. I'm bound to believe it, as I brought her into the world, and I have her birth certificate in my desk. But I don't feel as if she was my child at all. And I'm pretty sure she feels the same towards me. She doesn't trust me a bit, and I hate that way she has of looking at me—as if I was some queer, rather nasty creature. Don't you think I'd do better to give her an allowance and tell her to live somewhere else?"

She was lying down again. Now she swung her legs off the bed, caught her slippers with her toes, and shuffled off to the bathroom.

There was a rap at the door, and a voice said:

"It's me: Edna. Can I come in?"

"Let her come," called Jeanne from the bathroom, as she turned on the taps.

Edna showed no surprise at finding Vladimir in the room; she was used to the ways of the household. She posted herself in the bathroom doorway, from which point she could see both the Russian and Jeanne, who was sponging her face.

"The Count's rather keen on going to Nice, for dinner."

"So Vladimir told me."

Everyone said "the Count"—his fiancée included. They had been engaged for two years and seemed satisfied with the middle state; anyhow, neither of them ever mentioned matrimony. Edna would stay for weeks on end at *The Mimosas*, where Lamotte came to see her periodically; then, all of a sudden, she would vanish for weeks or months, staying in Paris, according to her account, or visiting her parents in Sweden. One fine day she would reappear, go straight to her bedroom, where everything had remained as she left it at her departure, and take up the old life again as if she had been absent for a mere week-end.

"The Count knows I never go out on Sundays," Jeanne reminded her.

"Yes, but the cook's not here tonight."

"That doesn't matter; we'll have a cold meal."

Vladimir was thinking: Once she's dressed she'll open her jewel-

case, and then—! Were they still playing cards, the two of them, on the *Electra*? Most likely not; by this time they'd be dining; Blinis smiling happily and telling stories to his companion.

Stories that he made up as he went along. Blinis was an expert at romancing. For that matter, so were they both—Vladimir no less than Blinis. For example, to get his job on the yacht, Vladimir had asserted that when the Russian Revolution broke out he was sub-lieutenant on a cruiser. No one had thought of checking the dates; otherwise it would have been obvious that he could not have been more than seventeen at the time. Actually, he was then at the Naval College, and only in his first year.

As for Blinis, he had never been to sea, and was at school when the Revolution began. Nor was he, as he claimed, a prince—except in the vague fashion that so many Caucasian landowners passed for princes.

"At my country . . ." That was another of Blinis's quaint idioms, meaning "In my country . . ." He had never troubled to amend the errors of his early days when he was grappling with a foreign language.

In a sort of lyric rapture he would describe the Caucasus as an earthly paradise, his family as rulers of a vast domain, and his birth-place as an immense castle where gargantuan banquets were served, to the light of hundreds of candles and the strains of balalaikas. "At my country everything was so wonder-wonderful. . . .!"

Vladimir felt himself blushing again, to his annoyance. He glanced at the Swedish girl leaning against the door-jamb, then at Jeanne, who had got out of her bath and was putting on a light blue wrap. Presently, when she opened her jewel-case . . .

Fortune had served him well the previous night. Blinis had been with them and they had had drinks together in the drawing-room. A window had been broken in the morning, and Jeanne complained of the draught.

"Blinis," she said, "go up to my room and get me a scarf."

So Blinis had gone upstairs—a fact that would certainly be recalled when the theft of the ring was discovered. And, to make things even blacker, he had been the first to leave the Villa and go back to the yacht to sleep.

"I say, Vladimir !" Jeanne called.

Yes?

"You might go out and try to get some eggs. Edna tells me there isn't one in the house."

He welcomed the pretext for leaving. That way the loss of the diamond ring would be discovered in his absence.

He had to go all the way down the hill, and then had some trouble in finding a grocer open at this hour. When he returned with the eggs, nothing seemed to have happened. However, Jeanne had not come down yet. . . .

"Give me a hand, dear," said Edna. "We'll see about the dinner."

Sometimes she addressed him in this manner, though, when she remembered, she was more formal. The shaker stood on the table, and he poured himself out a cocktail. They found Desire, the chauffeur, in the kitchen, reading an evening paper; he had taken off his black gaiters, to ease his legs.

He remained seated when they appeared, and went on reading, his elbows on the table. They fell to preparing a meal of sorts.

When Jeanne came down she was her normal self. On the way she had gone into the drawing-room and had a cocktail, which had taken prompt effect. She seemed much brisker, and in high good-humour. Her hair had regained its dark brown gloss, and the black silk dress she wore showed to advantage the lines of her body, which, if inclined to plumpness, had still a sensuous appeal.

"Getting along all right, pets ?" Her voice had its usual hoarseness.

Edna had found an apron in a drawer, and put it on. The Count was laying the table. Jojo was failing for the second time to make a mayonnaise.

"Do you really think my daughter won't be coming tonight, Vladimir ? I sent a message to say I wanted to see her. She's the limit !" She gave rather a shrill laugh. "But they're all the limit here. Nobody bothers what I say. Even the servants clear off when they feel like it, without a word of warning... . Anyhow, Desire's here. Are you going out too ?"

Desire looked up from his paper **and** replied quite calmly:

"Yes, I'm going to the pictures presently."

"Get me a drink, Vladimir."

He was the only one to know that her gaiety was merely on the surface. Later on, after four or five glasses of wine, she would be giving free course to her grievances against the world in general, bewailing her lot.

"We're two unhappy people, Vladimir. Nobody takes us seriously, nobody cares for us one little bit. The truth is, we're too soft-hearted, we can't keep our end up amongst these people. There are times when I feel like chucking up this rotten life altogether, and clearing out."

But that she would never do; here at least she was sure of company, and she had to feel people round her. On the rare occasions when there was no one staying at the Villa, she would go to a cabaret, pick up new friends and bring them back.

In the final stage of drunkenness she always became maudlin, and not uncommonly shed tears.

"When I think that I've a daughter, and she treats me like a stranger, worse than a stranger! The truth is, she can't bear me; I'm always shocking her, and she thinks I'm the lowest of the low. That's true, isn't it, Vladimir? Nobody understands me a bit. Nobody except you, I mean."

And Vladimir's eyes grew misted; he was as far gone as she.

"Own up, darling! If you had money you'd act just like I do, wouldn't you? One has to do something—to make one forget——"

However, that Sunday evening things did not reach this stage. There was a makeshift meal, but nobody had much appetite. All the time they were at table they heard the rain drumming on the terrace. The Count was sulking because he hadn't been able to go to Nice. Jeanne tried to cheer them up by telling more or less risqué stories.

Suddenly, at ten o'clock, while they were still at table, Vladimir rose—as abruptly as he had done at Polyte's cafe.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm off."

"Already? You must be crazy!"

No, he wasn't crazy, but he had had enough of it, he was physic-

ally incapable of staying another moment seated at this table. True, he had been drinking, but he had not yet drunk enough to lose his sense of reality.

"Don't be tiresome, Vladimir. Sit down again."

She had the misfortune to use a rather peremptory tone, and he gave her a surly look. He had blue eyes, and their expression was usually gentle, almost dreamy, but on occasion it could acquire a surprising harshness.

After a long look at Jeanne he started towards the door.

"Vladimir!"

His shoulders lifted slightly.

"Vladimir, I order you to . . ."

He muttered something under his breath, and walked out.

"What was it he said?" asked Jeanne.

Edna kept silent, but the Count replied:

"He said, I'm not a flunkey."

Jeanne ran after him, caught him up in the dimly lit hall, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Vladimir dear, what's the trouble?"

He thrust her away so roughly that she all but fell.

With the result that the atmosphere of gloom in the dining-room was worse than ever. Cruelly mortified, Jeanne decided to go out for the evening, after all. Then discovered that the chauffeur had already left.

"That doesn't matter," the Count said. "I'll drive."

While the women went up to dress, Lamotte proceeded to the garage. He was there some time, and when he returned the others were waiting in the hall.

"No luck," he informed them. "The fellow's taken the ignition-key."

It was Edna who bore the brunt of Jeanne's exasperation.

"Why are you staring at me like that? Most rude, I call it. But of course you've never learnt manners."

Meanwhile Vladimir was waiting for the 'bus, outside the Casino. The lights were still on at Polyte's cafe when he reached it. A game of *belote* had just ended, and the players were leaning back in their chairs, talking politics.

"Give me a drink," he said to Lili, resting his elbows on the counter.

"What came over you this afternoon?" she asked with a smile.

"This afternoon?"

He had already forgotten his sudden departure. And he failed to notice there was admiration, and perhaps something more, behind the girl's smile. He went out without having said a word to any of the others, walked on board the *Electra* and lingered for some moments on deck, suddenly conscious of the stillness of the air. The wind had dropped and the rain ceased. Rifts showed in the pall of clouds, and on shore the frogs were croaking in chorus.

No lights could be seen on the yacht, but he knew that Helene was in her cabin, the one with a cretonne curtain across the port-hole. Was she asleep, or had the sound of his footsteps on the deck awakened her? In the latter case she would wait till he had gone to his bunk before settling to sleep again.

He walked slowly towards the bows. Blinis always slept with the hatch open. Just as Vladimir reached it a ray of moonlight breaking through the clouds fell on the face of the Caucasian, sleeping in his bunk. More even than in his waking hours, one was surprised by the youthfulness of the face; it had the innocent tranquillity of a sleeping child's, and just now this effect was enhanced by the slightly parted lips. As a matter of fact, Blinis sometimes talked in his sleep—though the words were often meaningless—and even made movements as if to rise.

Vladimir was on the point of entering the cabin and stretching himself on the opposite berth when, all of a sudden, his face began to twitch; he was on the brink of tears.

Abruptly turning on his heel, and no longer troubling to muffle the sound of his steps, he hurried back to the cafe. The customers were preparing to leave, and Polyte to close for the night.

"Give me a drink, Lili."

"What? Another one?" She sounded quite reproachful.

And he proceeded to gulp down glass after glass of whisky, his eyes set in a hard stare; while the others watched him wonderingly, making furtive signs to each other. After the fourth drink he swung himself clear of the bar, and blundered into a table. He seemed not

to see anything or anyone. His jaws were clenched. Lili rushed to the door to open it; she had seen him fumbling with the latch.

"Blind to the world!" the Town Clerk remarked. "He'll be mighty lucky if he don't fall in."

They crowded into the doorway, Lili amongst them, to watch his drunken progress towards the yacht. Now and then, for no apparent reason, he stopped dead, and they wondered what idea had crossed his mind. After a brief halt, he moved on again.

Lili gave a little gasp when she saw him raise a foot uncertainly, to step on to the gangway. But by some miracle he kept his balance.

"No need to worry about *him*" Polyte remarked, as he put up the shutters. "He's used to it. He'll manage."

As he had predicted, Vladimir reached the yacht without mishap. He lost his balance only at the hatchway opening, slithering down the steep-pitched iron ladder from top to bottom. Blinis stirred in his sleep and mumbled in Russian, without waking:

"What's up?"

Everything was washed clean; sky, sea, the pink and white walls of houses, and the small boats moored round the *Electra*. The mountains on the horizon were a vivid green, as if they had been freshly painted. No traces of the recent deluge could be seen, except some puddles lodged between the flagstones of the jetty.

There was an even surer sign that the weather was set fair; there, on the quay, Polyte had let down the sun-blinds, in red and yellow stripes, in front of his cafe, and could be seen, in a white suit, setting out tables on the terrace, with a sunshade over each.

In his bunk Vladimir had been awakened by a steady, rasping sound, and no sooner was he on deck than his eyes fell on Blinis, who was in the dinghy, scraping the hull.

"My little, pretty boat...!" That was another of Blinis's absurd phrases. He took a childish pleasure in fresh paint; bright, shining surfaces. Sometimes it happened that a fishing-boat coming into harbour rubbed against the *Electra* and, in spite of the fenders, scratched the hull—always, oddly enough, at the same place. Then Blinis would set to, and spend hour after hour, removing the damaged paintwork and making a patch so neat as to be invisible.

The morning was already well advanced, and the sun stood high above Cap Antibes; the sea was calm but for a slight swell, last relic of the storm.

Blinis looked up and announced:

"Desire's here."

They lived in too close contact, Vladimir and he, to think of wishing each other "Good morning." Glancing towards the quay, Vladimir saw the big blue car drawn up outside Polyte's cafe, and the chauffeur seated at one of the terrace tables.

"What's he come for?"

"I don't know. He's only just arrived."

Formerly Vladimir and Blinis used to have their morning wash on deck, over a bucket; now, because of Helene's presence, they no longer dared to do this. So Vladimir retired to the fo'c'sle cabin for his ablutions. Blinis called after his receding form:

"Don't forget about the batteries. They'll have to be taken into town for charging today."

The small dynamo on board, which normally was used to charge them, had been out of order for a week. So the accumulators on which the yacht depended for its lighting would have to be charged at one of the local garages.

Vladimir nodded absently. He was wondering: Had Jeanne sent Desire here because . . . ? And he went about his toilet slowly, in no haste to go on shore and interview the chauffeur, who was having a short drink as he read the morning paper. Faint sounds could be heard on the other side of the cabin wall. Helene, no doubt. What could she be up to?

At last he reappeared on deck, where he lingered for some moments more, watching Blinis. His eyes fell on two fishing-lines attached to the dinghy. That was another of the Caucasian's absurd habits; though there was nothing worth catching in the harbour, he was always fishing, and would shout with glee when he hauled up an eel or even a jelly-fish.

"You know, a hand-cart will be wanted for the batteries."

"Yes? Any idea where you can get one?" Vladimir asked coolly.

This was too much for Blinis, who exploded, in Russian:

"Blast it! Why should everything fall on me? Can't you ever do a stroke of work? I've been hard at it for the last two hours. I have to do the cooking and all the chores, and you never lend a hand. And now you want me to hunt round for a hand-cart, for the batteries!"

"I do. And you'd better get a move on right away." He knew quite well that Blinis would give in finally, if under protest. This sort of scene took place ten times a day. Sulkily Blinis climbed out of the dinghy, then started off along the quay; his lips were moving, he was still grumbling to himself. ...

Suppose the loss of the diamond ring had been discovered already . . . ? After another glance at the chauffeur on the terrace he went down the companion to the saloon. Light was streaming in through the port-holes, and the little room was filled with a golden haze. A few seconds passed before he observed Helene seated in a corner, writing. She looked up at the same moment as he noticed her.

"Good morning, Mademoiselle." He took off his cap.

She merely nodded, and went on looking at him till he grew embarrassed. He could think of no pretext for his presence here, and she seemed to be waiting for him to leave.

"The chauffeur's come," he said at last.

"I know that."

"Oh? Perhaps he had a message for you?"

"No."

That was how they always conversed. She used the minimum of words and never betrayed any emotion; her pale, delicately moulded face and dark brown eyes conveyed a feeling of aloofness and repose. The customers at Polyte's judged her "stuck-up," and disapproved of her because she rarely set foot in the cafe, and never had a word for anyone.

"Would you like me to get out the motor-boat?"

Occasionally Helene went for a trip in it, by herself, to the Ile Sainte-Marguerite or beyond Antibes.

"No, thanks."

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing."

She was still looking at him, sucking the end of her penholder, and he wondered to whom she was writing. Despite himself, he shot a glance at the notepaper, but, as the writing was the wrong way on, made nothing of it.

"Have you any message for your mother?"

"No."

He sighed, and let his eyes stray round the little room for the last time; then went out, murmuring a vague "*Au revoir*." On the quay he encountered Blinis trundling a hand-cart towards the yacht.

"Wait, Vladimir! Where are you off to?"

"I've something to tell Desiré."

"And how do you think I'm going to get the batteries out by myself?"

"Oh, I'll be back in a moment."

But when noon came there was still no sign of Vladimir; and Blinis, after persuading Tony the fisherman, whom he saw mending nets in his boat, to give him a hand with shifting the accumulators, set out with the hand-cart to the Golfe-Juan garage.

"Does *she* want me at the house?" Vladimir had enquired in a low tone as he settled into a chair facing Desiré's on the terrace.

"Yes, she told me to bring you back in the car. By the way, she's in the hell of a temper this morning. She got to bed quite early last night—well before twelve—and it doesn't seem to have agreed with her."

But Vladimir knew better. She must have noticed the disappearance of her ring.

"Lili!" he called. "Bring some anchovies and a glass of white wine. Oh, and some olives as well."

"Would you like some sea-urchins? The dumb chap's just brought in a basketful."

Meanwhile the chauffeur was still reading his paper. His employer's tantrums left him quite indifferent, and he was in no hurry to move.

"Show us those urchins," he said, looking up. "I could do with half a dozen."

Two or three fishermen could be seen in their boats, tinkering

with their nets, which had not seen service for a week or more. Farther out a boat was drifting close beside a spur of rock, and the man in it was spearing sea-urchins and dropping them into a basket one by one.

"What did they do last night?" Vladimir asked.

"I couldn't say. When I got back she'd gone to bed and the others were talking in the drawing-room. Proper fed-up they were. The Count said he'd clear out first thing in the morning."

"Has he left?"

"No. He must have thought better of it. This morning there was another rumpus. She had everyone come up to her bedroom. One could hear her screaming and yelling from the bottom of the garden."

Vladimir made the most of his last quiet moments before going to confront Jeanne, and went on munching his anchovies with a thoughtful air.

"Did she say anything special?"

"Well, I think she spoke of sending for the police, but I don't know why."

The chauffeur was dipping squares of bread into the shells of the sea-urchins, and washing them down with long draughts of white wine.

Meanwhile Blinis was pacing the deck, waiting for someone to help him to convey the batteries, which were more than he could manage single-handed, to the hand-cart. In the offing a graceful thirty-footer, which presumably had set out from Cannes that morning, lay becalmed, her sails drooping in the windless air.

"Coming?" asked the chauffeur.

From the dark interior of the restaurant Lili, as she washed glasses, was watching the two men—Vladimir especially, whose face bore no trace of his drunkenness the night before.

Polyte set off with a basket towards the market.

"If anyone asks for me," he called to her from the doorway, "say I'll be back presently."

Vladimir rose slowly and walked to the blue car.

"Right. I'll come now." He gave a final glance at the *Electra* and had a glimpse of Blinis's blue-striped jersey. "Start her up."

He was in the front seat, beside Desire, who was smoking a cigarette. The chauffeur cut every corner, on principle as it seemed, and when he missed a big char-a-banc by inches grinned complacently. Presently he turned to Vladimir.

"I think Pierre and his wife have started taking that new medicine they were talking about—for their colds, you know. I wonder if it's any good."

"Yes?" Vladimir hadn't heard a word. He had let his cigarette go out. A voice, Helene's, was echoing in his brain, and it struck him for the first time that it was like her mother's, though, of course, less raucous.

"Think this fine spell's going to last?"

Vladimir gazed blankly at the chauffeur; again he had failed to catch what the man said. He tried to guess what it might have been, but without success.

Desire took no offence and merely grinned.

"By gum, you must have had a sousing last night!"

At *The Mimosas* an ancient gardener was tidying the drive, sweeping up the twigs and leaves with which the gale had strewn it. The garden was a blaze of red and yellow flowers; patches of light and shade dappled the edges of the lawn.

No sooner had Vladimir entered the hall than a girl rushed towards him and flung herself into his arms, sobbing.

"Oh, Vladimir, I'm so glad you've come. It's too frightful for words! I've never been treated like that before." Edna could hardly get the words out. "Do please try to make her see reason. I'm sure you can do it. Promise me you'll try, Vladimir dear!"

Taking his arm, she dragged him out on to the sunlit terrace.

III

ASKED that evening to recapitulate the day's events, they would have been hard put to it, and in any case would probably have declined to do so. For the behaviour of each of the four or five people concerned had been of the kind for which one blushes more than for a crime.

That scene on Vladimir's arrival, for instance, and Edna's outburst as she drew him out on to the terrace. Yet, oddly enough, their dominant impression of that moment—an impression which was to last through the whole day—was one of dazzling light, the genial effervescence of a Mediterranean morning in early spring. After those weeks of incessant rain, flowers and trees and sea seemed to have come alive, and there was a sense of triumph in the air, of resurrection. Appropriately enough, there was that "Easter" feeling too; at every turn one expected to come on a little procession of boys and girls, in ceremonial white and blue, marching down the streets to a First Communion.

"You simply can't imagine, Vladimir!" wailed Edna. "The things she said to me! I felt like sinking into the earth."

Sometimes on learning suddenly that someone she loved is dead, a woman drops for a while all care for her appearance, makes queer grimaces, and lets her tears streak the powder—until a moment comes when she blows her nose, hunts for a looking-glass, and at last gives her grief a more becoming aspect.

Just now Edna was at the first stage; little she cared how her appearance might strike Vladimir.

"As if it wasn't bad enough accusing me of being a thief, she told me I was no better than a street-walker!" she sobbed, twisting her handkerchief between her fingers.

One of the french windows giving on the terrace opened, and Count de Lamotte appeared, with Jojo behind him.

"Come inside, Vladimir," Lamotte said. "I want to have a word with you.... Now, Edna, do stop talking and let me have my say." He had assumed an air of extreme solemnity. Unfortunately, in his hasty toilet that morning he had forgotten to brush up his long, silky moustache, with the result that one tip of it hung down while the other pointed eyewards. "I have two witnesses, and am in a position to take proceedings, if necessary."

The air in the drawing-room was heavy with the scent of flowers. The gardener, who had got up much earlier than the others, unaware of the domestic storm that was brewing, had filled the vases with Madonna lilies.

Ignoring her fiance's efforts to quiet her, Edna went on talking.

"She said the most odious things. She told us we were a lot of spongers. She even said that I'd slept with you, Vladimir! I ask you now—in the Count's presence—is that true?"

Her tone was one of outraged virtue. Actually, for all she could tell, it might be true. One night, when everyone was drunk and they were together on a sofa in a darkish corner of the room, something had happened. But next morning neither could remember exactly what. . . .

"I assure you, on my word of honour. . . ."

"That's all right, Vladimir," the Count broke in hastily. "Of course I knew she was lying. But, as you must realize, I can't let it pass; I shall certainly claim damages or an apology. . . . She's over there, in her boudoir; she's locked herself in."

He pointed to the door of a small room opening off the drawing-room, which Jeanne used as her study. Raising his voice, Lamotte continued:

"I expect she's listening at the keyhole; I wouldn't put it past her! So much the better. I'd like her to hear what I've to say about her conduct."

Dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief, Jojo kept silent, gazing mournfully at Vladimir. She had thrown a coat over her pyjamas, and now and then drew the edges of it together across her chest.

At last Vladimir spoke.

"What exactly has happened?"

"We hardly know ourselves. She burst into my room this morning as if she'd gone clean off her head, and started screaming that she'd been robbed. Somebody had taken a diamond ring worth half a million francs. Then she began looking over our dressing-tables, rummaging in the drawers. . . ."

"Of course, the police must be called in," the Count said. "I shall insist on that."

"So shall I."

"And a proper enquiry must be held."

The boudoir door was flung open. Standing in the doorway, Jeanne gazed round the room, blinking her eyes.

"Is Vladimir here?" she asked.

On catching sight of him, she stepped forward and said in Russian:

"My ring's been stolen, Vladimir. I told them all to stay indoors. That was the right thing to do, wasn't it? But they started making a silly fuss. . . ." She looked Edna in the eyes. "Own up now. What did I find in your drawer?"

"I didn't steal it," Edna said uncomfortably.

"Didn't steal it? Of course you did. Yes, you're a thief all right. What was my gold lighter doing there, amongst your things? It was a dirty trick to play, considering that only a week ago I made you a present of my opal ring."

Edna glanced at her right hand, pulled off the ring, and flung it on the floor.

"Take it back! I don't want the beastly thing!"

"No, thanks. I've given it, and you're to keep it." Jeanne picked up the ring and placed it on a table near the Swedish girl. "Take it back. I insist. I've had enough of that ring anyhow. I suppose you know that opals bring bad luck; that's why I gave it to you."

The Count intervened.

"Listen, Jeanne. Vladimir agrees with me that the police should be called in."

"Is that true, Vladimir?"

"Certainly not. I said nothing of the sort."

"A nice lot, aren't they, my guests? I woke up this morning feeling grand, and I thought we'd have a gorgeous day on the yacht, toasting ourselves on deck after all this rotten weather. And then, when I opened my jewel-box, I saw—"

"Still, I don't think it was fair, suspecting us. Really, Jeanne

"Hold your tongue, Jojo! You've no right to speak, anyhow. Why, if I choose to fling you out, I'll have to pay your train-fare home. Who do you think you are, I'd like to know?"

None of them wore an ordinary expression, or dared to meet the others' eyes. Vladimir noticed that Edna was furtively picking up the opal ring, but lacked the courage to slip it back on her finger.

"I searched Desire's room to start with, and the other servants'. So hadn't I the right to search my guests' rooms as well?"

"Don't forget there **are** other people who've **been** in the **house** these last few days," suggested Jojo, looking out of **the** window.

"You mean, in my bedroom?"

"She's right," Vladimir cut in. "And that's why I insist on **our** cabins on board being searched as well."

Everyone was playing a pan, putting up a show of self-assurance or exaggerated indignation—just as Jeanne was exaggerating her vulgarity.

"People who guzzle at my table, people whom I support!"

"Well, Madame Papelier," said Count de Lamotte dryly, "we shall not continue to 'guzzle' at your table a day longer; you may **set** your mind at ease."

"Don't talk such rubbish! I've sized you up all right. Don't you remember yesterday night, when I was soused, how you tried to talk me into investing in some wild-cat cinema concern you're interested in ... ? Well, Vladimir?" The shrillness left her voice when she turned and spoke to him; with Vladimir she could take **a** respite from her indignation. "Do you really think we should go to the yacht?"

"Yes. That's the only way we can clear ourselves, Blinis and I. Otherwise suspicion's bound to fall on us."

"Very well, dear. Did you come in the car?"

By way of answer Vladimir pointed towards the garage, near which the car was standing.

They all piled into it, Jeanne sitting beside the chauffeur, as though to avoid physical contact with her guests. In the streets no boys or girls dressed up for their First Communion were to be seen; but any number of young men in flannels, women in summery frocks, and flower-girls doing a busy trade at the street-corners. All the char-a-bancs were crowded. Everyone was on the sea-front or on the way to it, and hundreds of small white sails were gliding to and fro across the bay.

"What's your idea of Edna?" Jeanne enquired, in a low voice, of the chauffeur.

"Ask me another!"

"Well, in my opinion, she isn't **quite** . . . **normal**. Just fancy, she's been engaged to Lamotte for two years and, to my knowledge,

they've never slept together! There must be something wrong with her—physically, I mean; that's the only explanation. I must ask Vladimir what he thinks. He's certainly made a pass at her, has Vladimir; it wouldn't be like him not to !"

The car had turned right, along the sea-front. In the distance the *Electra* could be seen, standing out amongst the small craft in the harbour.

Sitting at the back of the car, Vladimir listened with half an ear to what the others said. Edna was still airing her grievances, while the Count declared that he intended to consult his lawyer that very afternoon. The Russian noticed that Edna had put back the opal ring on her finger, and that Jojo in her haste had forgotten to hook up her skirt.

When they were a hundred yards from the yacht, the two women, as if by a tacit understanding, opened their handbags and began to powder their cheeks.

Vladimir kept his eyes fixed on the road ahead. He was wishing he could have stopped the car, if only for a couple of minutes—time enough to dash into Polyte's and have a glass of brandy. But he dared not suggest this. He saw Lili placing vases of flowers on the terrace tables; she looked just the same as usual, and hardly glanced at the passing car. Probably she thought they were going to the *Electra* merely to idle the day away on board.

On alighting from the car, none of them noticed Helene. Only when they had crossed the gangway did they see her, in a deck-chair, with a book on her knees. There was vexation, and something more, a glint of apprehension, in her eyes when she saw her mother and her friends coming up.

Jeanne gave her a perfunctory kiss on her forehead, and exclaimed :

"Do you know what's happened ? Someone's pinched my ring, the one with the big diamond, that's worth half a million!"

Then, giving a fretful kick to a spanner lying near her feet, she ran her eyes over the deck, caught sight of Blinis and called peremptorily:

"What's this damned thing doing here ?"

For weeks on end she would show no interest whatever in the

doings of her staff or the disorder that reigned in the Villa and on board the yacht. Then, all of a sudden, she would notice everything amiss, and fly into a rage over the first detail that caught her eye.

"I suppose Blinis has been using it," Vladimir explained, "for taking down the batteries."

"The batteries?"

"Yes. They've been sent to a garage, for charging."

"Why didn't you use the dynamo on board?"

"A bearing's broken."

Jeanne, who had assumed her most proprietorial manner, cast a last glance at the offending spanner, as though to say: "I'll come back to that later." Blinis, who was still in the dinghy, scraping the yacht's hull, looked up over the side, smiling widely, his teeth flashing in the sunlight. He alone was in a state of blissful ignorance.

"Come on board," Jeanne said to him.

Strollers on the jetty paused to gaze admiringly at the yacht. A big white 'plane was circling above the bay.

"Well, Vladimir?" Jeanne's tone implied that she wished him to take charge of the proceedings.

Edna was nervously tapping the deck with her high heels; when, after lighting a cigarette, Lamotte dropped the match, Blinis promptly picked it up and dropped it overboard.

"A ring has been stolen," Vladimir explained to him. "I suggested that our kit should be searched."

While Blinis was wondering whether he had better smile or make an indignant protest, everybody started off towards the fo'c'sle, where the hatch stood open.

"You go in front," said Jeanne to Vladimir.

There was room for no more than two people at once in the for'ard quarters. As Jeanne went down the ladder her skirts ballooned, displaying her thick, arthritic legs.

Vladimir opened his kit-bag and laid out its contents, mostly small personal effects, on his bunk. He had little in the way of clothes—a blue serge suit, a white cap, some jerseys, a few shirts and ties.

"That's all, isn't it?" **For** once Jeanne sounded almost embarrassed. "Thank you. I can see it isn't **here**."

"Your turn, Blinis," called Vladimir, and stepped out of the cabin to make way for him. "Get your stuff out."

Preferring not to watch, he went up on deck, walked to the side and fixed his eyes on Polyte's cafe. At one of the terrace tables the Town Clerk was sorting out a batch of letters that the postman had just delivered.

It lasted a minute; two minutes at most. Then there came a scream, a form like a wild animal's bounded out of the hatch, took human shape, and one saw Blinis's face convulsed with rage, his fists clenched.

"Who did it?" he was shouting. "Who's the swine that. . . ?" He gazed at them each by turn. But it was for Vladimir, who stayed in the background, that he was looking.

"Tell me, Vladimir. Who did it?"

In a sudden frenzy he seized his jersey at the neck and ripped it open from top to bottom. Then he began to weep, still screaming, grinding his teeth, hammering his bare chest with his fists. He seemed to have taken leave of his senses, and the women shrank away from him.

"Vladimir," said Jeanne, slipping the diamond ring into her bag, "do try to quiet him. If he goes on like that we shall have half the town here, staring at us."

There were people on the quay, basking in the sun; a few yards from the yacht a man sat on a coil of rope, fishing.

"I swear to you . . ." gasped Blinis, rolling his eyes from side to side, like a cornered animal.

"That's all right, Blinis," said Jeanne. "Only, for goodness' sake, calm down."

But, though there was a hint of compassion in her voice, this was not what he wanted.

"Vladimir! Tell me straight—who played that dirty trick on me?"

A vague suspicion showed in his eyes, but he did not voice it. A short silence followed, of which Edna took advantage to remark to Jeanne:

"You see! You'd no business **to call me a street-walker** and all the rest of it. **I hope you're feeling sorry. . . .**"

"Don't talk rubbish!"

"But you *did* call me that, and—"

She stopped abruptly. Helene had just come up.

"What's happened?" she asked quietly.

"Nothing," her mother replied. "Anyhow, nothing that concerns you. My ring was stolen, and we've found it in Blinis's box."

The worst was still to come. Quite unexpectedly Blinis flung himself at Vladimir, gripped his jersey and shook him vigorously.

"Look here! You've got to tell me. Who did it? Damn it all, man, why don't you say something?"

Vladimir remained quite calm, and there was something disconcerting, almost sinister, in his calmness. He was stronger than his friend. Seizing his wrists, he forced him to let go.

"Steady on!" he murmured. "Don't play the fool!"

Gradually he reduced Blinis to immobility; then, with a quick thrust of his hand, pushed him away.

"Now, Blinis, behave yourself!" said Jeanne sharply, glancing uneasily at the people on the quay.

The only effect of her words was to throw him into another paroxysm; he dropped on to the deck, face downwards, and seemed to be trying to gnaw the planks.

"Who did it? Who did it?" he sobbed.

Helene turned to her mother.

"Are you quite sure it was he?" she asked in a low voice.

"Well, the ring was in his box all right."

"Had he any opportunity of getting into your room?"

Jeanne pondered.

"Wait a bit. Yesterday he didn't come to the house at all. How about Saturday?... Yes, I sent him to my room to fetch..."

The first violence of Blinis's emotion had spent itself. Lying full length on the deck, he was quietly weeping. Only now and again a tremor ran through his body.

"Vladimir!" Jeanne called, and, after fumbling in her bag, produced a crumpled thousand-franc note. "Pay him off, and tell him to clear out."

"I think *you* should do that."

Jeanne shook her head; it was a task that went against the grain. She gazed helplessly round her, till her eyes fell on her daughter.

"Ah yes, you'd better do it, Helene. Give him this note and tell him to go."

And, turning her back on Blinis and her daughter, Jeanne walked hastily across the gangway, followed by the others, Vladimir amongst them. Blinis sat up, and yelled:

"No, Vladimir! Don't go. I want to speak to you."

Vladimir did not even turn his head. A moment later Helene went up to the young man.

"Now, please compose yourself. You've acted the fool quite enough." But there was much gentleness in her tone.

Without troubling to see if the others were following her, Jeanne walked ahead, quickly but stumblingly; for her feet always gave her trouble. Passing Desire, who held the door of the car open as she approached, she hurried into Polyte's cafe. Her nerves had been more shaken by the scene on the yacht than she cared to admit, and she needed something to steady them.

"A drink! Quick!" she said to Lili.

"Yes, Madame? What would you like?"

"Oh, anything you like. Wait! A glass of old brandy."

The others, with the exception of Vladimir, stayed on the terrace. While Lili was bringing the glasses another storm broke. Jeanne began by staring at her hands, then ran her eyes round the room.

"Now where can I have put it?" Already there was suspicion in her voice.

"Put what?"

"My bag."

She rushed out and inspected the table at which her friends were seated, even stooping to peer beneath it.

"Any one seen my bag?"

It was Edna who first noticed it—on Desire's knees; Jeanne had handed it to him as she went by.

"Silly of me to forget! But this morning I'm all nerves."

She went back to Vladimir, who had stayed in the café.

"Well, what's your idea of it, dear?" When he said nothing,

she added: "I'm afraid you're annoyed. But really I couldn't keep him, could I? What would you have done in my place?"

He looked away, biting his lip. There were tears in his eyes.

"In fact, he should count himself lucky that I didn't call in the police."

He drank glass after glass, as he had done on the Sunday; it seemed the only thing to do. Each time he looked out of the window he saw the white yacht, and two forms on the deck, Helene standing and Blinis seated on the saloon skylight. She was talking. What could she be telling him? Jeanne's voice broke through his musings.

"You've drunk quite enough. Come away now." Turning, she beckoned to Lili. "Put it down to my account."

She ran accounts everywhere.

Edna and Lamotte had begun by announcing they would not stay another hour in the Villa, and that the idea of having another meal at the same table as their hostess was intolerable. However, at one they had not quite finished packing, came downstairs and, with a bad grace, joined her at the luncheon table.

"Are you still quite decided to go, you two?"

"Quite."

"Well, all I can say is, it's very childish of you."

Doubtless, in their heart of hearts they shared her opinion. Now that the storm had blown over, they would gladly have stayed. The trouble was that they had committed themselves too deeply—and Jeanne did nothing to make things easier. On the contrary, she wasn't in the least apologetic; nor did she make any effort to smooth their ruffled pride. Her thoughts were obviously elsewhere.

"It reminds me of a story I read when I was little." From her tone she might have been talking to herself. "It was about an Arab boy, of a very good family, whom his parents had sent to a European school. One day he happened to see one of his schoolfellows' watches lying on the dormitory table. He'd never seen such a thing before, and thought it was alive—some queer kind of animal. And he couldn't resist the temptation of stealing it."

Vladimir, meanwhile, was eating his lunch in a brown study; he hardly heard what she was saying.

"Well," she concluded, "I expect Blinis is like that Arab boy. A big diamond—that's alive, too, in a way, isn't it?"

A new thought waylaid her, and she turned to Edna.

"Where do you intend to spend the Easter holidays?"

"I haven't settled yet."

The Count felt called on to add:

"We've any number of invitations, as a matter of fact. The trouble is deciding which to accept."

They left soon after lunch was over, and Desire drove them to the station.

Jojo stayed huddled up in an armchair, sipping her coffee with a look of stolid resignation. She, anyhow, had said nothing more about leaving the Villa. She gave an impression of trying to make herself as inconspicuous as possible, hoping to be overlooked.

Thirtyish, neither pretty nor plain, she was typical of a class of unattached women that is common on the Riviera. Her ex-husband gave her an allowance of five thousand francs a month, but she was used to living on a far more lavish scale. So, whenever possible, she would put in visits of a month or two with rich friends at Nice or Deauville in the season, and spend the autumn in some chateau.

"Fed up with me, Vladimir?" Jeanne asked suddenly.

He gave a start. "Fed up? Why?"

"About your friend, of course. Look here, if you're really keen on it, I'll keep him."

A startled look came to Vladimir's eyes. After staring at her for some moments, he jumped up, hurried into the garden and vanished behind a clump of azaleas.

"How about a siesta?" Jeanne suggested.

Jojo shook her head.

"I don't feel a bit sleepy this afternoon. I'll do some letter-writing instead."

Jojo was quite capable of spending the whole afternoon, from lunch till dinner-time, at her desk, covering sheet after sheet with her tall, angular script. Besides her ex-husband there was a host of

friends and acquaintances with whom she kept in constant correspondence.

"All right. Please yourself."

Jeanne, however, went upstairs, and, after carefully placing the diamond ring on her bedside table, against a bottle of mineral water, soon fell asleep.

Night was falling when she woke. She promptly rang for her maid, an Alsatian woman of a lethargic humour that nothing could ruffle.

"What's the time?"

"Seven o'clock, Madame."

"Has Vladimir come?"

"Yes, he's in the kitchen now. He was sleeping on the lawn before that."

"Has he been drinking?"

"Well, I think he's started."

"Give me my house-coat."

She lacked the energy to dress again, and merely ran a comb through her hair, which was almost white at the roots, and so thin that one saw the scalp beneath.

"Will you remind me tomorrow to deposit my ring at the Bank?"

Still half asleep, she went downstairs and, finding the rooms in semi-darkness, turned on the lamps. As she was entering the drawing-room she collided with Jojo, who was standing just inside the doorway.

"What were you up to, there?"

Both women were startled, and eyed each other mistrustfully.

"Oh, I was just going to give my letters to Desire. I'd like them to catch the evening post."

"Yes? . . . Has nobody come?"

She turned and went to the kitchen. The walls were white, and the sudden blaze of light made her blink. Vladimir was sitting on the table with a half-full glass beside him.

"Evening, everyone," she said.

The cook was preparing a tart; the butler, with an apron over his waistcoat, polishing silver.

"Coming, Vladimir?"

His eyes were already blurred, his eyelids swollen. As they went to the drawing-room, she linked her arm in his.

"Shall we go out for a bit, dear? It might cheer you up." Her tone was almost motherly.

"No," he said gruffly.

"Well? What do you feel like doing?"

"Nothing."

There was always the risk of running into Blinis if he went into the town, though more likely he was waiting on the station platform for a train—any train to any destination.

"Shall I mix a cocktail for you?"

There was a cocktail cabinet in the drawing-room. The door of the boudoir stood open, and Jojo could be seen there, keeping discreetly in the background, not sure if she was wanted. Jeanne gave Vladimir a long stare.

"I say! You do look rotten!"

"Give me a drink."

He had a cocktail; so did she. Then Jojo was asked to turn on the gramophone; as chance would have it, she put on a Russian record. Vladimir jumped up from his chair and stopped the gramophone, so brusquely as to damage the mechanism. When they tried to start it again there were curious noises inside.

"Still thinking about Blinis, are you? Well, *I* was thinking about those two in the train. I bet they're feeling sick as hell. That'll teach them to put on airs, the silly fools!"

"Yes, the silly fools!" echoed Vladimir thickly.

It was always difficult to judge how drunk he was; up to the last stage he retained a certain self-control.

The Villa was strangely forlorn that evening; even the lights seemed less bright than usual.

"What would you like for dinner tonight?"

"Nothing."

"But -"

"Damn it! Didn't you hear what I said? Nothing. All I want is to be left in peace."

"But what's wrong? Do please tell me, dear. I've never seen you like this before."

"What's wrong? What's wrong? . . ."

He picked up the bottle of gin and dashed it on the floor. There was a crash of broken glass.

Suddenly he stiffened up, and fixed his eyes on Jeanne.

"Blinis did *not* steal your ring," he said slowly and distinctly.

"What's this you're telling me?"

"I'm telling you . . . I'm telling you . . ." As there was no gin he took a long pull of vermouth, tilting the bottle to his mouth. "I'm telling you that . . . I'm a bloody swine. I wanted Blinis to go. So I took the ring and put it . . ."

Jojo, who, so far, had not opened her mouth, did so now; to give a little cry of horror.

Jeanne stood up.

"Is this true, what you're saying?"

"Yes. I was jealous."

"Jealous? Because of me, you mean?"

"Because of—of everything. But no one would understand. He must be at the station now."

Again a picture rose before him, of Blinis sitting on a wooden bench, with a bundle at his feet, waiting for a train.

"Well, what am I to do about it?"

"How can I tell?"

"Listen, Vladimir. Shall I send him some money? Desire can take it." When she saw Vladimir shrug his shoulders, she added: "Or would you rather I had him back?"

He gazed at her mournfully, then shrugged again.

"Why don't you say something? I can't bear to see you in this mood. It . . . it gives me the creeps!"

"Supposing I went to see him?" suggested Jojo.

"Yes," said Jeanne eagerly, "that's a very good idea. Wait! I'll give you some money. You can tell him . . . I don't know what, anything you like."

"Oh, I'll manage all right. Once I've given him the money, he **won't** make any difficulties."

Five minutes later she left in the car, with ten thousand francs

for Blinis in her bag. Jeanne went to the sofa and sat down beside Vladimir.

"Now tell me the truth, dear. What were you jealous about?"

"Oh, nothing in particular."

"It wasn't on my account really—that I'm pretty sure of. . . . You may as well own up."

"For God's sake, leave me in peace!"

"I can read you like a book, Vladimir, and I *know*. You've been making up to my daughter, haven't you?"

"No."

"You liar!" But there was less anger than affection in her tone. And she quickly added: "Anyhow, I'd have no right to blame you for it; I'm just as bad myself really. . . . You saw the state Edna was in this morning, didn't you?" She gave a nervous laugh. "She'd stolen my lighter. I knew she'd been hankering after it for ages. And I found something else in Jojo's room, but I didn't say anything about it."

"What was it?"

"That's my business. But I shan't mention it to her. She's such a queer creature, anyhow. Do you know, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if she pockets five thousand of the ten I've given her for Blinis. . . . Poor Blinis! And I thought you two were such great friends!"

There was a short silence. Jeanne drank another cocktail.

"But you're just the same as me. I haven't any real friends, have I? Not one true friend in all the world." Her eyes filled with tears; though she could imbibe large quantities of drink without bad results, the first two or three cocktails always had the effect of making her sorry for herself,

"I dare say it's just as well really; he was getting much too thick with my daughter." She pondered for some moments; then that morning's scene on the yacht came back to her, evidently, for she murmured; "Still, that was a low-down thing to do, you can't deny it. Are you really so unhappy as all that, Vladimir dear?"

She blew her nose. For some minutes neither spoke. Then, hearing the sound of an approaching car, Vladimir moved hastily

towards the door. His nerves were on the stretch; he had an impression that Jojo had been away for hours.

"Well?" he asked eagerly as she entered the hall.

"I was too late. He's gone."

"Where?"

"Helene doesn't know. He took a train this afternoon."

"What train?"

"She couldn't say. Here's the money."

Jeanne said, "Put it there," adding after a moment, "What's my daughter doing?"

"Nothing in particular. She was coming on shore when I left, to have dinner at Polyte's."

Vladimir suddenly rounded on her.

"I say! You didn't tell her, did you?"

"No, of course not." Jojo guessed that he was on the brink of flaring up. "I shouldn't have dreamt of such a thing."

But he went quite close to her and peered into her eyes, to satisfy himself she wasn't lying.

Jeanne yawned.

"How about some dinner? I believe cook's made one of those tarts I like so much, for tonight."

IV

EASTER SUNDAY had come, and from six in the morning 'buses had been pouring in from Toulon and Marseilles, all of them crowded. The men, who for the most part carried fishing-tackle, after a quick breakfast at Polyte's, hurried seawards, and posted themselves on the rocks fringing the Cap d'Antibes, while the womenfolk and children, in the scantiest of costumes, fanned out along the beach. Every skiff and dinghy, sea-punt and sailing-boat, down to the smallest craft, little bigger than a boy's model, was putting out to sea. Spluttering bursts of sound came from motor-engines; sails flapped languidly in the faint breaths of air.

There was the promise of a sweltering day. Sky and sea were bathed in a silvery haze, and, to amuse themselves, two young

airmen Were circling the bay, flying so low that the women in the pleasure-boats gave shrieks of terror each time they passed, only a few feet overhead.

In his usual corner Vladimir was eating olives and anchovies, and drinking wine, while Polyte bustled about the cafe, and Lili watched him from the corner of an eye as she served the other customers. She had on the usual black dress and white apron, but this morning, Vladimir noticed, she had left off stockings. He also noticed that she had well-shaped legs, and their skin was of a very smooth, silky texture.

But he gave her no more than a glance. Lili had a pert little face and trim figure—she looked less than her age, which was eighteen—and was always a centre of attraction at the cafe. Everyone had a friendly word for her, and one of the male customers' amusements was teasing her to make her blush. But she had eyes only for Vladimir—and Vladimir seemed hardly aware of her existence.

A family from Marseilles had settled down at the table next to his. He inspected each in turn, as if something about them had caught his interest; first the plump, perspiring matron in a pink silk dress; then her husband—whom, for some reason, he took to be a plumber; then a small man, the woman's brother probably; and finally the children. After which, abruptly, as if their proximity were more than he could stomach, he rose and, without a word to anyone, walked across the road towards the yacht.

Bells were pealing, the sky was like a dome of pale blue glass under which the two 'planes circled incessantly with a shrill, waspish drone. Stepping on board, Vladimir observed that Helene was no longer in her chair, and, peeping through the saloon skylight, saw her preparing her morning coffee on a spirit-lamp. She was fully dressed, even at this early hour. Never once, since she had come to live on the yacht, had he caught her in a dressing-gown, or indeed in any sort of *neglige*.

He paced the deck for some moments, but she did not once look up towards him. It was uncomfortably hot in the bows. A big kapok cushion was lying on the deck amidships, where there was a patch of shade.

After turning once or twice like a dog settling down to sleep, he

stretched himself on the teak planks, crooking up his knees, his head resting on the cushion. The only movement he made during the *next* hour or so was to draw the peak of his cap down, to shade his eyes.

But he did not fall asleep. Nor was he thinking. He continued to be vaguely aware of what was going on around him, of the voices of the holiday-makers putting out in row-boats, of buses rumbling in, some of them from as far as Lyon or Paris, and halting for a moment outside Polyte's cafe.

Everything was as it had been, and it was precisely this absence of any change that galled him most. Since that fateful day he had never been able to regain his peace of mind; indeed, his nerves had gone to pieces. No matter where he went he felt dissatisfied, and the only respite he had found was to lie down on the deck and let the sunlight seep in through every pore, till a gentle drowsiness stole upon him, bringing forgetfulness.

The extraordinary thing was how calmly everybody had taken it. He remembered his return to the yacht that first evening, and his excitement at the thought that from now on he and Helene had the boat to themselves; she was there, behind that open port-hole, lying on her bunk. Perhaps she had heard his steps on the gangway. Anyhow, she must know that on this night there were only the two of them on board.

Though he was a long time getting to sleep in his cabin, where the opposite bunk was, for the first time, empty, he had risen the following morning before sunrise, all eagerness for his first contact with Helene under these new conditions.

That morning he had been in a curious mood, full of romantic imaginings. They—he and Helene—were alone together, in a little world apart. And now he was going to take Blinis's place; to prepare her morning coffee, play cards with her, help her into the motor-boat. A new life was beginning.

He was so near her now that, listening attentively, he could follow all her movements as she got out of bed and dressed. When she was ready, he was waiting for her in the saloon with her breakfast.

"Good morning, Mademoiselle,"

There was no response. After a while, noticing that he remained standing near the table, she looked up and said coldly:

"There's no need to stay. I can look after myself."

This had found him unprepared. He had expected her to begin putting questions, trying to find out if Blinis had really stolen the ring; indeed, he was prepared for a certain hostility on her part, to start with.

She looked very pale that morning; but, of course, she never had much colour. And she was, as usual, quite composed.

"Will you be wanting the motor-boat?" he asked.

"No, thanks."

"Is there nothing I can do for you?"

No.

At the cafe, too, everything was the same as usual. With one small exception; Polyte, who never missed a chance of doing a stroke of business, came and sat beside him as he was breakfasting.

"Is it a fact that Blinis has got the sack? I've a brother-in-law who might take on the job; he was steward on a liner for five years. Just now he's at Bordeaux, but I could send him a wire. He's an A I cook, just the man you need."

The Town Clerk came up and tapped Polyte's shoulder.

"That's enough about your brother-in-law. I've a much better idea. Tony here ..."

For Polyte's customers had already been talking it over among them; everyone had a proposal to make, and the competition for Blinis's place promised to be keen. Tony was the Town Clerk's nominee, and, bringing his glass, he, too, came and planted himself at Vladimir's table.

"There's no point in having an extra man on board at night while you're in harbour. Tony's free in the daytime; he does all his fishing by night. And the dumb chap can give him a hand. They could look after the yacht between them, and you'd be on velvet."

"But how about the cooking?" Polyte cut in. "Tony's all right, of course, but I don't see him as a cook."

They left it at that for the moment. Just before eleven, Jeanne came in the car, accompanied by Jojo, her sole remaining guest.

They ordered luncheon at Polyte's. Then, while Vladimir and Jojo stayed on deck, Jeanne went down to the saloon and had a long, whispered confabulation with her daughter; after which she called to Vladimir to come down.

He found mother and daughter seated facing each other across the table.

"Listen, Vladimir." In Helene's presence Jeanne usually addressed him in a formal tone. "We must make a new arrangement, now that Blinis has left. My daughter absolutely refuses to come and live at the house. And she won't hear of my engaging anyone as cook." Jeanne was exceptionally fit that morning, having drunk little the day before and had a good night's rest. Her mind was working lucidly, her voice relatively clear. "So she must shift for herself. But, of course, the *Electra* must be looked after properly, and you will need a man for that."

After some discussion it was settled that Tony the fisherman was to be engaged as deck-hand, on a monthly pay of a thousand francs. Vladimir would have his meals sometimes at the Villa and sometimes at Polyte's.

Nothing more was said about Blinis. Jeanne had already lost all interest in him. A sale of jewellery was taking place at Monte Carlo that afternoon, and, for want of anything else to do, Jeanne proposed to attend it. Accordingly, no sooner was lunch over than she drove off with Jojo to Monte Carlo.

Helene was sitting, reading, in a deck-chair at the stern. Vladimir was hidden from her by the saloon skylight. People were strolling on the quay, pausing to gaze enviously at the yacht, and making stupid comments.

Of the girl's social background, or her early days, Vladimir had no knowledge. All he had gathered was that she was Jeanne's child by her first husband. Possibly the man who had held a ministerial post was meant, but from certain remarks she had let fall, he was inclined to think there had been a previous marriage with someone to whom she never overtly referred.

It would hardly have been possible for two people to be more intimate than were Jeanne and Vladimir. They got drunk together almost daily, and slept together several nights a week. Jeanne did

not trouble to conceal from the Russian that her hair was dyed, and had even vomited in his presence. They knew each other's failings through and through, down to the least savoury details.

And yet Vladimir could not have brought himself to ask point-blank:

"Why has Helene come to live with you?"

Jeanne, too, kept off the subject of her daughter. Certain tracts of their lives were, so to speak, forbidden zones.

She, for instance, had not dared to probe into the motives which had led Vladimir to wrong his friend so cruelly. Though six days had passed since then, she had never once broached that subject. It was over and done with, the last chapter of a closed book. The farthest either of them went was when, on the Monday, Vladimir asked nervously:

"Have you told Helene about it?"

"Who do you take me for?" she had replied indignantly. . . .

A shaft of sunlight struck down on the peak of his white cap, and Vladimir could feel his eyelids glowing. As his limbs relaxed, even the hardness of the deck on which he was lying gave him a curious, almost voluptuous sensation. Everywhere, on land and sea, that Easter mood made itself felt; voices had a special timbre, even the noises of the street were different. And there, only a few yards from him, was Helene in her deck-chair. . . .

He was in a curious mood, at once exultant and despondent. Dominant was the sensation of her nearness. He knew the novel she was reading; the scene was laid in the Malay Archipelago, and it was almost as if they were reading it together. Now and again she turned a page, and he caught himself listening for the rustle of the paper.

How simple it might have been! And yet it was impossible. Yet why, where Blinis had succeeded, must he fail? Why, for instance, had she never given him a friendly look, but always remained aloof, impregnable, as though she had set up a barrier between them?

It would have been so easy for them to go down to the saloon and have a game of Sixty-six—he knew it better than Blinis—while sunbeams coming through the skylight played on their shoulders

and the low sound of waves lapping the hull lulled their senses. They would forget all about Mme Papelier and her satellites, about *The Mimosas* and the sordid side of life.

Like Blinis, Vladimir would tell her stories of his youth. Not quite like him, though. He would strike another, more serious note, and tell no lies. For Blinis made a point of lying, whereas he, Vladimir, would stick to the truth. He might say, for example, that now, at the age of thirty-eight, he was still a child at heart—an unhappy child, just as Helene was an unhappy little girl. "Unhappy" because of her mother's being what she was, of course. . . .

He would ask her: Was it his fault if he had developed into the man he now was? And explain that his life had stopped short, so to speak, at the age of eighteen. There had been three frantic months, when he lived in a sort of dream or, rather, a nightmare, as in retrospect he saw it. He had fought in Denikin's army, killed men, seen death in many forms, and—clearest memory of all!—been ravenously hungry.

Then, abruptly, had come the mad stampede to Constantinople, in the course of which they had slept in barns or on the roadside, or, more rarely, sheltered in the attic of some charitable soul.

After that he had found work as a cafe waiter. It was at the cafe that he had met Blinis, who was employed there as scullery-boy. He had never had any news of his mother, who had stayed in Russia.

"You understand, Helene, don't you?" he would say.

But Helene was reading her book at the other end of the boat, and probably she despised him for being at once her mother's lover and employee. . . . But then why didn't she despise Blinis? He, too, was an employee. And . . . the other thing as well, though perhaps she didn't know this. Still, it had happened more than once. On the first occasion he'd almost lost his temper—but only because he suspected the Caucasian of trying to supplant him!

The dumb man, who had come alongside in a row-boat, thrust his head over the rail. He made some gestures, to enquire if there was anything he could do, and Vladimir, sitting up for a moment, shook his head.

After all, she had only to stay where she was, instead of coming

here. But where exactly had she been, before ? Probably in some small provincial town; at a convent-school, perhaps, where her father used to come to see her every Sunday, with some trifling present; a box of chocolates, or the like.

That was the explanation, probably. She'd never seen life, *real* life. Never seen, for instance, a drunk man; still less, a drunk woman. That would explain why she always stiffened up and looked so distant when her mother appeared.

Yes, she'd have done better to stay where she was, wherever that might be. Before her coming, life went smoothly enough for them all; time slipped by without one's noticing it. There was always company, music *in* the evenings—and plenty to drink. A girl like that would never realize what a relief it can be when one's drunk at night, to get the day's accumulated grievances off one's chest. A glorious purge!

If she despised them all so much, why couldn't she go back where she came from, instead of imposing her scornful presence on her mother and her mother's friends ? Or, anyhow, have tact enough not to draw distinctions between a man like Blinis and a Vladimir ?

Instead of that, because Blinis had a boyish laugh, Creole eyes, and spoke with a droll accent, she had taken a fancy to him—with the result that they formed a pair apart, like the small children at a party, who are given a table to themselves. But why take to Blinis and scorn Vladimir ? Was it because Blinis never touched strong drink ? If so, it was most unfair. She should have been more interested in Vladimir precisely because he drank, because he *had* to drink. For one thing, the reason Blinis refrained from drinking was that it always turned his stomach. For another, he didn't *need* to drink.

Blinis could be perfectly contented—more than that, happy—scraping the ship's hull, or fiddling about with saucepans in the galley. And when he yarned about the Caucasus and his family, deliberately making it sound pathetic, that, too, was a pleasure; he relished the effect he was producing.

For Blinis was a born actor, and a natural romancer; that was the secret of his charm. He enjoyed playing a part, building himself up

into a figure of romance. He was no prince, or anything like it, and, even had there been no Revolution, would never have become a naval officer, as he had been ploughed in all his examinations.

Vladimir had never given his friend away, though he knew the truth; that Blinis's parents were mere farmers, *kulaks*, if fairly prosperous by Russian standards. His life in Jeanne's yacht was as good a life as he could have expected in the best of circumstances.

He was a queer mixture. When talking to women, he made great play with his fawn-like eyes. For, boyishly sentimental though he was, he knew what he was doing, and sometimes, at such moments, would give Vladimir a furtive wink.

"Like this. And like that. So!" He talked that way deliberately, knowing people found it quaint; that his simplicity amused and touched them. Tears came to him as easily as laughter, and he made a point of weeping whenever a Russian folk-song was being played on the gramophone.

Whereas Vladimir—drank! He drank because he really felt things; was genuinely unhappy.

Surely Helene should have understood this; and also that, if he was Jeanne's lover, it was less from interested motives or a fear of losing his job than because, when they were drunk, they could unburden themselves to one another, speak freely of their disillusionments.

Yet, if Helene had only consented . . . ! If only she had looked at him with the kindness in her eyes that she reserved for Blinis . . . ! For his love for her was deeper, truer than the Caucasian's. For instance, even if they had accused him of worse crimes than the theft of a diamond ring, he would never have run away as Blinis had done. Surely, too, it was a proof of his devotion that he could content himself with her mere proximity, with the merest glimpse of the hem of her skirt!

He was waiting till it was eleven and she got up from her chair. She had rejected the proposal that she should have her meals at Polyte's restaurant, and every morning went to Golfe-Juan, as Blinis used to do, carrying the same shopping-bag. She would visit the butcher, then **the** greengrocer, buy things that were easy to cook, and have simple meals by herself in the saloon.

Vladimir watched her going, and returning along the quay, at first a distant sunlit figure, and gradually growing clearer as she approached. Always she showed a slight discomfort when starting up the narrow gangway, for so far she had not found her sea-legs.

After that he could tell what food she had brought by the smell that came up from the galley or the saloon. He made a point of asking if there was anything he could do for her, and invariably had the same curt reply.

What possessed her to dislike him as she did? Everyone else could see how depressed he was, and was sorry for him; she was the one exception. When having meals at the restaurant, he never spoke, and Lili would have gone to any length to console him.

Tony, the Town Clerk and the others treated him with deference—though deference was by no means in their nature—because they felt somehow awed by him; he had become a man of mystery! No one would have dreamed of laughing at him when he was drunk and making blundering efforts to find the door-knob.

All his thoughts turned on her incessantly; on Helene's pale beauty, her quiet ways, her far-away eyes. Yet with Blinis she had seemed so much at ease, when she would spend hours listening to his fairy-tales, his absurd jargon. "Like this. And like that. So!"

Vladimir's eyelids were twitching. But he was no Blinis, he wasn't going to cry. Instead, he lit a cigarette and, lying on his back, watched the smoke curl up towards a small white cloud island in the blue.

His thoughts harked back to Constantinople, where he and Blinis had been so desperately poor. Still, they had managed to find a room to live in, and, when the day was over, Blinis would cook a little supper with scraps of meat filched from the kitchen of the restaurant where they worked. He stole chunks of ham and even caviare, and with a cheerful grin would fish them out of his pocket and lay them on the grease-stained table. As they ate their supper, they gazed out of the window, which faced the Bosphorus.

Their life was like that of a young married couple. They pooled their savings to buy a gramophone, and when they had an afternoon off, would hire a boat and go out rowing.

Vladimir dropped his cigarette on the deck, without troubling to

stub it out. How angry Blinis would have been; Blinis who could not endure a speck of dirt on his "little, pretty boat" !

That trick he had of using baby-talk, conscious of its effect on his audience. Vladimir could never have brought himself to say "My little, pretty boat"—nor would he have taken all that trouble to keep it clean. A year had elapsed since the *Electras* last cruise, and quite likely the Diesel had rusted up—but little he cared !

If he was thinking of Constantinople now, it was probably because the feel of the air here, this Easter morning, was exactly the same. And, while the intervening years seemed to melt away, he gave up his mind to fancies built on memories of those early days.

Thus he pictured himself and Helene setting out in a few minutes' time to do their marketing together at Golfe-Juan. In the market a smell of vegetables filled the air, cabbage-leaves and onion-skins littered the ground between the stalls. He could see Helene examining a barrel of apples, then wondering if she should buy a bundle of asparagus. Their eyes were smiling; the cheerful gaiety of the stout Southern matrons round them was infectious. Vladimir was carrying the shopping-bag and, almost without thinking, Helene took his arm—with one of those gestures which, better than words, convey affectionate understanding.

Then there would be the lunch to cook together on their return to the yacht. He, Vladimir, would lay a diminutive table-cloth on the saloon table. And now it would be his turn to tell her stories, and he had hosts to tell: of the Black Sea, Berlin and Paris, for he had taken four years to make his way, city by city, to France.

"My poor father was shot," he would tell her.

His mother was still alive in Russia; but it wasn't safe to write to her, letters from abroad might get her into trouble. By now she was quite an old woman, and he had difficulty in imagining her appearance. He pictured her poor and friendless, waiting in never-ending queues outside the co-operative shops.

Then, perhaps, Helene would tell him about her father, who, he supposed, had died quite recently. He had noticed that she always wore mourning. And her father must have died quite poor; otherwise she would hardly have come back to her mother after his death, Jeanne being what **she was**.

Surely, like Blinis, he could retrieve his youth, and take up life where he had left it those catastrophic days of the flight to Constantinople?

"Promise me, Vladimir, to give up drinking."

Of course he'd promise, if she asked this of him. What was more, he'd keep his word. At first, perhaps, he might have a drink or two on the quiet, but gradually he would master his weakness. When he went to Polyte's he would order a lemonade.

But why continue going to Polyte's? There would be better ways of spending his time

Mass had ended, and people in their Sunday finery were streaming out of the church. There was quite a crowd now on the quay. The bells were louder than ever. It must be twelve o'clock, or a little after.

Looking up, Vladimir saw that the hem of the dress was no longer visible. He rose to his feet. Helene had gone; only her book lay open, face downwards, on the deck-chair.

Abruptly another picture rose before his eyes, one that came to him at all hours of the day—irrationally enough, for he couldn't be really sure that Blinis had taken a train. He saw his friend, with a bundle at his feet, in his striped jersey, sailor's cap and white trousers, sitting on a bench on the platform, gazing at the empty lines.

The regular customers were submerged by the noisy crowd round every table. Two extra girls had been called in to help Lili to serve the *bouillabaisse* and crayfish. For their game of *belote* Tony, the dumb man and the "Italian" had taken refuge in the kitchen.

Everyone was in high spirits, talking at the top of his voice. And yet there was something counterfeit about the gaiety of all these men and women. For one thing, they had so obviously dressed up for the occasion, a holiday at the seaside; their costumes were grotesque, and hardly less grotesque the tackle the men had brought with them for a few hours' fishing, while their wives dozed in the shadow of the pines, or kept an eye on the children. Some had come in the vans they used for their businesses; one of which,

drawn up at the cafe entrance, bore an inscription in **red letters**: *Eggs, Butter, Cheese.*

"See that yacht over there? Well, she used to be a torpedo-boat. You can tell it by the cut of her stern."

Lunching by himself in his usual corner, Vladimir listened unsmiling. Actually he envied these people—while they envied him his job as captain of the *Electra*, and children gazed wide-eyed at his striped jersey and peaked cap. Lili came to his table.

"There's a letter for you."

The men stared appreciatively at Lili as she walked by; the short, close-fitting dress showed her trim young figure to advantage. Only Vladimir had no eyes for it.

And Lili took no notice of anyone but Vladimir.

"A fellow from Toulon," she explained, "gave it to me this morning."

The envelope was dirty and of the cheap kind supplied by small stationers. The address was in Blinis's writing. For some reason he'd pictured Blinis as being far away by now; whereas he was no farther than Toulon, two hours by train.

"*Vladimir*" the letter began. It was in Russian and written in pale blue ink. "*I could not see you before I left, but you owe me an explanation. As you know quite well, I did not steal that ring. I insist on your telling me if it was you who put it in my box. This is very important, more important than you probably imagine. I promise I won't be angry with you; only I must know. Write to me at once, Poste Restante, Toulon.*"

"*The reason I went away was that Helene had lost faith in me. But all the same, please tell me in your letter what she is doing, everything she says, and how she is.*"

"*I await your answer, but I have little hope that I can still call myself*
"Your friend, George.""

He had signed with his real Christian name. The letter was, like himself, frank to a point, but one might read between the lines. What exactly was he getting at, why did he insist on the importance for him of *knowing*? Why should it be more important than Vladimir probably imagined?

"You'll have some *bouillabaisse*, won't you?" Lili asked, with an amiable smile.

He shrugged his shoulders. Helene had just gone on board with her marketing. Presently, when he returned to the *Electra*, he would be met by a smell of grilled meat and vegetables on the boil.

Yes, what was Blinis driving at, exactly? And why had he gone no farther than Toulon? Almost Vladimir could picture him hovering round, keeping an eye on things. And, as it so happened, at this point of his musings a 'bus coming from Toulon pulled up outside.

It was almost uncanny. True, Blinis didn't alight from it, but it was a reminder that he might appear at any moment. Also, of course, it would be quite easy for him, Vladimir, to go to see Blinis.

For a while he dallied with the idea. In half an hour's time, after calling at Antibes, that 'bus would be going back. It should be easy enough to hunt up Blinis at Toulon.

He went on eating, hardly knowing what he ate. Some drops of the *bouillabaisse* had smeared the letter; Vladimir tore it up into small pieces and dropped them on his plate. So absorbed was he in his thoughts, he failed to notice that Desire's car had stopped outside. A moment later the chauffeur came in and sat down at his table.

"Hullo, Vladimir."

Yes?

"She wants you at once."

"Oh? Is she up already?"

"Yes, she was dressing when I left. And in the hell of a temper, so it seems."

Vladimir could guess why. Those pealing bells, this atmosphere of fete, had the same effect on both of them; on days like this the crowd came into its own, and people like themselves felt out of it. They had nothing in common with these cheerful, carefree folk, and it went against the grain to mix with them. ... Or perhaps it was rather that such occasions stirred old memories, and regrets.

"What are her plans?"

"We're leaving for Marseilles in an hour."

"Helene going with you?"

"Don't know. I've a note for her."

"Hand it over. . . I'll be back in a moment."

Vladimir returned to the yacht, and knocked at the saloon door, which was something Blinis never did.

"Here's a letter from your mother."

It was not a steak but a cutlet that was sizzling on the little stove. The novel lay open beside the girl's plate, and near it were small cartons containing *hors oeuvre*.

"Tell my mother . . ." She paused and glanced at the clock. "Shall you be going with them?"

"Where?"

"To Marseilles. My mother's going there with her friend."

"Yes, I expect she'll want me to go."

"In that case, tell her I'm not coming."

"But suppose we don't get back tonight? You'll be all by yourself on board."

"Why not?"

"Won't you be frightened?"

"Tell my mother I don't want to go to Marseilles."

"Yes, but don't you think . . .?" he began tentatively.

"Give my mother that message, please."

He found himself tongue-tied; at such moments she had the *hauteur* of some great lady of the old regime. But this impression of aloofness was, perhaps, due less to her bearing than to the isolation which she not merely tolerated, but courted. All she asked was to be left in peace, to have her solitary meals, and read the hours away in her deck-chair.

"Good afternoon, Mademoiselle."

"Good afternoon."

He walked quickly down the gangway. There was no point in lingering now that the day's programme was settled. The chauffeur was drinking coffee laced with cognac. Vladimir had two wine-glasses of the harsh local brandy in quick succession, and his eyes began to redden.

V

WAS it really Cogolin? Anyhow, for the last few miles the name had been recurring on the milestones. Cogolin or not, it was with this odd-sounding name, which fixed itself on his memory, that Vladimir always associated the little scene.

For quite a while they had been driving through a forest of parasol-pines. Desire was at the wheel, imperturbable as ever, with Jeanne beside him. Vladimir and Jojo were at the back; a sliding panel of greenish-yellow glass separated them from the other two. Sometimes they saw Jeanne lean towards the chauffeur and her lips move, but they could not catch what she was saying.

The road began to climb. At a corner near a farm they came on a number of people all going the same way, in a ragged procession. A wedding party, evidently. The men's black clothes brought out their sun-tanned peasant faces; the women were in blue or pink. There were some big-bosomed matrons; the older men were smoking short cigars.

The wedding breakfast had, no doubt, been held at the farmhouse, and now they were all taking the air along the high road, arm-in-arm. There was something sculptural about the scene; *it* might have been a wedding procession carved in wood and coloured by some old-time Nuremberger craftsman. This frieze-like effect was partly due to the angle at which the sunbeams met the slowly moving forms; also to the background of dusky pinewoods and red rocks on which the black shapes of the men stood out with a peculiar sharpness; and perhaps also to the crystalline purity of the air.

The little procession moved to the side, and stopped to watch the car go by. Vladimir felt the fleeting impact of a small boy's eyes, admiringly intent on him.

After the *next* turn came the village; it had an air of childish make-believe, like a hamlet of dolls' houses. On the village square some men were playing bowls. They had taken off their coats and white shirt-sleeves flashed in the almost level rays. And **all** the way **along the road, as they proceeded, there was the same atmosphere of naive well-being, rustic gaiety.** Nearing the sea, one had

glimpses of men perched on rocks, each with his fishing-rod, and at the entrance of each lane and byway cars were drawn up, and their occupants could be seen strolling or lying down amongst the trees.

Even the old men on their doorsteps had put on their best clothes for the day. And the showy blue saloon, so unlike the other cars on the road, superbly indifferent to Easter and the sunlit landscape, drew every eye. Everyone felt it wasn't of the same class as the usual Sunday cars, and it ruffled their tranquillity, like a pebble thrown in a lake—but only for a moment. No sooner was it out of sight than they relapsed agreeably into the mild enjoyment of an Easter Sunday afternoon.

Pleasant-looking villas, some as large as *The Mimosas*, with their gardens full of flowers, were dotted along the road. But a glance was enough to show that these were of the same family, so to speak, as the cars drawn up on the roadside, the anglers, and the wedding party taking a stroll between two meals.

"And yet she's not a bad sort, really."

For nearly two hours neither had spoken. And now came this remark from Jojo, almost like a comment on his thoughts. Vladimir started, and gave her a long stare. She looked more pensive than usual, perhaps because she was bored and rather sleepy. She, too, was "not a bad sort, really"; it was her appearance that put Vladimir off. She was too fat, for one thing. . . .

One afternoon, on entering Jeanne's drawing-room, he had caught her with the Count at an embarrassing moment. He wasn't much surprised; still, he had wondered what Lamotte found in her.

"I can't think what came over her this morning," she sighed.

"Did she make another rumpus?"

"She was quite nasty to me. And I'd only shown her a letter from my little boy."

Hyerès and its palm-trees had been left behind and they were about to cross Toulon. Vladimir was feeling anxious; Jeanne might have the idea of stopping for a drink. In any case, the mere sensation of his nearness to Blinis, who was probably idling the hours away in some tavern, made him ill at ease.

Then the remark Jojo had made penetrated his consciousness; she had spoken of "her little boy." He'd **had no** notion **Jojo was a**

mother. It was always so with the people one met at Jeanne's place; one knew next to nothing about them. Vladimir had caught Jojo with the Count, had looked after her when she was dead-drunk, and she had wept on his shoulder, but he had no idea she had a son,

"How old is he?"

"Seven. I've his photo here."

She produced it from her bag. A gracefully built boy with clean-cut features and candid eyes. The only thing against his appearance was that he seemed to have inherited his mother's sallow complexion.

"Where is he?"

"In Switzerland, at a boarding-school. I've always been worried about his lungs. This morning Jeanne was in the room when I was reading his letter, and I showed it to her; then all of a sudden she turned on me and started abusing me like a fishwife. She asked me how I could bear to live apart from my son, hadn't I any natural affection?"

Gazing at Jeanne's thick-set shoulders, Vladimir thought of Helene, and tried to understand.

"She said I didn't keep my son with me because I couldn't do without men, and he'd be in the way. Of course, that's an absolute lie. I don't give a damn for men. Would you believe it, she said I was no better than a tart and if I hadn't some money of my own I'd be on the streets!"

In Toulon, too, reigned that holiday spirit, with family parties slowly promenading, a military band playing on the Front, crowds in the cafes. As the sun neared the horizon, the light grew denser, and the shadow following each passer-by seemed almost solid, a silhouette clamped to his heels.

"I've known people," Vladimir murmured in a thoughtful tone, "who every New Year's Day, when they hang up the new calendar, put red rings round every public holiday and week-end."

Jojo gave him a puzzled look. The remark baffled her. As a matter of fact, it had been suggested by what she had just been telling him, taken with the scene under his eyes. After a few minutes' silence she spoke again.

"Jeanne's tight as a clam, of course, about her early days, but I've

an impression that she must have been very poor once, and had a rotten time. For one thing, she's never breathed a word to me about that first husband of hers, who died last month. The Count has an idea he was a railwayman, or something of the sort."

For Vladimir her words evoked a picture of the girl on the yacht, her dark, slim form, and her cool, indifferent gaze. He fell to wondering what sort of man Helene's father had been. Perhaps it was he who had taken Jeanne to Martinique, where she had met Leblanchet and got married to him—her first step to opulence.

"She's generous with her money, I'll say that for her, but I'm pretty sure that if there was any risk of her becoming poor again she wouldn't stick at murder to prevent it."

They had left Toulon. There was no danger now of meeting Blinis. At every moment they were catching up and passing little cars which, laden with flowers, were returning to Marseilles, and Desire was sounding his horn repeatedly.

"What are we going to do at Marseilles?" Vladimir enquired.

"I haven't an idea. All I know is that she was feeling bored. She always gets bored when there's no one at the Villa. I suppose she's going to hunt up some new friends. . . . No, she's not a bad sort. Only she's so—how shall I put it?—so insensitive about some things. This morning, for instance, when she was calling me names because I don't have my son to live with me, it was on the tip of my tongue to tell her she'd do much better not to keep her daughter with her."

"Yes, you're right. Jeanne's hardly a model of virtue for a girl in her teens."

"Tell me, Vladimir. Hasn't she ever asked you anything?"

"Who?"

"Helene. I've watched her several times when we were on the yacht, and I can't help wondering what she makes of all our lot. I dare say she thinks we're quite crazy. . . . Do you know, I had half a mind to clear out the other day, wick Edna, but then I thought better of it. If I had to earn my living, I'm sure I could settle down to it and live on next to nothing. But, with an income of five thousand francs a month, it's another story. One's sort of betwixt and between, if you see what I mean."

Without thinking, Vladimir laid his right hand on her knee, and she let it stay there. There was no amorous intention behind the gesture, but for the moment he felt drawn towards Jojo; she fitted so well into the pattern of his thoughts.

"One day there'll be a crash," she sighed, as if summing up her meditations. "I'm sure of it."

"A crash? What sort of crash?"

"Oh, I can't explain. But all this will come to an end one day; pretty suddenly, I expect."

That there was something fundamentally brittle in their present mode of life she had long suspected, though what it was eluded her. And today she was more convinced of this than ever. She, too, had been observing thoughtfully those cheerful holiday crowds and the host of little cars speeding along the forest roads like hounds in full cry. Meanwhile, with a deep throbbing of its eight cylinders, the big saloon was overtaking everything, and Desire, with the disdain of a chauffeur used to high-powered cars, hardly bestowed a glance on the small fry of the road as he outpaced them.

Jojo's thoughts took a new turn.

"Did Blinis really come of a good family?" she asked.

He pondered before replying. What was her idea of a "good family"? Blinis's father was no nobleman; still less a prince. But his family owned three or four thousand sheep on the Caucasian foothills. Vladimir first thought of telling her the truth; then he decided not to, it would be too much like letting Blinis down.

"Yes, he comes of a very good family."

"It must have been terrible for him. Yet, I don't know, I'd rather be a servant than live like those people do."

They were entering the suburbs of Marseilles, and Jojo pointed to the small shopkeepers and their wives walking with a sedateness befitting their Sunday best.

Then she blushed. It had just struck her that her remark about Blinis would apply equally to Vladimir, and she had used the term servant.

"Of course, it's different for you," she put in hastily. "Sailoring's your profession."

She lowered her eyes; Vladimir was smiling at her, as if to say:

"You're very kind to put it like that. But you know quite well that I'm a 'servant' too."

And a servant, moreover, who could never hope to escape from bondage; in the same plight as herself. A servant used to drinking champagne and whisky, lolling in a big car, living at his ease. He discovered that he was still holding the photograph of Jojo's little boy, and handed it back to her.

This gave him a pretext for removing his hand from her knee, and she, too, drew away a little, opened her bag, and began to ply her powder-puff and lipstick.

"I haven't yet decided what sort of job he should study for. What do you suggest?"

They were entering Marseilles. With an effort Jeanne slewed herself round to see what they were doing in the back of the car, then turned towards Desire, and they could see her lips moving.

"You might have reminded me, Vladimir, that it was a Sunday today," she said sulkily as she stepped out of the car beside the *Cintra* cafe.

She eyed with distaste the crowds on the wharves of the Old Harbour. After closing the door of the car, Desire stood by, waiting for orders. Jeanne halted on the pavement, undecided.

"Well? What shall we do now?" she asked fretfully. And, when neither Vladimir nor Jojo made any suggestion, she continued: "Really, you two are the limit. You look half dazed. What were you up to at the back? Making love? I wouldn't put it past you!"

At the Villa, Desire was quite capable of strolling into the hall, a cigarette between his lips, and on occasion speaking rudely to his employer. But in public, in the street, he was the model chauffeur, all deference and attention.

"What's the time, Vladimir?"

Six.

"Only six?" Jeanne frowned. What could one find to do at six o'clock in a city teeming with holiday-makers? The people in the *Cintra* were watching them through the windows. After a pause, she added: "Anyone feel like eating?"

There was no response. They all were vaguely conscious how

absurd it was to have travelled full speed all the way only to find the half-hour gained so difficult to fill.

"I suppose we may as well go in, now we're here. . . . You can wait for us outside, Desire."

"Sorry, Madame, they don't allow parking in this street."

"Then drive where you like. You'll find us somehow, later on."

She was wearing a very distinctive cape in a heavy white material, and for once the big diamond sparkled on her finger. Everyone stared at her as they entered, and the manager, who knew Jeanne, hurried forward obsequiously.

"This is indeed a pleasure, Madame. It's ages since your last visit.

"That's all right," she said curtly. She always had a short way with such amenities. "Now hurry up, young fellow, and bring us some cocktails."

That was another foible of hers, addressing anyone who served her as "young fellow," whatever his age. The manager was a well-dressed man in his fifties, with a son in the Army.

They were given a table near the window, and a good many of the people in the cafe stopped talking, to watch them. Vladimir was feeling low, and Jojo, after her sentimental effusion over her son, too exhausted even to make a show of cheerfulness.

When Jeanne broke the silence, her question took Vladimir by surprise.

"Had any news of Blinis?"

Er—no.

"That's too bad. What a dope he is!"

"But—" Vladimir was about to say something in defence of his friend. He resented Jeanne's light-hearted way of speaking of him.

"There's no 'But' about it. If he hadn't been a complete idiot, he'd have come to me and explained things—No, they're not dry enough," she added to the waiter who had brought the cocktails. "Take them away and bring another lot."

When the man had gone she said:

"As a matter of fact, I'm rather glad we're rid of him. I wouldn't mind betting **he had** something **else** on his conscience, even if he didn't **steal my ring.**"

There was a brief flash in Vladimir's eyes, and he promptly lowered them. Probably, if Jeanne spoke in this tone, she was feeling as uncomfortable as he about it. Jojo incautiously put in a remark.

"Aren't you rather hard on him ? After all, he'd been accused of being a thief; I'm not surprised he preferred not to stay."

"Don't talk rubbish!" snapped Jeanne.

Vladimir was about to make a sign to Jojo to keep quiet, but it was too late.

"It isn't rubbish. Do you suppose I'd let anyone accuse me of being a thief?"

"Of course you would."

Jojo blushed, but found the courage to retort:

"Certainly not."

"Oh yes, you would, my dear. You'd put up with anything so as to go on having a good time. But we're all alike, we're a pack of cowards, that's the truth of it. I'm no better myself; if I was, I wouldn't be here at this moment with you two. If only I had an ounce of pluck—"

She fell silent. Often she would go on for weeks without making a bitter remark; then, all of a sudden, something in her would seethe up, a bitter discontent, and everything she said breathed loathing for the world at large, herself included.

"Just look at that little bitch who's trying to listen to what we're saying!"

She fixed her eyes on a girl, a shop-assistant or typist by the look of her, who was sitting with a young man at a neighbouring table. Deliberately Jeanne had raised her voice. The girl began to fidget, and the man with her was even more embarrassed, feeling he should retaliate, but not knowing how to begin.

"Waiter! What about those cocktails?" When the man brought them, she asked: "Can we have some dinner here ?"

She knew quite well that the *Cintra* never provided dinners, but refused to take "No" for an answer, and protested shrilly, staring meanwhile at the other customers with an air of vast disdain, as if **they were creatures of a low, objectionable species.**

"Can't you open that window ? It's stifling in here." Abruptly

she added: "I'm going to get tight tonight," and beckoned to a page. "Go round to *Pascal's*, will you? Tell them Madame Papelier wants dinner for three, the best dinner they can produce. Got it? Wait! Tell them to put some bottles of champagne, the kind I always have, on ice. Here's the money for your taxi."

She handed him a hundred-franc note, and refused to take the change. All the same, when, a few minutes later, she was paying for the cocktails, she carefully verified the check and gave only a ten-franc tip.

"Well, you haven't much to say for yourselves, you two. Do try to buck up."

Night was falling. The motor-boats that had taken holiday-makers to the Chateau-d'If were coming into harbour one by one, and families on their way home were calling in at the pork-butchers' and greengrocers' to buy something for their supper. Married couples were lingering on the pavements outside the restaurants, studying the menus posted on the doors, and debating whether or not to enter, while the children with them tugged their hands impatiently.

"It's a bit early for dinner, but never mind. A spot of food may brighten you up a bit. You'll end by giving me the hump if you go on like this."

At *Pascal's* she had a royal reception. The proprietor hovered round her, rubbing his hands, enquiring after her health, and the staff gathered at her table.

"Isn't there *anybody* at Marseilles just now?" she asked as she took her seat. Though there were two million people in the city, there might still be "nobody." The proprietor took her meaning.

"Well, Miss Dolly dropped in yesterday, but I gathered she was leaving this morning."

"Miss Dolly" was an attractive English girl who *in* the previous year had figured in the chorus of a revue, and had subsequently been taken up by an elderly American. The odd thing was that the American was said to have no use for girls!

"Was Brian with her?"

"Yes, and two other people I don't know. . . . Wait a bit! No,

there's nobody would interest you. Except Sir Edward; he had lunch here today—at your table, as a matter of fact."

"Sir Edward? Oh, the colonel, you mean?"

"Yes, he's been here two days. I think he's come about a yacht that's for sale."

At one in the morning there were six of them seated round a table at the *Pelican* cabaret, at the far end of the room, near the band. The colonel had got two of the girls attached to the establishment to join their party. Jojo, who had eaten too much, was feeling liverish and staring mournfully in front of her, while Vladimir sat beside Jeanne, who had forced him to dance with her several times.

Jeanne, too, wasn't in form—for the same reason as before, that it was a Sunday. Though the place was crowded, here too, as in the town, there wasn't anybody. Anybody who counted, that is to say. The cabaret was full of noisy young people, swilling lemonade or beer and dancing incessantly. And with them were some wretched women, professionals or semi-professionals, who would count themselves lucky if they made fifty francs in the whole night.

When the violinist was going round with a plate, Jeanne put a hundred francs in it and told him to sit down.

"Have a drink with us. . . .What a queer lot of people you have here!"

There were three bottles of champagne on the table.

"Well, it's not always so crowded," the violinist replied cautiously. He had sunken eyes and looked desperately tired.

"What time do you close usually?"

"When there's no one left. At three or four."

He wore a wedding-ring, and Vladimir could have sworn he had two or three children. Probably that afternoon he had taken them for a walk on the water-front, in the dust and glare, amid the clang and clatter of trams; and then the family had settled down on some cafe terrace to watch the endless stream of passers-by.

Bowing politely, the man rose.

"Well, I must get on with my round."

"Wait! Do you know any Russian tunes?"

"One or two."

"Then play us some, with your orchestra."

"I'm afraid they're not very good to dance to." He glanced round the room; all these people had come with the sole object of dancing.

"Never mind that," said Jeanne imperiously, putting another hundred-franc note in his plate. "They can dance afterwards."

A few minutes later the band was playing a Russian folk-song, all the musicians gazing in Jeanne's direction. The others understood, and patiently waited for jazz to be resumed.

"Oh, Vladimir dear!" Jeanne sighed.

She was not very far gone as yet; but her eyes were beginning to grow moist.

"There are times when I wish I was poor, really poor. . . ." A lie, as Vladimir knew well. But in this sort of make-believe she found a respite from her boredom. "What do you think my daughter's up to at this moment?"

"She's asleep, of course."

"By herself, do you think?"

He felt a spasm of anger, but kept quite still. Jeanne's question had outraged him, like a sacrilege. But then she added thoughtfully:

"Yes, I expect she's by herself. And I should think she's 'intact,' though of course one never knows." She gave a shrill little laugh and drank some more champagne. "I doubt if Blinis brought it off, he's too soft. . . . What's become of him, I wonder?"

Vladimir, too, finished off his glass; then gave her a sour look.

"What swine we are!" he muttered.

"You *do* sound serious, Vladimir! What's come over you?"

Facing them, the two girls were giggling at the colonel's witticisms, while Jojo in her corner seemed to have fallen into the uneasy sleep of the over-eater.

"Still thinking about Blinis?" Jeanne asked, and, as Vladimir kept silent, added: "It's stupid to let *that* get you down. Something else would have happened to him anyhow; he's one of the unlucky ones, that's all. **Once** upon a time I used to be sorry for people who had **no luck**. **I've got over that**, thank goodness. If I

hadn't, I'd be so sorry for myself, life wouldn't be worth living. Look at that poor devil playing the violin."

Vladimir looked at him. As the man played, his cheek pressed to his instrument, he was casting glances towards the rich lady who had given him two hundred francs. The pianist too, a plump, dark-haired girl of twenty or so, was looking in her direction.

"Those people have two hundred francs to share amongst them, and they're wondering how to spend all that money. I expect the violinist will buy a new hat for his wife, and won't she enjoy showing herself off in it! And the girl who's playing the piano ..."

She was evidently drunker now than one might have supposed from her appearance, for tears began to roll down her cheeks—a sure sign!

"And does anyone, anyone in the world, ever dream of giving *me* anything? Answer that, Vladimir! I might as well be dead for all the interest people take in me." She called the waiter and told him to bring another bottle of champagne. "It's your vile Russian music that's upsetting me. Really, it shouldn't be allowed, music like that—it makes one feel all twisted up inside." Standing up, she shouted to the violinist: "Stop that! Play something else."

Everyone was staring, but this didn't perturb her in the least. She was used to it.

"We were talking of Blinis just now. Well, I'm not a bit sorry for him; he'll be happy anywhere. You know what I mean? He has a knack of settling down, making the best of things, wherever he happens to be. Like my daughter. Before she came to me she'd lived all her life in a Paris suburb, where her father was station-master. That surprises you, doesn't it? Yes, and when I married him he wasn't even a station-master; only a booking-clerk. Just fancy! For twenty-five years he never left the Bois-Colombes station; for all I know, he never changed his lodgings."

"I'm feeling rotten," Jojo whimpered, "and I'm so sleepy. Do let's go home."

"Certainly not!" Jeanne retorted roughly. She had other plans for the night. Then she harked back to the subject of her daughter. "You've seen what Helene's like. After being poor as a church mouse, she has money to spend. But she stays put in her corner,

she does her own marketing, and cooks her meals on a spirit-lamp. Crazy, isn't it?"

"Well, *you* could never do that."

"Of course I couldn't. And that's just why. . . ."

She fell silent. They gazed absently round the crowded room. The colonel was fondling one of the girls beside him, superbly indifferent to all the people looking on, while the girl pretended not to notice what he was up to. Jojo made a hasty departure to the *Ladies*. Looking rather downcast the violinist came up.

"Wasn't that what you wanted?" He was still wondering why she had asked him to stop in the middle of a piece.

"Oh yes, it was quite all right."

"I'm so sorry. . . . I expect you'd heard it played by a real gipsy band; of course, we aren't very good at that sort of music."

"I tell you it was quite all right. You played very nicely."

He couldn't make head or tail of it; nor did he know how to break off the conversation.

"Got any children?" Jeanne asked.

"Yes, three."

"Then what the hell can *it* matter to you?"

Of that, too, he could make nothing; and he went off none the wiser. Following up her thoughts, Jeanne turned to Vladimir.

"I expect those kids don't have meat to eat every day of the week. . . . What a damned fool that Jojo is, sending her son to a boarding-school in Switzerland! She showed you his photo, didn't she? When one has a nice kid like that, one doesn't part from him—or, if one does, one ought to have one's neck wrung. And all she's done it for is to be able to swill champagne at my expense and lead an idle life. Yes, human beings are a disgusting lot. Why don't you listen? Tight already?"

She studied his face carefully, and she knew him well enough to see he wasn't quite drunk, as yet.

"What are you thinking about? Can't you get your mind off Blinis?"

"At Constantinople . . ." he began.

"Oh, cut it out! I've heard all that before. I know you nearly starved, you two. And I don't wonder."

He turned and looked at her; had she observed his eyes, their look might have surprised her; there was something much like hatred in them.

"At Constantinople," she continued, "you'd missed the 'bus already. You'd had your chance."

"What do you mean?"

"You know the state your country was in. Everything was in the melting-pot, as they say. Well, that's just when a man can do something, make a fresh start—even if he starts from nothing. Only, you hadn't the guts. . . ."

His lips tightened, and he drew a deep breath.

"You don't reply? But you know it's true, what I've just said."

"My father was shot," he said in a low tone.

"And don't millions of people die every day?"

"My young sister was carried off, and, before she died, ten or a dozen fellows . . ."

She swung round on him.

"Is that true?"

"I swear it's true."

"Oh, you're always swearing things. . . . But, for this once, I'm prepared to believe you."

"And my poor mother . . ."

"Please don't tell me any more. I couldn't bear it." She was again in a melting mood, and choked back a sob as she reached out for her champagne-glass. "Sorry, Vladimir. I shouldn't have talked like that. But no one can understand, not even you. All of a sudden something comes over me, and . . . Waiter, some more champagne. Not little bottles. A magnum. No, two magnums while you're about it. . . . Here's luck, Colonel. All the best, my dears. Vladimir, you might go round to the *Toilet* and see how Jojo is. Perhaps she's really ill."

He made his way stumbingly across the dance-floor and found Jojo studying her face in the glass, while the *Toilet* attendant stirred an aspirin for her in a tumbler.

"Anything wrong?"

"Yes, I'm feeling awful. Are we leaving now?"

"I don't know."

"Shall we sleep at Marseilles?"

"Let's hope so. But she hasn't said anything so far."

"Really, I sometimes wonder if she doesn't do it on purpose."

Jojo did not specify what that "i t" meant—but they understood each other. By way of answer Vladimir said:

She s crying now.

"She always does at this stage." Jojo drank the aspirin, hiccupped and dabbed some more powder on her cheeks. "I'm ready."

There were fewer people now. The colonel, who was smoking a Havana, had one of the girls on his knee. In honour of Jeanne's party and her lavishness, favours had been distributed round the room, and when Vladimir came back with Jojo, Jeanne was wearing a fireman's helmet in yellow paper. But already she had forgotten **that** she had it on.

"**What** have you been up to all this time, you two?" There was a note of suspicion in her voice.

"Nothing," Jojo answered. "I was feeling ill."

"Really, I'm beginning to wonder if you and he aren't having an affair!"

"Heavens, no!" Jojo exclaimed indignantly.

And it was the truth. Such an idea had never crossed the mind of either.

"That's just too bad. I shouldn't mind a bit, you know. I'm not one of the jealous sort. . . . Are you, Colonel?"

He was unable to reply, as he had not heard what went before.

The band was still playing, solely for their benefit. The proprietor was making up his accounts, with the barman's help. The only garments still hanging in the cloakroom were those of Jeanne's party, and the waiters were beginning to eye the clock. One magnum was still full.

"We'd better finish it off, I suppose," sighed Jeanne, and filled the glasses herself.

Then she beckoned to the head waiter, checked the bill with him, and found thirty francs too much.

"Ah, you thought I **was** tight, didn't you. Well, you shan't **have a tip. That'll teach you!**"

They rose and crossed the empty dance-floor, catching their

ankles in coils of paper streamers. At the door Jeanne turned, then took a few steps towards the bar, and in her most queenly tone summoned the head waiter.

"Come here. There's a hundred francs for you. But don't you try those tricks on me again."

As she expected, Desire had succeeded in tracking them down and, when they stepped on to the pavement, opened the door of the car.

"Home!" Jeanne sounded quite worn out. Then, glancing round, she saw the colonel, who also had his car. "Won't you come with us?"

"No, thanks." He preferred the company of his two girl friends. Desire suggested politely:

"Wouldn't you be warmer at the back, Madame?"

"You know I hate being shut up in the back."

But some miles from Marseilles, when they were in open country, Jeanne complained of feeling cold. The car was stopped and she put on the chauffeur's coat over hers. Jojo was asleep, her head sagging to one side or the other at each bend of the road, and Vladimir smoking cigarette after cigarette in his corner.

He, too, felt cold; he had not thought of bringing an overcoat. The picture of Blinis sitting disconsolate on some railway platform, waiting for a train, still haunted his imagination; he could almost feel the night-wind scouring the station, cold air seeping through the domed glass roof.

All he could see was the outline of Jeanne's head and shoulders, like shadows on a screen, and he noticed that she had forgotten to remove the fireman's helmet. Was she asleep? he wondered.

As he continued smoking it seemed to him that, with the coldness of the night, something else was slowly permeating him, something subtler, more insidious. It was a feeling of hatred for those broad shoulders, the massive neck looming up in the backwash of brightness from the headlights.

Now and again Jojo moaned in her sleep. Unconsciously she had slipped off her shoes and drawn her legs up on to the cushion; her stockinged feet were pressing against Vladimir's thighs.

VI

Two months later, at various times of the day, but especially on waking up in the morning, Vladimir would still catch himself starting to say something in Russian, then stopping in the middle of a phrase when he realized that the words fell on vacancy, Blinis was gone. On two nights, when an east wind was blowing and he happened to come back later than usual, he had found the dumb man lying fully dressed on Blinis's bunk, and the sight of that big, ungainly head on the pillow had affected him disagreeably. For the rest, the bunk had remained unused.

There was no calendar on board, but without even going on deck one could fix the date approximately ; the feel of the air, the sounds from the outside world, varied constantly with the time of year.

June was ending, and the big refreshment-rooms on the beach, resplendent in new coats of paint, had opened all their windows, and were doing a brisk trade in ices and *bouillabaisse*, cocktails and tepid beer, their loud-speakers going full blast from dawn to dusk.

Strung out along the sands were bathing-tents and cabins, and at the far end, dominating all, a water-chute and diving-tower. The pavements had developed into one long cafe-terrace, an unbroken line of iron chairs and small round tables.

The harbour, too, was crowded up with craft ranging from luxurious yachts to small canoes, and including various quaint contraptions, some of which looked like enormous spiders and were worked by pedals.

In the evening, groups of people gathered on the quay and sat there for hours, watching the night fall, to the strains of the gramophones they had brought with them. In a tall, narrow building, honeycombed with furnished rooms, that overlooked the sea, the windows lit up one after another, and one saw couples leaning on the balconies, outlined against the lamplight.

Had Lili guessed ? . . . One day, though Vladimir hadn't drunk more than usual, he started up from his seat—he always sat in the same corner, near the bar—so precipitately that, as she walked across the room carrying a tray of drinks, she stopped to watch.

There was no mistaking the look on his face; it was one of panic, and Lili could have sworn he was on the point of bolting to the kitchen.

Then she followed the direction of his eyes, and wrinkled her brows. Some young men were entering the cafe in a group, quite ordinary young men, whom she had never seen before. Already Vladimir had mastered his alarm, and was preparing rather shamefacedly to sit down again.

"What made you jump up like that?" Lili asked.

He pretended to be examining the chair on which he had been sitting.

"Oh, nothing really. . . . I thought some insect had stung me."

But Lili had noticed that one of the young men was of Blinis's build, wore white trousers, a striped jersey, and an American sailor's cap.

There were a good many young fellows who affected that style of dress, but on this occasion Vladimir had been taken by surprise. He had been looking in another direction, when from the corner of an eye he had a vague glimpse of the young man's form behind the glass door, and for a moment could have sworn it was Blinis.

But it was on his way back from *The Mimosas* at night that his obsession reached its climax, and he peered nervously into the shadows under the trees, where dark forms were moving in couples and some, who had brought camp-beds with them, could be seen sleeping in the open. And he always turned on the light before entering the cabin; it was as if he half expected to find Blinis there, lying in his old bunk.

He had not revisited Toulon. Of course, the probabilities were that Blinis was no longer there; but quite possibly he had come nearer, and at any moment might make his presence known. The least sound beside him was enough to make Vladimir start, and he would swing round to scowl angrily at those who had unwittingly alarmed him.

By way of incidents there had been two during those two months; one no more than a conversation, the other a rather serious accident. But it was the former, a mere exchange of words, that had the more far-reaching consequences.

Helene was still living in the yacht. She spent her time reading and sketching, seeing to her meals, and, in the early morning, going for solitary excursions in the dinghy. Her contacts with Vladimir were as few as she could make them.

The work on board was shared by Tony and the dumb man, and the yacht was kept in tolerable order, no more than that. Tony continued to go out fishing every night. He was an odd character. Now that he was on Mme Papelier's pay-roll, he always addressed Vladimir as "Captain," seemingly with much deference, and touched his cap to him.

"Any orders this morning, Captain?"

He even said "Captain," or sometimes "Skipper," when they were playing *belote* together. None the less, he did exactly as he chose on board the yacht, and even used the deck for drying his nets. Also, he made free with all the tools in the engine-room, and Vladimir couldn't have sworn he had not pocketed some of them.

"Good morning, Captain. Any objection to my taking a length of that there rope? I want it for my drag-net."

There were some coils of brand-new rope in the store-chest. Vladimir had weakly said "Yes." Thinking about it later, he had an impression that Helene was within earshot at the time. But she had never shown the least interest in anything concerning the yacht.

Next day, however, she accosted Vladimir on deck.

"I've something to ask you."

"Yes, Mademoiselle?"

"Did you give Tony leave to take some rope?"

The net was drying in the sun, with the length of new rope showing up between the meshes.

"He asked me for it."

"And you told him he could have it?"

Vladimir flushed, and lowered his eyes.

"Does my mother know," the girl continued, "that you're giving away the ship's stores like this?"

"Oh, she'd never bother her head about a bit of rope!" Somehow he managed to assume a casual tone.

"I suppose that's why she's always being robbed, right and left?"

He made no answer. He was breathing quickly, but, so far, had betrayed no emotion.

"I'll ask you to draw up an inventory of everything on board the yacht. And I also ask you to tell that man I don't want him littering the deck with his nets."

"Very good, Mademoiselle."

"Wait! What's the value of a coil of rope like that?"

"About two hundred francs."

"Thanks. . . . That's all for the present."

Vladimir never found out if Helene had mentioned this to her mother. Just now Jeanne was in one of her relatively tranquil phases. After a spell of excitement there often came a reaction, during which she led an orderly, almost exemplary existence. Her servants and dependants dreaded these interludes of virtue.

Jojo was the first victim. No one learned what exactly took place between them, but one morning, on his way to the Villa, Vladimir met Desire coming back from the station.

"So that's another of 'em off our hands," grinned the chauffeur.

After Jojo's departure the Villa was empty of guests, and a new form of activity prevailed. Jeanne, who had risen at, for her, an early hour, could be heard giving orders to the gardener, near the greenhouse.

"Vladimir, come here, please!" Her tone was peremptory.

"Is everything on the yacht in order? I shall be starting out for a cruise *in ten days'* time, and you must make the necessary arrangements. We shall call at Naples, then go on to Sicily."

"Very good, Madame."

There would be no point in demurring. Regularly at this time of year she planned a cruise, and preparations were hurried forward on the yacht. All sorts of changes were made, and sometimes an entire crew stood by for days, or even weeks, awaiting the order to put to sea. On one occasion they had actually got as far as Monte Carlo.

"It would be as well to install another drinking-water tank," Vladimir suggested gravely.

"Yes? What would it cost?"

"I couldn't say off-hand. Perhaps a thousand francs. Perhaps a little more."

"I don't want 'perhapes.' Get an estimate."

She checked the household accounts, haggled over sous, put the gardener through his paces, found fault with the car and with the appointments of the Villa, and had the decorators in.

"And of course you must find a captain, a real one," she told Vladimir.

He took it calmly. As he knew, she had in mind the cruise which had ended prematurely at Monte Carlo. Though he claimed to have a master's ticket, Vladimir had only the haziest ideas of navigation, and had nearly wrecked the yacht just off Menton.

"Very good, Madame," he repeated. "I'll look round for one."

An additional fresh-water tank was installed, and Jeanne went on board the *Electra* daily to supervise the alterations, lavishing advice on the men engaged on them till they very nearly threw up the job.

She was putting on weight. Vladimir hardly tried to veil the hostility in his eyes when they were together. One day, by way of reprisals, she enquired if he had any news of Blinis, and deliberately added;

"I've an impression that the yacht was much better looked after in his time."

Blinis and his "little, pretty boat"! There was no denying that Tony and his mate were nothing like so good as Blinis at cleaning a deck and polishing brasswork. Nor would Blinis ever have allowed an outsider to remove even six inches of a new coil of rope. Vladimir had once seen him refuse to lend a spanner to a fisherman, merely because the spanner belonged to his "pretty boat."

If any youngster, greatly daring, ventured on to the deck, intending to dive off it, he would shoo him angrily away. Nor did he permit any row-boat or canoe to make fast alongside the *Electra*.

And all the time Vladimir was haunted by the feeling that, were he to look round, he would see Blinis there, as large as life—with his beaming smile and girlish eyes. . . .

Jeanne spent two evenings at Nice without asking him to accompany her. On the second occasion she brought back an Edna rejuvenated and blonder than ever.

"I ran into her at the Casino, and I've asked her to join us for the cruise."

All, apparently, was forgotten or forgiven, and Edna was again in favour. She settled down at *The Mimosas* in her old bedroom, and on the following Saturday there appeared a very tall young man, who bent double to kiss his hostess's hand.

"This is Jacques Duranti, my fiance," Edna proudly announced.

So the Count was a back number; the engagement had been broken off. The new fiance was a shy, sentimental youth, an engineer by profession, who would sit beside Edna for hours, murmuring endearments and squeezing her hand.

Preparations for the cruise were hurried on. Duranti, who had arranged with his firm for a week's leave, proposed to fly to Naples and join them there, so as to share the most interesting part of the voyage.

He lived in Paris with his mother, a very dignified old lady, who had a comfortable, if rather gloomy, flat on the left bank of the Seine. He always sported the badge of a Patriotic League on his lapel, and was eagerly looking forward to the refresher course for Reserve Officers due to take place later in the year.

On her return from seeing him off at the station on the Sunday evening, Edna exclaimed petulantly:

"Oh, what a sap the man is! I feel quite flattened out. Do you mind if I ring for some fizz, Jeanne?"

"Certainly, dear."

It had a queer effect on Edna, seeing Jeanne in her new role, bespectacled, poring over accounts, and writing elaborate letters to her lawyer.

"Tell me, Vladimir, how much petrol do the engines use per hour?"

She had made friends with a man who let her have it with a small discount, and lubricating oil at cost price.

Would they sail, or would the cruise fall through? Two or three candidates for the post of captain had come forward, and Vladimir was keeping them in suspense.

Then one afternoon, out of the blue . . . The originating cause of the catastrophe was the dynamo used for charging the accumulators,

Though the bearing had been repaired and the local expert had overhauled it twice, it still refused to work properly, and Jeanne was growing more and more exasperated.

That afternoon she had called in another mechanic, an employee of the Power Company at Nice, and Desire had been asked to give a hand. Jeanne remained on deck and, through the engine-room skylight, watched the activities of the men below. Edna stood beside her, while Helene, seated on a folding chair at the end of the jetty, was making a watercolour sketch of the harbour.

"Wait! I'm coming down!" cried Jeanne, annoyed by the mechanic's slowness.

To get to the engine-room she had to go round by the bows. She walked quickly past Vladimir, grumbling to herself, cursing the dynamo and the incompetence of the man from Nice. As it so happened, the foreward hatch was open, and she failed to notice this. Abruptly she vanished from sight, as if the deck had swallowed her up, and piercing cries came from below.

They lifted her up as gently as they could on to Blinis's bunk. She was complaining of acute pain in her left leg, and, after manipulating it gingerly, Vladimir discovered that there was a fracture of the shin-bone.

Jeanne was screaming with pain, and in a blazing rage with everyone.

"Damn it all! Why doesn't someone bring me a drink? Can't you see I'm half crazy with pain?"

Her daughter entered the cabin and gazed down at her mother as calmly as she might have gazed at a complete stranger.

"There's nothing to drink on board," she said.

"Then go and get something, one of you."

Desire ran across to Polyte's and came back with a half-bottle of liqueur brandy. He had had presence of mind enough to ring up the doctor while at the cafe.

When the doctor arrived, Jeanne was sobbing like a child, stroking her injured leg—and the bottle was almost empty.

The accident had given her such an aversion for the yacht that her one desire was to get away from it, and she would not hear of staying on board overnight, as the doctor advised. An ambulance

was sent for, and meanwhile she showered abuse on Vladimir for his carelessness in leaving the hatch open. Then she rounded on her daughter.

"You must be mental, wanting to stay on this rotten boat when you've a comfortable home to go to."

The crowd on the quay drew apart to make way for the ambulance. Gingerly the injured woman was carried up the companion, step by step, and deposited on the stretcher brought by the ambulance men. She would not hear of going to a nursing-home, and insisted on being taken to her bedroom in the Villa.

Anyhow, that disposed of the projected cruise. The doctor informed Jeanne that she would have to remain in a lying position until the end of the summer. Despite the prohibition of the nurse, she made a point of drinking herself fuddled almost every day.

"Who do you think is mistress in this house?" she would ask indignantly. "I'm paying you to nurse me, not to preach at me. If I choose to drink, it's my business."

"No, Madame."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that my duty is to make you well; I must carry out the doctor's orders, and no one else's."

Strangely enough, Jeanne, who ordinarily flared up when contradicted, took it meekly. Instead of making a frontal attack she had recourse to ruses. Vladimir was instructed to bring her drink in flat bottles that wouldn't show in his pockets. But the nurse noticed them one day.

"You should be ashamed of yourself, you the captain of a ship! If you had the least self-respect, you wouldn't stoop to a thing like that."

Whereat Vladimir merely laughed. Much he cared for the woman's tirades! What importance had they beside the taunts that Helene had directed at him? Or, for that matter, beside the wrong that he had done his friend?

The more Jeanne drank, the easier it was for him to despise her. And he even took pleasure in her unsightliness; for, now that she was confined to bed, she ceased to trouble about her appearance.

The dye was **fading** from **her** hair, and the low-cut nightdress disclosed **the** furrows in her neck.

After **the** first few drinks she would ask Edna to leave her alone with Vladimir, and she often brought the subject round **to** her daughter.

"Doesn't she ever say anything about me, Vladimir?"

"She never speaks to me."

Then she would turn and look at him thoughtfully, and there was something in her look which told the Russian how well they understood each other.

"She comes here every day—but only from a sense of duty. And she stays with me as short a time as she decently can. As a matter of fact, she has more to say to Nurse; she seems interested in medical matters. What a queer girl Helene is!"

It seemed, indeed, that Helene and the nurse had taken a fancy to each other. One evening, to Vladimir's surprise, the nurse came on board and spent some hours with Helene, in the saloon. After that she came quite often, never taking the least notice of Vladimir.

The nurse was a rather masculine-looking young woman of about twenty-five, as sedate as Helene, and very sure of herself. Her name didn't suit her at all; it was Blanche.

Sometimes, lurking in the engine-room, Vladimir tried to catch what the young women were saying to each other, but their voices were too low.

Jeanne was reverting to her old habits. He brought her two flat flasks daily, and they induced the usual flood of maudlin self-commiseration.

"I'm the unhappiest woman in the world, Vladimir darling. Now I'm laid up, I'm just a nuisance to everybody. The servants treat me like dirt. Edna's bored stiff; she'd like to be going out and having a good time, and I can't blame her. Really, there's only one thing they regret about my accident—that I didn't break my neck while I was about it! But I don't want to die, not yet anyhow. They'll have to put up with me for a long time yet, whether they like **it** or not." After that she started questioning him as **to** what he **had been doing on the yacht**. "**You aren't making up to my daughter by any chance, are you ?**" Then, with a sudden change

of tone: "Tell me, do you really think she's never been to bed with a man?... Fancy my asking you that! But I expect you've formed your own opinion. Every time I see her, I can't help wondering if she's as saintly as she looks."

"I should say she is."

"So you think! But you know nothing about it. Men never do. When I got married I was a virgin, but even my husband wouldn't believe it! Just as he'd never have believed that, one day, his daughter . . . Hand me the bottle, please."

Vladimir's eyes hardened. One day, happening to notice their expression, she had a little qualm of apprehension.

"Vladimir!" she exclaimed nervously.

"Yes?"

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Like what?"

"One would think you hated me. No, not that exactly. It's as if—no, I can't find the word for it. But you're different from what you used to be."

On the following day she reverted to the subject.

"Now listen, dear, I'm going to tell you something that I want you to remember, always. We have our little tiffs, of course, and I dare say there are times when we hate each other. I've said beastly things to you, I admit. But, when all's said and done, our lives are linked together, we can't do without each other. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"Perhaps."

"All the others—they're only there to make a sort of background for us. We understand each other, you and I, even when we aren't talking. You look at me sometimes and I know just what you're thinking, 'What an ugly old hag she is!' But you have to sleep with me, even if I am an ugly old hag. You can't do without me. And I can't do without you."

They could hear the nurse moving in the adjoining room. Though the bedroom windows were always kept open, the air **smelt** stale.

"You remember that trouble over Blinis? Most people would have called you all sorts of names, wouldn't they? But I never said

a word against you, and the reason was that I knew you *had* to act like that." Lowering her voice, she added: "He got on my nerves too, now and then——Don't pretend you don't understand. Yes, you're a damn' rotter, Vladimir, you know it as well as I do—but if you ever tried to drop me, there's nothing I'd stick at, nothing! But there's no fear of your dropping me; you haven't the guts. Where would you be, my dear, if you hadn't got me?"

Those words were echoing in his ears, an odious jingle. "Where would you be, if you hadn't got me?" There was a buzz of voices round him, and a riot of colours where, in costumes of the most varied shapes and hues, people sat drinking on cafe terraces or lay sun-bathing on the sands. All the rooms in the big apartment-house were occupied by married or merely loving couples. Cars kept moving up and down the sea-front, honking their way through the crowd. When night fell, the dusk was full of shadowy forms roaming two by two, and pausing now and then for an embrace.

That evening Vladimir was thinking yet again of Blinis. Going down to his cabin, he extracted from under Blinis's bunk the gramophone which they had bought between them at Constantinople. Without turning it on, he stared at it musingly, and it struck him that he, Vladimir, had only a half-share in it; it belonged to Blinis as much as to himself. Just then a sound caught his ear that filled him with amazement.

The sound came from the saloon, a low, recurrent sound, and after listening for some moments, he knew what it was; the sound of a woman sobbing.

Without stopping to think, he ran up on deck. Just as he was about to go down to the saloon, the hatch was slammed to. He had time to see who did this; Mile Blanche, the nurse. She had hurried forward to intercept him, and the glimpse he had of her face told him that she, anyhow, was not crying. So it must be Helene. . . .

His mind was in chaos and he stayed for some moments gazing down at the closed hatchway. People were strolling on the quay in the cool of the evening; now and again a couple would halt to stare at the yacht.

Vladimir walked on tiptoe to the saloon skylight and, bending forward, looked down. Afterwards, he wished he had not done so ; so poignant was the scene under his eyes that seemed to burn itself indelibly upon his brain. Helene was crouching on the floor, half lying and half kneeling. Kneeling to—the nurse! Tears rolled down her face, and she seemed to be pleading with Mile Blanche.

He drew back hastily; the nurse had raised her head and given him a furious look.

He fell to pacing the deck. After a while, however, it struck him that his footsteps could be heard in the saloon and the knowledge of his presence might embarrass Helene.

Hardly knowing what he was doing, he went on shore, crossed the road to Polyte's, and sat down in his usual corner. There was a group of young men round the bar. One of them was leaning across it, trying to fondle Lili, but she thrust his hand away angrily, her eyes intent on Vladimir.

He did not order a drink. After some minutes, unable to keep still, he made a move outside. And then an absurd impression came over him that Blinis was lurking in the shadows, close at hand, and he felt a qualm of fear. He dared neither go forward nor retreat. From where he stood, in a dark patch, he could see the lights of the saloon port-holes, and he wondered if Helene was still crying.

A voice jarred in his ear.

"Have a glass of wine with me, Skipper ?" It was Tony.

"No, thanks."

At last he brought himself to move, and returned to the yacht. Sitting in the bows, he strained his ears to catch every sound. A new gleam of light on the water told him that Helene had switched on the lamp in her cabin. As the night wore on there were fewer couples promenading on the quay. Tony could be seen on his boat, getting his nets out for the night, and the dumb man was helping him.

After a while Vladimir heard footsteps coming up the companion. Mile Blanche stepped on to the deck, halted, and looked round.

"Come with me, please," she said promptly, on catching sight of Vladimir; then crossed the gangway and took some steps along the quay.

He followed her. Presently she stopped and faced him.

"I am going to put a question to you, and will ask you to answer it—as frankly as you can."

There was a short silence. Looking up, he saw the girl's eyes fixed on him, and there was as much scorn in them as in Helene's.

"Is it true that your friend, the Caucasian, was a thief?"

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Answer, please. You've nothing to fear. And don't try to understand why I'm asking this; anyhow, you'd never guess the reason. Did Blinis steal that ring?"

"Well, it was found in—"

"I know all about that. I'm not asking if you two were accomplices." When he kept silence, his eyes fixed on a speck of light in the distance, she added: "Well? Have you nothing to say?"

"Really, I don't see how . . ."

"All right, have it your own way. I can draw my conclusions. I shall sleep on board tonight. Will you make up one of the beds in the saloon for me, please?"

There were two extra bunks in the saloon, which, when not in use, were folded up against the wall, like the berths *in a Pullman*.

While Vladimir was in the saloon, the nurse remained on deck. He noticed with surprise a slight smell of ether in the air. At one moment he seemed to catch a sound like a sob from Helene's cabin. Then he heard her approaching.

"Are you there?" she called down the hatchway.

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"Where's Nurse Blanche?"

"She'll be coming down in a moment."

He was tucking in the sheets when he heard the nurse's voice behind him.

"That's enough. I'll finish it myself."

When he was going up the steps she called him back.

"Do you intend to sleep on board?"

"Of course. I always do."

"Not always. You sometimes stay at the Villa. I suggest you do so tonight."

"Very good."

She had spoken in a calm, authoritative tone that admitted no refusal. However, though he knew he must leave the yacht, he had no intention of going to the Villa.

That night Polyte's cafe remained open till the small hours, as the young folk who had come after dinner decided to make a night of it. Vladimir stayed till the end, and, in the course of the night, realized for the first time that Lili was in love with him. The discovery gave him no pleasure, nor even flattered his vanity.

"Damned little fool!" he muttered under his breath. It got on his nerves to see her giving him languorous glances as she poured out drinks, and blushing whenever he looked her way. What on earth had caused the girl to fall for him like this? He certainly had never given her any encouragement.

He drank heavily; he felt he needed drink tonight. And then, without knowing how it came about, he found himself on the beach, trudging through the sand. Before him lay a line of bathing-huts, stretching, it seemed, to infinity. He tried the doors of several before finding one unlocked, stumbled in and lay down, resting his head on his folded arm.

The wind must have risen towards five in the morning, for suddenly he realized that he was shivering with cold. The sound of waves had come quite near. But presently he went to sleep again.

When he woke, the sun was up and two men with pronged sticks were walking past, spearing the paper and other litter on the beach. They stared at the odd figure coming out of a hut, his hair tousled, his trousers soiled and crumpled.

A distasteful thought crossed his mind; that perhaps Blinis, too, had spent the night in some makeshift shelter, or even in the open. Once, in Berlin, in mid-winter, they had nearly been reduced to this; at the last moment a compatriot of theirs had offered them a shakedown in his outhouse.

As Vladimir passed the cafe, Polyte, who was already up and about, stared at him, surprised.

"Hullo! You're an early bird today! Just come from the Villa?"

He made no reply. The nurse, too, was up and waiting for him on the *Electra*. She came forward to meet him.

"Did you go to *The Mimosas*?"

"No."

"Where did you sleep?"

"Over there." He pointed to the beach.

She looked at him sideways, then sighed.

"Listen! I want you to keep an eye on Helene. Try to prevent her going too far from the yacht. No, I can't explain the reason, but it's most important."

"Is she asleep now?"

"Yes. Don't disturb her, please. I'll be back presently."

And she started off with brisk, decided steps towards the town.

VII

HE went down to the saloon with the intention of tidying it up, and, without thinking, seated himself on the bed the nurse had slept in. A depression in the pillow showed where a head had rested, and he fell to picturing the girl's black hair flowing over the pillow-case, and then her dark, clean-cut features, which he could never imagine relaxed, even in sleep.

The air was stale and, reaching out to the port-hole, he opened it. Then with a sigh he set to making the bed, haunted all the time by the thought that the nurse had been dressing here only a few minutes before.

A picture rose before him of Helene sleeping in her cabin, and his senses tingled. For some reason he felt a vague repugnance for handling the sheets in which Mile Blanche had slept, though he could not account for it.

He was dog-tired, and conscious that just now he must look a sorry sight, red-eyed and unshaven; he could feel the bristles on his chin.

Sitting down again, he fell to wondering why on the previous night Helene, normally so self-possessed, should have given way to tears, especially in a stranger's presence. Suddenly he started, and rose to his feet; he had heard footsteps approaching. Slowly the door opened; Helene looked in, then drew back hastily.

"Oh, it's you! I thought..."

Obviously, hearing someone in the saloon, she had assumed the nurse was there; for she was in her night-garments, her hair loose on her shoulders. She went back to her cabin and, after slipping on a wrap, returned.

It was the first time Vladimir had seen her thus, and there seemed to hover round her a faint fragrance of the night. Like her mother, like Edna or Jojo, she was wearing loosely fitting slippers, and the first thing she did was to open a locker and take out a bottle of mineral water. At last she spoke.

"What are you doing here?" She sounded tired, or half asleep.

"I've been making the bed."

"When did Mademoiselle Blanche leave?"

"About three-quarters of an hour ago."

"Thank you."

The words were evidently a hint for him to go. And she glanced towards the door, to emphasize this. But Vladimir pretended not to understand, and stood his ground, his eyes fixed on the bottle and tumbler on the table. He was conjuring up a familiar scene: the table strewn with playing-cards, Blinis seated at it with Helene facing him. "Like this. Then like that. So!"

His gaze wavered up to the girl's face, and he noticed the dark rings round her eyes and their look of weariness.

"Didn't you understand? I wish to be alone." Her voice had recovered its cool disdain.

At last he made a move and, going up on deck, leant on the rail. Somehow he had lost the thread of his thoughts. Not that they were real thoughts; rather, fugitive impressions that he vainly tried to link together. Instinctively he cast a glance over his shoulder, to make sure Blinis wasn't there, watching. . . .

What day of the week was it? A Tuesday, he supposed; the day when Jeanne's husband came on his weekly visit. Presently Vladimir would find him on the terrace, in a tussore suit and Panama hat, measuring out words and gestures as though he knew exactly how many of each remained to him and had to make them last his time. Soon after lunch he would return to Nice and have a half-hour's constitutional before proceeding to his Club to read the papers.

But he, Vladimir, would have to stay, and bear the brunt of Jeanne's ill-humour. A dismal prospect at any time, and even dimaller today. For he felt thoroughly exhausted, in mind as well as in body. His eyes fell on the fo'c'sle hatch, and he told himself it was high time to go to dress. Only—he lacked the energy.

Now he saw with brutal clarity things to which hitherto he had shut his eyes. And yet—if he had sunk to the condition of a menial, was he wholly to blame? And even if he had grovelled to Jeanne quite abjectly at times, hadn't a man to live? As for his sleeping with her, that was the only effective way of assuring his position in the household. . . .

But in his heart of hearts this servitude had always rankled; that, in fact, was why he had taken to heavy drinking: so as not to see tilings in the bleak light of reason. Now, however, only one thing mattered; for one sin only would he never be forgiven—what he had done to Blinis.

Strangely enough, were anyone to ask him now why he had done it, he would have found it hard to explain. His eyes were blurred as he stood gazing at the hatch. He was longing to say something in Russian, to Blinis, here and now; something comical that would set Blinis laughing merrily. . . .

"Vladimir!"

He was so much absorbed in his thoughts that he hardly knew whose voice it was, and he gazed blankly round him for a moment before seeing Helene's head emerging from the saloon hatch. The extreme pallor of her face startled him, now that he saw her in the open; he hadn't noticed it when they were below.

"Would you come to the saloon for a moment?"

He followed her down the steps. She remained standing, and he did not dare to sit.

"Sit down."

"But—"

"I ask you to sit down," she said impatiently. "I can't talk to you properly while you're standing."

Her voice, too, had changed. She was twisting a handkerchief **nervously between her fingers. Abruptly, without looking at him, she asked:**

"You're keen on money, aren't you?"

The question was so completely unexpected that he did not even consider its absurdity. Money was the last thing he troubled about, and he lacked the possessive instinct to the point of never being able to keep even a watch. On two occasions he had bought one, only to leave it a few days later at a tavern when, after going through his pockets, he found he had nothing left and the proprietor refused to serve drinks on credit.

"Please listen carefully to what I am going to tell you."

It seemed to Vladimir that all the blood had been drained out of the girl's face, and she might faint at any moment.

"I need your help," she continued. "Shut the door, please."

He shut it, and forgot to sit down again.

"Sit down!"

So strange was her look that for a moment he wondered if she had gone out of her senses—which would explain the injunction that the nurse had given him. At first her voice came in jerks, with a short gasp between the phrases, but after a while it seemed to fall into a rhythm, the words flowed on, as if she were reciting something learnt by rote.

"When I've finished, I shall give you money and you must go away at once. I've a little money of my own, that my father left me." She was postponing the odious moment. She poured herself out a glass of water, and forgot to drink it. "You're a man. There are things a man can arrange quite easily. Nurse Blanche refused **to help.**"

Through a port-hole came a series of short sharp bangs—a motor-boat was starting up—subsiding to a steady purr.

"This is what I want you to do for me, Vladimir. I want you to find a doctor who'll consent to . . . to . . ."

Vladimir rose slowly to his feet, choking down an exclamation, while the girl drew a deep breath, then said in a harsh voice, the tone she might have used for a rebuke:

"I'm pregnant. . . Now do you understand?"

He was **aghast**, and his face must have expressed his bewilderment, **for Helene gave a short, hard laugh.**

"Is it such a surprise to you?"

He realized that if she had appealed to him for help, it was not as to a friend in need. The fact that she had begun by offering him money made that brutally clear. The truth was, she regarded him as so vile that she felt little compunction in approaching him. With anyone else it would have been different.

"You see what I expect of you ? This child must not come into the world. If he did, I wouldn't want to live; I'd do away with us both together. I know there are doctors and midwives who handle cases of the sort. Make enquiries. And let me know at once."

She shed no tears, but one had the feeling she might collapse at any moment. To compose herself she took some steps round the table ; Vladimir followed her movements with his eyes. Evidently his silence exasperated her, for suddenly she raised her voice.

"Why don't you answer ? Haven't I made it clear enough ?"

"Mademoiselle," he began uncomfortably.

Mademoiselle!" she echoed mockingly. "Is that all you have to say?"

But he couldn't get a word out. And when his eyes fell on the table he seemed to see cards scattered on it and to hear Blinis's cheerful laugh.

"Well, will you do what I want, or not ? Needless to say, you must not breathe a word of it to anyone—in your interest as much as mine. Here!"

She had the money ready. From the table drawer she took five thousand-franc notes and held them out.

"That's to cover the first expenses."

Suddenly Vladimir planted his elbows on the table and hid his face between his hands. Tears were rolling down his cheeks. Never in all his life had he felt so wretched. It seemed to him that he had touched the rock-bottom of human misery. He could not bring himself to look up at the girl, who was beginning to lose patience.

"Control yourself, for heaven's sake!" she exclaimed irritably. "I loathe scenes of this sort."

But, try as he might, he could not check his tears, and he began mumbling to himself in Russian.

"Did you hear what I said, Vladimir?"

At last he uncovered his face and tried to look at the girl; then dropped his eyes.

"Was it . . . Blinis?" It was an effort to get the name out.

"Yes, your friend Blinis." There was no resentment in her voice. "And when it's over, you can go to him and tell him all about it."

He could bear it no longer. Leaving the banknotes on the table, he started up the companion.

Helene called after him:

"Vladimir?"

Yes?

"I want your answer. Can I count on you? Get this into your head, anyhow. If you refuse to help me, one of these days they'll fish my body out of the harbour. Don't imagine I'm bluffing; I mean it."

"Yes," he repeated, hardly knowing what he said.

"Then you'll do what's necessary? That's understood?"

He gave no answer. However, he picked up the banknotes and thrust them into a pocket of his trousers. Coming on deck, he winced at the sudden glare; the noise and laughter of the people on the jetty jarred his nerves. There was a voice behind him.

"Where were you?"

Turning, he saw Edna. She was in beach pyjamas, scarlet toe-nails peeping from her white sandals.

"I'd love to have a run in a motor-boat; it's such a lovely morning. Will you take me out?"

No.

"What's up? You look as if you'd been crying!"

"Don't talk such rubbish!" he almost shouted at her.

Then he went to the fo'c'sle, and stumbled down into the darkness of the cabin, closing the hatch behind him. So Blinis had . . .! His hand fell on a jersey and he tore it savagely into shreds. Then he flung himself on his bunk and burst into a flood of tears, muttering to himself in Russian. As he rolled over he felt something hard in his trouser-pocket, the wad of notes.

And he'd never suspected anything of that sort, simpleton that he was! He'd go away, leaving the two of them playing cards in the

saloon, or cooking their meal together, like a pair of innocent children. On coming back at night, he would find Blinis—baby-faced Blinis!—sleeping in his bunk, and never once had he dreamt that only an hour or two before . . .

"Skipper! Hulloo, Skipper!"

It was Tony, wanting to know if the motor-boat would be required that morning. Vladimir went up on deck, and found Edna sitting on the saloon skylight.

"What's come over her?" she asked, pointing downwards. "She slammed the door in my face and said she wanted to be left alone. By the way, are you coming to the Villa?"

But Vladimir was still undecided. He changed his clothes, but did not shave. His eyes were still bloodshot, his eyelids swollen. After all, why not go to the Villa? He had no idea what to do when he got there, but anything was better than staying on the yacht. As he was going down the gangway, the saloon hatch opened again and Helene called to him.

"Wait!"

He hurried back. She was still in her wrap, her features drawn and rigid as before.

"Can I count on you?"

He nodded, though he had not made up his mind as yet. He would need time to think it over.

"Good! Well, if you don't keep your word, you know what I shall do."

Edna was waiting for him on the quay. She had come in the car. Lili, who was standing on Polyte's terrace, smiled to him, and for some reason this affected him disagreeably.

"You drank a lot last night, didn't you?" said Edna, who had been studying his face.

"May be."

"It's silly to drink like that. One day you'll fall really ill, and where will you be then? Have you never had an illness?"

"No."

Desire's back loomed up in front, monumentally indifferent.

"Well, I have. I had a bad go of appendicitis and a beastly operation."

He scowled at her. Why must the damned girl start talking about operations just now ?

"I had the best surgeon in Stockholm for it, but I very nearly passed out, and—"

"Oh, shut up!"

How he loathed her and everyone and everything associated with Jeanne; the car, Desire, the Villa to which he was being taken. For a moment he pictured himself rushing up to the couch on which Jeanne was lying, gripping her shoulders, shaking her soundly, and venting his indignation.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you bitch? Let me tell you what's happened—and it's all your fault!"

Sunlight was falling almost vertically on the garden, where never had there been such a display of flowers as this year; the gardener was spreading leaf-mould from a barrow on one of the beds. In the hall-stands was a stick that Vladimir recognized as belonging to Jeanne's husband, M. Papelier.

He went upstairs. Jeanne had had her couch moved on to the upper terrace, and M. Papelier was with her.

"What's wrong, Vladimir?" she asked quickly, after a glance at his face.

"Nothing."

While her husband gave him a casual nod by way of greeting she examined him more closely.

"Yes, I can see something's biting you. Out with it!"

"I assure you . . ."

"You're an even poorer liar than Blinis. Well, have it your own way. I'll get it out of you later. Tell Mademoiselle Blanche to have some champagne brought up."

He hadn't seen the nurse yet. When he met her coming from the bathroom she, too, gave him a long stare, puzzled by the look in his eyes and his puffy cheeks.

"Feeling ill?"

"No, I'm quite all right, thanks. Madame Papelier would like some champagne."

What a fool he had been to let himself be inveigled into coming here, instead of going somewhere where he could have some peace.

That was what he needed, peace—and, above all, to stop thinking. He couldn't bring himself to return to the terrace; nor to go downstairs, where he would be sure to run into Edna; nor to go back to the yacht; nor to take refuge at Polyte's and order drink after drink, leaning against the bar. He felt caged, with no way of escape.

From where he was, in the bedroom, he could hear Jeanne talking on the balcony; she was saying to her husband:

"After that, I must go to Paris for a fortnight or three weeks. . . . Vladimir!"

He came at once.

Have you told Nurse about that champagne?" Then she added, for the two men's benefit: "She seems to know her job all right, but she's obstinate as a mule. Just imagine, when she first came here she flatly refused to bring me drinks. She said she'd come to nurse me, not to wait on me, and the most she'd do was to ring for the maid. Did you ever hear such nonsense?"

M. Papelier turned to Vladimir.

"Have you any news of your friend?" One could see he asked it merely out of politeness. He made a point of being affable with everyone, but there was something unctuous and unconvincing about his *bonhomie*.

"Oh, leave Vladimir in peace!" Jeanne broke in. "He's feeling low today. I don't know why, but I'll find out later. Is my daughter on the yacht, Vladimir?"

"Yes."

Since her accident Jeanne had put on flesh, and now, lying on the couch with her leg in plaster, her thick neck and double chin well in view, was looking her worst.

The maid appeared with three glasses and a bottle of champagne on a tray.

"Won't you have some?"

Both men declined. They were waiting. With Jeanne one was always waiting. And just now she was too bored to think of anything to say or to do. At her feet lay the garden, a mass of flowers, palms and sea-pines stretching down to the sea, of which one had glimpses through the foliage, dazzling as a mirror.

But Vladimir had no eyes for flowers or sea; he was studying the

woman as, propped on an arm, she held the glass to her lips. And he knew beyond all doubt that the feeling she produced in him was more than repugnance; it was hatred.

"Where are you off to?"

"Nowhere." He didn't even trouble to look round.

His "Nowhere" was near enough to the truth. For the next hour he drifted aimlessly about the town, dropping in for a drink at cafes where nobody knew him. At one moment he yielded to an impulse to go to the station and fix indelibly on his memory the place where Blinis had sat, waiting sadly for his train. . . .

He had been to the station again; this time with Edna, who was going there to meet her new fiancé. The young man was carrying a huge box of chocolates, and almost inarticulate with emotion when he alighted from the train. He left next evening, after coaxing Edna into promising to think of him for ten minutes every night, just before going to sleep.

"Poor fool!" was Vladimir's comment when he heard this. What, he wondered, did the young man tell his mother when he got home? Probably that Edna was the cleverest girl in the world, uniquely lovable, and that he was the happiest of men!

The look in Jeanne's eyes when she watched the young man fondling the Swedish girl was one of sheer amazement. She didn't even want to smile. It was as if she were thinking: "Well, I never realized that men could be so absurd!"

And so naive. With so keen a zest for life, a thirst for happiness. No sooner had the absurd young man stepped on to the platform than he sniffed the air, closing his eyes.

"It's simply wonderful, this fragrance in the air. Like an earthly paradise!"

How Vladimir loathed Jeanne now, Jeanne and everything she stood for! He could not have put his thoughts into words, but he had a feeling that everything she touched went rotten.

He found himself thinking of the period of their lives when he and Blinis had been taken into her service. Before that they had lived from hand to mouth, learnt what it means to go short of food for days on end. Then, all of a sudden, they found themselves in an "earthly paradise," a land of plenty.

"My little, pretty boat...!" And Blinis would contemplate the yacht with the same childish rapture as that of Edna's fiance sniffing the Riviera air. He would spend whole days polishing and painting, gloating over his handiwork—as though the "prettiness" of the *Electra* was his sole concern in life.

Sometimes when a mistral was blowing he would get up at night to make sure the mooring-ropes were fast, and woe betide anyone who ventured on the deck with muddy shoes!

And, in a way, hadn't Vladimir been like him in those early days? But Jeanne had intervened; spoilt and soiled everything.

Now, his eyes fixed on the ground, he was walking slowly along the sea-front, lost in thoughts.

Poor Helene! She, anyhow, still believed in something. She had flung herself at the nurse's feet; nerved herself to confess her shame to Vladimir. Her "shame"! In a few years' time would she be giving it another thought? Much more likely, under her mother's influence, she would have taken the easy path, fallen into line.

As with unseeing eyes he made his way through the crowd on the beach, a thought, a plan, was slowly taking form; a plan of escape. It was not yet too late; he had little doubt he would succeed in finding Blinis. And then the two of them would resume their wanderings; Jeanne and the *Electra* fade into the mist of forgotten things.

Obviously he would have no more champagne or whisky to drink, but there would be compensations. On a Sunday morning Blinis and he would stroll the streets of the town where they happened to be, and do some shopping in the market; then, in the afternoon, go to the pictures. The old gramophone which they had bought between them with their first savings would be standing on the table in their bedroom, and . . .

Suddenly he quickened his pace; he was fretting to be off. Obviously his first move must be to Toulon. But could he count on Blinis's still being there? No matter; somehow he'd get on his track. When they met, he wouldn't trouble to lie, but make a clean breast of it.

"Look here, old chap; I was jealous of you, that's why I did it. Jealous that you could manage to live amongst all those foul people

and keep your hands clean. You could still laugh, you didn't let them get you down. Whereas I — ! And what clinched it was that when a girl came along, a decent young girl, she couldn't bear the sight of me—I disgusted her—and she turned at once to you, because she felt you were of her kind."

He gave a start, and at first could not believe his eyes. There on the deck was Helene, in her usual chair, with a book on her knees, looking quite composed. Amazing girl! It was as if nothing had happened, she had never humbled herself to the nurse or given Vladimir that odious commission.

As he came on board she said to him, without turning, in a low tone:

"Well?"

"Nothing, so far."

"Have you taken steps about what I asked you to do?"

"Not yet." Then, so as not to break the link, such as it was, between them, he added: "But I've started making enquiries."

"It shouldn't be so very difficult." He was puzzled by the tone in which she spoke; the urgency had gone out of it. And he wondered if this were merely due to weariness, or had she, too, glimpsed possibilities of another way out?

"Can I get anything for you in town—for your lunch, I mean?" He would have welcomed an opportunity of setting out with the shopping-bag, as Blinis used to do, and doing her marketing.

"No, thanks. I've been already."

"Then there's nothing I can do for you?"

"Nothing. Except—you know what."

She went on reading, or pretending to read. Again he realized that the confession she had made that morning had created no intimacy between them. Rather, the contrary. If she had picked on him, it was because in her eyes he was completely negligible; the sort of person to whom one can say anything, because his opinion carries no weight at all.

Vladimir went down to his cabin. After a while he heard foot-steps on deck and, putting his head through the hatchway, saw that the nurse was back. Seated on the skylight, she began talking in a low tone to Helene, who kept her eyes fixed on her book, seemingly

quite calm. Mile Blanche, however, showed signs of agitation; perhaps the other girl's composure, so unexpected under the circumstances, alarmed her. She cast a glance round the deck, as if trying to discover the cause for it, and her eyes fell on Vladimir, who promptly retreated to his cabin.

Not till a little after noon did he decide to make a move. When he went on deck Helene was no longer there; presumably she was down in the saloon, preparing her meal. The quay was empty; everyone at lunch.

He had forgotten all about the nurse. To his surprise, on entering Polyte's restaurant, he saw her seated by herself in a corner, as if awaiting someone.

"Monsieur Vladimir !" she called at once.

As he sat down beside her, he noticed that Lili gave him a sad, reproachful look. Probably she thought this meeting was pre-arranged.

"I want the truth, please. Has she spoken to you ?"

"Sorry, I don't follow."

"Don't pretend. I can see quite well that something passed between you this morning. She's quite different." Mile Blanche was looking hard at him. Another one who despised him through and through!

"I'm afraid I must ask you to explain."

Her face hardened.

"Don't try to throw dust *in* my eyes. Can you deny that she asked you to ... to do something for her, and you declined to do it?"

"I've no idea what you're talking about, Mademoiselle."

"For your sake, anyhow, I hope that's so. For, let me warn you, if you do what she asks..." She stood up. "Well, that's all I have to say. If you really don't understand, so much the better. In that case, I'll ask you to forget this conversation and, what's more important, not to say a word to anyone about it. But I can see in your eyes that you're lying."

She walked out, followed by the stares of the people in the cafe; her grave demeanour was so ill-assorted with the atmosphere of the place.

"What'll you have ? There's some nice stewed tripe today."

The silly little fool! thought Vladimir when he saw Lili's hurt expression as she bent over him; she's quite capable of going to the kitchen and weeping into the tripe!

VIII

"Hi there, Vladimir!"

Not a muscle of the Russian's face stirred, and the chauffeur repeated, more loudly:

"Hi there, Vladimir! Show a leg!"

Only at the fourth call did a slight movement of his head indicate that Vladimir's mind was getting under way, coming back from a world of rambling dreams.

His cheeks were flushed and moist with sweat. Slowly his lids parted and his gaze swerved upwards, dull and vacillating, towards the hatch, beside which the chauffeur was squatting.

"What's up ?" he muttered thickly.

"She wants you to come to the Villa. At once."

Vladimir was not yet fully awake. Turning his face towards the wall, he curled himself up and shut his eyes again.

"Wake up, damn it !" Desire bellowed, bending forward.

Abruptly Vladimir sat up in his bunk, and rubbed his eyes.

"What's the time?"

"Ten past five."

"Ten past five ? Much too early. I'm not getting up yet."

He failed to understand the chauffeur's cheerful guffaw.

"By gum, you must have put 'em down at lunch. It's five in the *afternoon*, man. You'd better get a move on; she's in the hell of a temper. Well, I'll wait for you across the way. Mind you don't go to sleep again."

Vladimir grunted something. As Desire moved away, the patch of sky over the hatch showed up again. Five in the afternoon—of **the** day, obviously, when he had wakened, stiff and shivering, in a bathing-hut on the beach.

What came next ? Yes, that was it; **he'd made the nurse's bed—**

he could still recall the stale smell of the sheets—and then he'd had **that talk** with Helene. . . . Anyhow, it must be a Tuesday, as M. Papelier had put in his weekly appearance, and tripe had figured on the menu at Polyte's.

Desire was wrong in thinking that Vladimir had been sleeping all the afternoon. As a matter of fact, he'd dozed off for a few minutes only, right at the end. For the rest of the time, though his eyes were shut, he had been constantly aware of the luminous rectangle framed in the hatchway opening overhead. It had produced a curious effect, setting his mind off on a series of daydreams, some with a feverish tang bringing back to him a morning in his boyhood when he had fallen asleep in the garden under the midday sun—he had had a mild attack of influenza at the time—and his mother had run out and carried him into the shade. . . .

Passing his hand over his chin, he felt the stubble on it. But he lacked energy to shave. Nor did he trouble about his clothes, but put on the first that came to hand, his crumpled white trousers, striped jersey and canvas shoes.

Far from refreshing him, his brief sleep had had the opposite effect; his limbs were aching and his stomach seemed out of order.

There were footsteps on deck; it was Desire back again.

"Buck up, for God's sake, or I'll get it in the neck. You know what she's like."

I m coming.

Vladimir had no idea that something was impending and the minutes he was living through were the last of their kind. Once on deck, he looked round for Helene, but the deck-chair was empty, her book lying on it.

There were voices, however, in the saloon and, glancing through the skylight, he saw Mile Blanche. With a sigh he walked down the gangway.

As it so happened, the Town Clerk was at Polyte's when Vladimir entered and ordered a double whisky to set him up. He came over to the bar at once.

"I've been wanting to see you. Can you let me have your friend's address? We need it to enter up in our books—as he's an

alien, of course. He should have reported to us before leaving, really."

Vladimir gazed calmly at him, as if already he knew that all this had ceased to matter.

"Haven't you heard from him?" the Town Clerk asked.

Vladimir shook his head, his eyes fixed on Lili, who was in a coloured dress, as it was her afternoon off.

He could see she had been weeping, the silly child! Because of him. And, when settling her hair in front of the glass, she deliberately assumed a tragic expression—for his benefit, of course. Almost as if she, too, were thinking of throwing herself into the harbour!

"Another whisky."

Outside, Desire sounded his horn peremptorily. Gulping down his drink, Vladimir went to the car and seated himself beside the chauffeur. His blue eyes were paler than ever that afternoon, almost transparent.

"She's sacked that nurse. Did you know?"

Desire was travelling at his usual breakneck speed. On the left the beach flowed past; beyond it, the waveless sea was studded with the heads of swimmers.

"Why?"

"Because she was away at lunch-time without leave. The old girl's on the waggon again, and you can't say a word to her without she snaps your head off!"

Whenever Vladimir closed his eyes, fragments of his daydreams seemed to be clinging to the lids, and the pungent smells of Constantinople still lingered in his nostrils. A sudden craving came to him for a glass of *raki*, the fiery Turkish brandy. But there was no likelihood of its being procurable anywhere at Cannes.

The car drew up at the Villa. Jeanne was on the terrace.

"Ah, here you are at last!" she said severely. "High time, too!"

Vladimir went up the steps slowly, with an unwonted non-chalance.

"What were you up to?" She fixed her beady eyes on him.

"Sleeping."

"Well, you weren't the only one. Edna had a glass or two after

lunch and went straight up to her room. Sit down. Pour me out a whisky."

Evidently Jeanne had now decided to get off "the waggon," for all stood ready on the table: a bottle of whisky, siphons, an ice-pail. She, too, must have been taking a siesta; her hair was tousled, her wrapper gaped, disclosing a soiled chemise. Cased in the plaster sheath, her left leg lay across a stool.

"What's the trouble?" She gave him a long stare.

"The trouble? Nothing in particular."

"Oh, Vladimir, I'm so fed up with everything and everybody. Nobody cares about me the least bit. That nurse now; I've had to sack her, she was never here when I wanted her. And Edna—well, between ourselves, of course, she's just a tart, for all her airs and graces. I was quite right when I bundled her out the first time."

Vladimir hardly heard the words; only the stridence of her voice rasping the stillness. Once in a while there comes a summer afternoon like this, when everything seems dream-like, colours and light, the golden air, flowers and foliage, even the rhythms of human life. The sea was hardly blue at all, but shimmering like a misted mirror, and the gardens seemed to exhale a fragrant peace.

In the direction of the town a plume of smoke hung in the air where a train was in the station, and one could hear the engine panting. Even that distant sound affected Vladimir disagreeably, and he was all impatience for the train to start and be gone.

"If things go on like this much longer, I'll do something drastic. Throw them all out, the whole damned lot of them. Yes, I mean it. Then I'll live all by myself; settle down to the life of one of those old hags on the Riviera—with a podgy little lapdog and a parrot, and the rest of it."

Instead of protesting, Vladimir observed her calmly, even approvingly.

As for being an "old hag," she was almost that already. Really, it was only her wealth that differentiated her from the old creatures she was thinking of, who live in shabby back-rooms and spend their days telling their fortune by the cards, counting their money, preparing food for an aged dog or cat, and occasionally drinking themselves under the table.

" Oh, Vladimir, just picture me with a parrot and a Peke!" She burst out laughing.

But her laugh rang false. The picture she had painted frightened her; it was too near reality. And Vladimir had not reacted as he should; he hadn't expostulated.

"Why don't you speak? But, my poor dear Vladimir, don't forget that if it came to that, you'd be in it too. Oh yes, you would. It's no use putting on that innocent look. . . . Give me another drink."

There was still a glint of fear in her eyes, and deliberately she turned them away from the landscape. The gardener was raking one of the gravel paths.

"Do tell him to stop. That noise he's making sets my teeth on edge."

Vladimir leant over the balustrade and shouted to the old man, who, after scratching his head, began slowly to trundle his wheelbarrow down the slope. He always potted about his work in an absent-minded way, as if he had no set plan. One would see him fiddling with a border or wheeling flower-pots in his barrow from place to place—but to what end one never knew.

"Do sit down. I shall scream if you go on moving about like that."

Her siesta, too, had left her feeling liverish, and she made a wry face at each sip of whisky.

"What did you do last night?"

"Nothing."

"You mean you'd rather not tell me. Do you think I haven't noticed your goings-on with that girl who waits at the cafe?" Vladimir smiled sardonically, and she added: "Not that I'm the least bit jealous. You can run after all the kids you like; I know you'll always come back to me. You can't help yourself! And I defy you to deny it."

He did not deny it, but he looked at her; and, had she caught that look, she might have changed the subject.

"Do you know what my husband said to me this morning in that gentle tone he always has—you know the way he talks?"

"You should think more about the future, my dear Jeanne. I

know you're much younger than I, but in a year or two you'll begin to feel that you're going downhill, and that you're all by yourself in the world. "

Vladimir kept his eyes on her, but made no comment.

"Well, this is what I answered:

"'Anyhow, I shall always have Vladimir. And we'll spend the rest of our days drinking and quarrelling and making it up—in bed.'"

He lit a cigarette and gazed vaguely at the sea.

Why did those daydreams of the afternoon persist in coming back at every moment ? He was standing on the pink stone terrace, with Jeanne's voice shrilling in his ears. But all the time his thoughts were far away; at Moscow, for instance, and his old school. A picture rose before him of that half-holiday afternoon when, lying full length on a sun-warmed stone bench, he had watched for half an hour or more the awkward progress of a beetle on a wall. Then he visualized the *Electra*, Helene in her deck-chair, the blur of light on the white pages of a book lying open on her knees. And then, again, Constantinople, the narrow, ill-paved streets in which he used to roam with Blinis. Then Paris, where they had arrived on a spring morning and for the first time in his life he had eaten a *croissant*. Even now he would identify at once that little *bistrot* just outside the station.

The raucous voice went on :

"My grandfather, it seems, when he was very old, couldn't stir from his armchair, and every night my brothers had to carry him up to bed. He'd come to loathe them, because he depended on them for everything. But he was terrified at the thought that they might get married and stop looking after him. It had become a sort of obsession. He saw himself being left to die by inches in his armchair when they were gone." She laughed and drank some whisky. "But there's no danger of your getting married. You'd never make the plunge. You're such a coward that, just to make sure of staying with me, you played that dirty trick on your friend Blinis——Why do you look at me like that ? I'm not reproaching you. In fact, I should say it's the only time in your life you ever did anything on your own initiative.... Where are you off to ?"

"Nowhere."

He had risen, but it was only to pour himself out a drink. He made no effort to silence her ; indeed, he may have hoped she'd go on talking, revealing still more clearly the woman she was.

His eyes were still pale, pale as the sea had been when he woke that morning on the cold, deserted beach.

Really, everything about the day had been exceptional; only now, however, did he realize it. He hadn't shaved. He looked like a tramp. And ever since that conversation with Helene in the morning he'd had a queer sensation, as if a steel band gripped his chest.

Just now there was something soothing, tranquillizing, in the slow advance of night. But Jeanne must needs choose this hour for one of those desultory monologues she always indulged in, in the first stage of drunkenness.

"I remember reading somewhere—in a novel, most likely—about two gangsters who hated each other, but had got so that they couldn't live apart. Do sit down, dear. Well, we're a pair of old toughs, you and I, and we're tied together like those two. Presently I'll ask you to my bed, and in you'll hop ! . . . Having another drink?"

"Yes."

"Thinking about Russia, that's it, isn't it ?" She gave a mocking laugh. "Comes in very handy, doesn't it, your dear old Russia ? When you've put away half a bottle of whisky and you start crying or talking sob-stuff, that's what you always say: 'I'm thinking about Russia.' So pathetic !

"But—it's all bunkum, and well you know it, really. Even if there hadn't been a Revolution, you'd be just the same. Did I go through the Revolution ? Of course I didn't. No, the truth is, we're built that way, you and I, and we don't fit in with ordinary folk. We can't stick them, and they can't stick us. That nurse, for instance. I loathed her at first sight; that serious, soulful look she has—it put me off. And I could see she hated me.

"There's something else. Of course, it doesn't mean anything to you, but I may as well say it. I often wonder if I don't hate my daughter too.

"She's so . . . so saintly, blast her! You'd think butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. And independent! She never asks me for anything, and as for showing any affection—a dab on the forehead when she comes, and another when she leaves, is the most I ever get. But I dare say some day she'll climb down off her pedestal and drink herself silly—like we do. And it'll do her a world of good."

She raised her head, exclaiming:

"What on earth are you up to?"

He had risen abruptly and walked to the balustrade, and was leaning on it with his back to her. He pretended not to hear.

"Vladimir! Come back!" she called.

There she was wrong. It seemed, indeed, that she was dimly aware of this, for there was a slight quaver in her voice when she called again, less loudly:

"Vladimir!"

He swung round, and she was startled by something in his expression, though never had Vladimir appeared so placid, outwardly. His cheeks seemed less puffed, his features in repose, and in his gaze was something of the serenity which she saw, and resented, in her daughter's eyes.

"Now, Vladimir dear, do sit down and tell me what's the trouble."

He sat down docilely enough, and, leaning forward to see him better in the dusk, she noticed two drops hanging on his eyelashes.

"Crying, are you?"

No, he was laughing now. A low, guttural laugh. He reached out to the whisky-bottle and held it to his lips.

"Do you know," she said, "you gave me quite a start just now!"

He smiled, and that smile, too, was new to her. The sun had set, and a green light was spreading on the sea. Exactly the same light as there had been that evening at Sebastopol, his first evening on a battleship, when he had felt so lonely and, sitting on deck, had written a ten-page letter to his mother.

"Have I offended you? But, you know, you shouldn't get vexed at what I say. Really, it's because I'm such an unhappy woman. I know that sounds like nonsense—but you understand, don't you? There **are** only two people in the world who understand me, you

and my husband. And he knows me so well that he prefers to live in Nice and see me only once a week.

Vladimir was looking at his hands.

" But—*do* say something! What's come over you this evening ?"

Could she have guessed it—what had come over him ? It was this. A few minutes before, when he was leaning on the balustrade, watching the shadows deepen in the garden, the green light sleeping on the sea, he had realized in a flash that the solution was quite simple, simplicity itself.

The air was dense with silence; with the gathering darkness a still deeper hush had fallen on the world. And in that hush a strident voice was jarring on his ears. Behind him, a woman lying on a couch, her left leg sheathed in plaster, was jabbering futilities....

How easy it would be! He had only to kill her; and it would have no more consequence than the dropping of a stone into a lake. A few small ripples would spread out; then all would be ended, all this ignominy and wastage of the years. So obvious was this solution that he wondered he had never thought of it before.

Then he could go back to the old life, precarious perhaps, but at least a clean one. He'd hunt out Blinis, and in the evenings, after the day's work, they would turn on the gramophone. . . .

That harsh voice again.

"You've drunk quite enough. You'd better stop now."

Deliberately he took another drink.

"Give me the bottle," she said.

No sooner was it in her hand than she flung it over the balustrade, and it crashed on the gravel below. Without any sign of emotion, though his gait was unsteady, Vladimir crossed the dark, empty bedroom, went downstairs to the kitchen and fetched another bottle from the refrigerator.

On the cubes of ice lay a spiked, dagger-like implement used for breaking them, and he eyed it for a moment. But he did not take it.

"Vladimir!" a voice called softly as he was going up the stairs. He saw Edna in a dressing-gown at her bedroom door. "Tell me, please. Is she still cross with me ?"

Edna couldn't make out why, instead of replying, he gave her a gentle smile.

A moment later **he** settled down again in the wicker chair beside Jeanne, and started drinking glass after glass.

"If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee."
How was **it that** only now he recalled those words? And that other passage in the Bible where it says that the unforgivable sin is to offend "one of these little ones"?

Words and words buzzed in his ears. That ridiculous woman was still chattering away. Out of nervousness, perhaps. Now she was in a tender mood.

"Listen, darling. Suppose, when my leg's all right, we do a little trip abroad, just you and I together? We might go to Switzerland, to one of those mountain resorts where there's nothing but snow and the air's like iced champagne."

It was on the tip of his tongue to retort: "Too late!"

He was still smiling. He could feel the vast serenity of the night permeating him through every pore. And in the shadows a picture was taking form: the saloon table on the yacht, strewn with cards, and two young people sitting at it, Blinis and Helene. Blinis was laughing, like one of the innocent "little ones" of the *text*. Telling lies, as children make up stories to amuse themselves; and he wanted Helene as a child wants a toy.

"Get me a drink."

He did as she asked, and as she sipped her drink she gave him a long, slow, meditative look from head to foot.

"Tell me the truth. Were you offended by what I said just now?"

"What was it you said?" The queer thing was that he spoke the words in Russian. But she understood; she had picked up from him a smattering of the language.

"That you'd never have the pluck to leave me."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Do you really mean to say that you could leave all this, and take on a job of real work, and live like—like the people one sees in the streets?"

Presently, yes! There would be nothing he couldn't do!

"Do **you** know, Vladimir, you're dearer to me than if you were my son." She was nearing **the** self-pitying mood that always came

over her at this stage of drunkenness. Soon tears would be rolling down her cheeks. "When I was little, my ambition was to be a washerwoman. I didn't aim high, did I? I wanted to dabble in soap-suds with my sleeves rolled up, and spread out white linen to dry on lovely green grass. . . ."

He had turned his head away.

"Shall we go indoors?" she asked, glancing towards the dark interior of the bedroom.

"No."

It might be better to stay outside. Probably it wouldn't be long now; in fact, he hardly knew what he was waiting for. How odd to think that when he was on the yacht that morning he hadn't had the least inkling of what was going to happen!

Then, for some reason, his thoughts drifted to Lili. Most likely she was at the pictures now. She too, of course, hadn't the least idea. . . . Nor had anyone, for that matter.

"Really, Vladimir, it's thinking that gets one down. People who never think are the happiest."

He sighed. She always talked far too much, and repeated herself every time. A light was switched on below, in the drawing-room. Evidently Edna had gone downstairs at last.

"Vladimir darling, I want you to promise never to leave me."

He was on his feet again, hesitating. The lines of Jeanne's face were already hidden by the kindly darkness, but he could see her eyes wide with panic.

"What. . . what are you doing?"

He was coming towards her slowly, almost casually. His face had the look of a madman's, or a mystic's. He had just seen in the cloudless sky, where even now a trace of daylight lingered, the silver sickle of a young moon.

"Vladimir!" She forced a laugh to her lips, and at the same time tried to shrink away, but the high back of the couch prevented her.

"What is it? What have I done to you?"

He was quite close, still closer. Suddenly his hands shot forward and closed round Jeanne's neck..

She uttered no cry, only an absurd little sound, as if **she were** about to vomit. He had to look away, as she was staring at **him**

with eyes that seemed starting from their sockets, and he loathed the sight of physical pain.

He was trembling violently, panic gripping at his heart. What unmanned him most was the thought that she was suffering—how long would she take to die ?

Her limbs were jerking spasmodically, even the leg *in* plaster was sawing up and down. Vladimir's fingers had gone numb; only his thumbs were aching with the strain. At last he seemed to feel Jeanne's body growing limp, and he let go.

But, after a second or so, her head moved a little and, horrified at the thought that she would have more suffering, he picked up a siphon from the table and, holding it by the neck, brought it down with all his might on the greying hair.

To his surprise, the siphon did not break. Drawing a deep breath, Vladimir thrust away the whisky bottle, which had tempted him, and began to move staggeringly towards the stairs.

As he had guessed, Edna was in the drawing-room; she opened the door as he was going down the hall, which was in darkness.

"Is that you, Vladimir ? What's up ?"

"Nothing."

"Will she be coming down ?"

"Not yet."

"Are you off?"

He could not get another word out. After hurrying across the terrace and through the garden, he slammed the iron gate behind him.

It was done! A free man at last, he was walking down the familiar road leading to the lights of Cannes. So now a fresh start could be made; he must pick up the thread of his life where he had dropped it on beginning his association with Jeanne.

Obviously, the first thing was to trace Blinis. Then they could find work together, as cafe waiters or no matter what; once again they would be a pair of vagrants, sharing only a gramophone between them.

"I've great news for you," he would say, the moment he set eyes on Blinis. "It's over. Over and done with."

Of course, Blinis wouldn't understand at first; so, quite calmly, he would add: "She's dead. I killed her."

He was about to turn into a tavern, but mastered the temptation. That, too, was over. He had no longer any reason for drinking, and must give it up.

When at last he stopped, he found he was at the halt of the 'buses running to Golfe-Juan. So far he hadn't given a thought to the dangers of his position, nor even wondered whether the body had been discovered yet.

He took the 'bus, and alighted outside Polyte's cafe, greeting Tony, who was on the terrace, with a wave of his hand. After taking a few steps he turned back and asked:

"What's the time ?"

"Getting on for nine."

"Thanks."

Tony watched him going to the yacht, but without any special interest. The lights were on in the saloon. The nurse was still there, talking in whispers to Helene. On hearing footsteps on deck they looked up, but paid no more attention to him.

Once in the cabin, he took from beneath his bunk the only clothes other than uniform that he possessed, a grey lounge suit that was now a little tight for him. He had bought it ready-made when he and Blinis were in Germany. When pulling on his trousers he lost his balance—which made him grin sardonically; it showed he was still drunk. For a moment he toyed with the idea of going to the saloon and informing Helene and her friend that all was over, they had nothing to worry about now.

They saw him walking back across the deck, and may have wondered that he was not in his usual clothes.

There was no point in visiting the cafe, but he entered it none the less. All the people in it stared at him; they had never seen him out of uniform before.

"What's up ? Going on leave ?"

He smiled and glanced towards the place where Lili usually stood; but it was her evening off.

"I'm going to see Blinis," he said.

"Oh ? Then he's somewhere hereabouts ?"

"I believe so."

On which he left the cafe, after grasping the door-handle for some moments, to steady himself.

Meanwhile, at *The Mimosas*, Edna had at last nerved herself to go up to the terrace, and was screaming for help at the top of her voice.

The Superintendent of Police, who did not turn up until half an hour later, began by questioning the servants. They all agreed it must have been Vladimir. Mme Papelier had been with him on the balcony, and he had left the house an hour ago.

"This fellow Vladimir, who is he?"

"A Russian."

"Yes, but what was his position here?"

"He looked after the yacht."

When, accompanied by Desire, two inspectors went on board the *Electra*, their first question to the two startled girls was:

"Is Vladimir here?"

"He left a little while ago. . . . What's happened?"

"He's killed Madame Papelier."

Edna would not hear of sleeping at the Villa. As M. Papelier's flat was not on the telephone, Desire went to Nice in the car to break the news to him.

It was an inspector left on duty at the Villa who finished off in the kitchen the bottle of whisky Vladimir had broached. Meanwhile the butler was confiding in him, wagging his head:

"It was bound to end that way."

Why? The butler couldn't have given his reasons, but all the same went on asserting in a tone of profound conviction:

"Yes, it was bound to end that way."

Impelled by a vague desire to do as Blinis had done, Vladimir seated himself on a bench at the station, and waited for a train. The first one in was an express to Marseilles, stopping only at Toulon, and he took it.

Glancing out of the window at Toulon, he saw two police-officers walking along the platform, inspecting the passengers. And then he did as he and Blinis had often done when they travelled

without tickets. He stepped out of the carriage, on the wrong side, discovered a luggage van with the door open, and lay down behind a pile of trunks and suitcases.

Presently the door was closed, and the train started. Squatting on a big trunk, Vladimir lit a cigarette with a little grunt of satisfaction. The new life was beginning ; a new life like the old.

IX

As chance would have it his name cropped up again that evening. The game of *belote* had ended sooner than usual, and the players decided not to start another. Now that the days were drawing in, there was less incentive for staying up until two or three in the morning. Polyte especially, who always rose at six, welcomed a change to earlier hours. It was only October, but the cafe had already assumed its winter aspect, and though no fire was lit as yet in the big central stove, instinctively the men gathered round it when they wanted to talk.

Only a few days more, and the terrace would be cleared of chairs and tables.

"Well, I'm off to bed," murmured the "Italian," rising heavily from his chair. "I have to go to Nice tomorrow."

Tony, Polyte and the Town Clerk were there, and with them a retired business man who had just bought one of the new bungalows near the station. Opening the door, the "Italian" peered into the darkness.

"Hullo! It's raining."

A light drizzle, hardly more than a sea-mist, had set in with the nightfall.

"Take Vladimir's mack," Polyte suggested.

For the last three months Vladimir's black oilskins had been hanging at their old place near the door. And it had become the practice for someone to say "Take Vladimir's mack" on occasions like this. The man who took it always brought it back next day. And, after that, someone else would borrow it.

"It's damn' queer," the Town Clerk remarked thoughtfully as

he filled his pipe, "that they've never managed to trace him. . . . I say, look at Lili! You've only got to mention his name and she gets all hot an' bothered, the silly child!"

"He was a rum bird, and no mistake," said Tony.

"Anyhow, you did quite well out of him, didn't you? If he'd stayed another month, you'd have shifted pretty near all the stuff off the *Electra* on to your smack."

And Polyte put in his word.

"What beats me is *why* he killed her. It don't make sense."

"Oh, they were blind to the world, both of them. I should say they always led a cat-and-dog life. The chauffeur told me once that when they had a row the air was fairly blue. The old girl had a flow of language it was a treat to listen to."

"You know what people said about her. That she'd made her money keeping bawdy-houses, up Paris way."

"That's all bunkum," the Town Clerk said. "I've seen her identity papers. To start with, when she divorced Leblanchet she got a tidy pile. And Papelier, her last husband, owns some of the biggest estates in Morocco and Algeria; he's rolling in it. As a matter of fact, it was through Leblanchet that he wangled his African concessions. After that, he got a contract for the harbour-works at Casablanca."

Polyte, who had been fiddling absent-mindedly with a siphon, yawned and rose.

"Well! Well! I'd never have thought things would have turned out like that."

A quarter of an hour later, the Town Clerk was on his way home and the shutters were up at the cafe. Before going to bed, Polyte said to Lili:

"By the by, don't forget to remind me to get some more beer in, tomorrow morning."

Lili slept on the ground floor, in a room adjoining the kitchen; its windows gave on to a yard. As there were no curtains she undressed in the dark, turning on her light only when she was in her nightdress, ready to go to bed. The room was always hot, as the **kitchen flue** passed through one of the walls.

That night she followed her usual procedure. After undressing

she switched on the light and stood in front of the glass, in her nightdress, brushing her hair. She always lingered over her nightly toilet, and Polyte sometimes accused her of wasting electricity.

"You keep your lamp on for a good half-hour. What on earth are you doing all that time?" .

Nothing very much. But it was the only period of the day that she could really call her own, and take things easy behind a closed door. She studied her face in the glass, cleaned her teeth, folded up her underclothes, dawdling over each operation; then, once in bed, she read the paper—any old newspaper that a customer had left in the restaurant—for the mere pleasure of stealing a few more minutes from the night.

Just before going to sleep she always got out of bed and opened her window half-way; then switched off the light and snuggled down between the sheets.

On this particular evening, when she was dropping off, a noise aroused her; a very slight noise, little more than a creak. Opening her eyes, she saw a shadowy form framed in the window.

She was too terrified to cry out.

A voice whispered: "Lili!"

The man opened the window full and swung himself over the sill.

"Don't be alarmed. It's me. I've something to say to you."

She had recognized Vladimir's voice and was sitting up in bed, her hands locked on her breast.

"Gosh!" she exclaimed excitedly. "What on earth—?"

"Ssh!" He took a step forward. "Don't move. Polyte might hear."

"Oh, that's all right." She had got over her fright. "He's sleeping in the front room now."

She couldn't resist the temptation of turning on the light; the switch was by her pillow. Then she jumped out of bed, barefooted, and standing in front of him, devoured him with her eyes. Somehow he looked different, though she couldn't yet decide where the difference lay.

Now that his eyes were used to the light, he smiled, and there was something humble about the smile, as if he were apologizing for this intrusion.

"Don't be alarmed. There's something I want you to tell me."

She noticed now that he was in dungarees, and his hands were not as well kept as they used to be. His face, too, had altered. And it seemed to her that he had put on weight, was burlier than before.

"Have you been here all the time?" she asked.

"No, I've come with the circus."

The circus that's at Antibes. Just fancy! And I never saw you."

Polyte had sent her that morning on an errand to Antibes and she had spent nearly an hour watching the circus-hands erecting a huge marquee in the town square. Thirty or forty caravans and lorries were parked near by, and from them came growls and yelps, and an odour of wild beasts and horse-dung hung in the air. Meanwhile the men—there were at least twenty of them—were unfurling rolls of canvas, erecting poles and tugging at ropes.

They were dressed as Vladimir was now, in blue dungarees, and seemed to be foreigners, for the most part. The heavy wood and metal structure supporting the canvas—on a poster it was claimed that the tent accommodated five thousand people—was being run up with amazing rapidity.

She pictured the whole scene quite clearly—the circus-men walking narrow planks with cat-like ease, and swinging to each other enormous poles and girders hung on tackle from the central upright. But she had failed to recognize Vladimir amongst them.

"So you're in the circus," she murmured, half to herself. "Well I never!"

That explained the change in his appearance, his dirty hands, tanned cheeks and oddly swinging gait. He was still smiling.

"Yes, I was in luck. A Russian friend lent me identity papers, and the circus people took me in. We've been touring in the South-West. Now we're moving North to Grenoble; then on to Switzerland."

Lili blushed; she had seen Vladimir's eyes fixed on her, and, taking a coat off the peg, she wrapped it round her nightdress. Noticing the gesture, Vladimir asked carelessly:

"You're not scared of me, surely?"

That was a mistake. Until then she had quite forgotten what he

had done—that he was a murderer; now, if not actually scared, she felt less at ease, and drew back a step.

"What did you want to ask me?"

"I'd like to know if there's anyone on board the yacht now."

"No, there's nobody. After the funeral the young lady locked everything up. Tony wanted her to leave the keys with him so he could air the cabins and see to things if the weather turned bad, but she wouldn't hear of it."

Lili noticed that the pockets of his overalls bulged with tools. Then her eyes fell on some underclothes lying on a chair; hastily she picked them up and thrust them behind the bed.

"Please listen, Lili dear." (Did he ever call her "dear" in the old days? he wondered. Anyhow, it had no great importance.) "There's something I'd specially like to know. I left some clothes on board. Can you say if Tony's taken them?"

"No, I'm positive he hasn't," she replied promptly.

"How can you be sure?"

"Because the young lady wouldn't even let him set foot on board the yacht. He was always grumbling about it. As a matter of fact, it wasn't really she, but that nurse; she was a holy terror, she kept everybody at arm's length. Still, I don't blame her, really; there was always a crowd of people hanging round, taking photos and trying to sneak on board—especially the first few days."

"What's become of them—Helene and the nurse, I mean?"

"They went away soon after—after it happened. I hear the Villa's up for sale. Someone told me the two young ladies are staying with the nurse's mother, in a village near Melun."

Lili was gradually losing her self-assurance and beginning to fidget. Perhaps she was vaguely chagrined. His visit, it seemed, was merely for the purpose of acquiring information, and he made no secret of it; at first she had imagined—something quite different.

"You don't know the name of the village, by any chance?"

"No. A young chap who was lodging here—he's a doctor, as a matter of fact, and comes from Melun—told us about it. It was after he'd left that Polyte moved into the front bedroom. ... He said the young lady was going to have a baby."

When she saw how Vladimir's face lit up at this remark, she gave a little cry. *That* was something she'd never thought of!

"I say, Vladimir! Are you ... I mean, was it you ...?"

"No, I've nothing to do with it. It was Blinis. . . ."

"Blinis!" She couldn't believe her ears.

"Don't talk so loud. Now I must go on board."

"But everything's locked up."

He tapped the tools in his pockets, and showed her a small electric torch.

"I'll manage. Thank you, Lili."

There was a creak of boards somewhere at the back of the house, and Lili promptly switched off the light. For some moments they remained standing in the darkness, which, as their eyes got used to it, grew less opaque.

"Good-bye, Lili." He held out his hand.

She hesitated. Then, impulsively, he drew her towards him and quickly kissed her forehead.

"Thank you, my dear," he whispered.

As he was passing his leg over the window-sill she called softly: "Vladimir!"

He stopped moving.

"Tell me. Why did you do that?"

He gazed at her for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Never mind. . . . Now get to sleep quickly, like a good girl."

Soundlessly he crossed the yard. She watched him climb on to an empty crate, steady himself, then vault over the wall, beyond which was a small, little-used alley.

At the same moment she heard footsteps in the kitchen. The door opened and Polyte stepped into the room and gazed round it suspiciously. He was in pyjamas.

"Who was here just now?"

"Nobody."

He didn't believe her, and fixed his eyes on the counterpane, which Lili had thrown back as she got out of bed.

"Out with it, Lili. No lies."

"I'm not lying. Honour bright!"

"You remember what I told you?"

"Yes, yes." She was on the brink of tears.

And now she was really scared. Polyte had been pressing his attentions on her for some time, but so far she had managed to stave him off, the principal reason being that he realized she had kept straight. "All right," he had said, "I'll leave you alone, but on one condition, mind you. That some other fellow doesn't get there first!"

Tonight his suspicions were aroused; he was eyeing furtively the still warm bed, the nightdress and the unbuttoned coat.

"Do please go away," she whimpered. "If you don't, I'll scream."

But he stayed a good minute longer, shuffling his feet, undecided what to do.

"Very well. We'll talk it over tomorrow," he said at last, as he went out. . . .

Vladimir had reached the point on the quay nearest the *Electra*. But the gangway had been removed, and some twelve feet of water lay between him and the deck.

Rain was still falling. From where he stood he could see a glow in the sky in the direction of Antibes, above the fair-ground, and he pictured his fellow-workers of the circus, resplendent in blue livery and brass buttons, lined up in two ranks to lend glamour to the entrances of the star performers.

He should have been amongst them, there would be a gap in one of the ranks. Meanwhile, soundlessly, he was unfastening the mooring-rope of a sloop and worked it out towards the *Electra*.

Deck and ropes were drenched with rain. A train rumbled past behind Golfe-Juan, its reflected lights dancing like will-o'-the-wisps on the sea.

The hatch was secured by a padlock only, and Vladimir made quick work of it with his file.

Not till he was below did he switch on his torch. The cabin, he noticed, already smelt of damp and decay. Coils of rope had been piled on his bunk. On the floor was only a pair of canvas shoes, which belonged to him.

Opening the locker, he tossed aside a striped jersey and hauled

out a pair of white trousers; then felt the pockets. In the left-hand pocket was a wad of notes, the money Helene had given him on that unforgettable morning.

His quest was over. There was nothing to prevent his going to the saloon, by way of the engine-room, for a last look at the place where Helene used to sit, the table on which she and Blinis had played cards together. No such idea even crossed his mind. All the same, when leaving the cabin, a new thought waylaid him, and he turned back. Without switching on the torch again, he drew out from beneath the right-hand bunk the gramophone and box of records, and tucked them under his arm.

He put back the hatch in place; quite a long time might pass, he supposed, before anyone discovered that the padlock had been sawn through.

A minute later he was mooring the fishing-boat at the same place as before. Then he set off at a brisk pace along the quay. His head was bare. He wore his hair much shorter than in the past, and, probably because it was now exposed to the sun so much, it had darkened, and was streaked with reddish glints.

No one was about; he had the whole town to himself. He halted 'under the shelter of a tree to roll a cigarette, for now he had got into the way of making his own cigarettes; then started off again in the direction of Antibes.

It was a little after midnight when he reached the town square. The show was just over, and the audience hurrying home in the rain. First he went to the van used as their sleeping-quarters by the twenty circus-hands, and stowed in it the gramophone and records.

"Ah, there you are! Where have been?"

"I wasn't feeling at all well. I went to see the doctor."

"Doctor my elbow! . . . Well, get along with your job, you slacker!"

The foreman was the fattest man in the circus, and the nimblest. No one else could keep his balance on a narrow strip of scaffolding with such perfect unconcern.

No sooner had the public left than the attendants discarded their blue livery, changed into dungarees and ran back to the tent. Each had his appointed post. Swiftly and almost soundlessly the tent

was dismantled, the huge mass of canvas detached and furled, leaving the bare ribs showing like a stripped umbrella.

Some vans set out at once, as an advance-guard. A show was taking place next day at Grasse, where, on a fair-ground much like that of Antibes, the tent would be run up in the morning, under the thrilled gaze of children and young servant-girls like Lili.

The men had little to say to each other. A Czech asked Vladimir casually:

"Where were you?"

And Vladimir, thrusting his hand into his pocket, produced the roll of notes.

"Good for you! So you pulled it off."

A whistle sounded; the signal for the vehicles to draw up in line for loading.

During the loading operations, which lasted fully two hours, the scene was reminiscent of a modernistic film. Under the glare of powerful electric lamps each object cast a jet-black shadow, and, amongst these shadows, other shadows flickered to and fro, the men at their allotted tasks. There was a constant sound of hammering, a rumble of engines in low gear. All orders were conveyed by whistles to which the circus-men reacted like automatons; thought had no share in their activity. With aching limbs and smarting eyes they played their parts in a machine-made world, where the only sensations were those of strain and stress, impacts of balks and girders.

But all the time unconsciously they were counting the minutes, waiting for the moment when the last whistle brought release and they could pile into the sleeping-van, where twenty lay together on straw mattresses, a close-packed mass of sweating bodies.

Once the van started, their duties were ended; it was the driver's turn to fight down sleep. All through the night he steered his heavy vehicle along the country roads, straining his gaze along the low beams of the headlights.

Everyone slept soundly. Sometimes a body jostled its neighbour and one was dimly aware of movement, without knowing where one was—or even who one was.

The respite was to end in the same manner, with the shrill **blast** of a whistle breaking across their sleep, light pouring in as the doors

of the van were opened. Then each man would take a canvas bucket, fill it with water and wash in the open square, stripped to the waist, like a soldier on campaign. And, again like soldiers, they would run to the cook's van, get their coffee in tin mugs, the meat ration in a dixie. But, also, everyone would snatch a moment off to go to the nearest cafe for a glass of white wine.

Then another blast of the whistle. . . .

That night Vladimir was even wearier than usual, but he had energy enough to whisper in the ear of the Czech beside him:

"Own up! You didn't believe a word of what I told you."

What he had told him was that, when they reached Antibes, he would retrieve five thousand francs that he'd cached near by, in his palmier days.

"You see, it was perfectly true. And now I'll be able to take the train to Warsaw. That fellow who wrote to me is on the straight. If he says Blinis is in Warsaw, it's a fact."

Someone grumbled:

"Stop talking, there! Give us a chance to sleep."

"Sorry!" Vladimir replied. He wanted to keep silent, but all sorts of thoughts kept crowding into his mind, and it was hard not to share them with his companion.

"I suppose it means you'll be leaving us tomorrow." The Czech did not relish the prospect; heaven alone knew who his *next* bed-fellow might be—quite likely someone who snored, or stank.

"No, I'll stay with the crowd as far as Switzerland."

"But you've five thousand francs!" It passed his comprehension that anyone with all that money should consent to lead this dog's life a day longer, once escape was possible.

"Yes, but I'll stay on," Vladimir repeated.

"Anyhow, you'll stand us some drinks tomorrow, just to celebrate, won't you?"

When Vladimir made no answer the man went on:

"If you don't, you're a bloody tightwad."

"For God's sake stop talking!" a voice bawled across the van. The engine had started up and they were moving off.

"Well, I'd never have thought that of you," the Czech said. "It just shows how one can be mistaken."

"I'm not a tightwad. Only it's not my money. It belongs to my mate, to Blinis."

"Oh, I sec. That's different. . . . Why do you call him 'Blinis'? It's not a real name; anyhow, I never heard it before."

"He used to do the cooking, and nearly every day he made some blinis. Know what that is?"

"Something Russian?"

"Yes, it's a kind of pancake. One eats it with sour cream."

"Sour cream? Doesn't sound so nice to me. But you Russians have some funny tastes."

On which the Czech evidently went to sleep, as Vladimir heard no more from him.

He fell to working out his programme. In a fortnight the circus would be at Grenoble; after a day or two they'd cross the frontier. There should be no trouble in getting across, as the troupe had a collective passport. And once they were in Switzerland . . .

Someone's leg was pressing against his and he could feel his left-hand neighbour's breath on his bare arm. Very gingerly Vladimir shifted the gramophone on to his knees, and fished out a record. Because of the jolts the needle kept on skidding; he steadied it with the tip of his forefinger.

At first the tune that was being played was hardly distinguishable from the hum of the engine, but gradually it grew distinct. It was a tango that had been all the rage when they were living in Constantinople. Vladimir brought his ear to the soundbox, so as to hear better. A voice barked through the darkness:

"Stop that noise! We want to sleep."

Docilely Vladimir removed the record, and slipped the gramophone under the kit-bag which served as his pillow. Then he wormed himself into a gap in the tangle of arms and legs around him, and heaved a contented sigh.

A minute later he was asleep; all through the night, in his sleep, he felt a taste of blinis and sour cream on his lips.

"You must be balmy," one of the other men told him next morning at Grasse as they were having a wash behind one of the vans. "What an idea, starting up your gram. in the middle of the night!"

Vladimir merely smiled beatifically. There was no point in trying to explain; the fellow would never have understood.

"You Russians are all like that," the man, a Frenchman from the North, went on, amiably enough. "We must have had twenty of 'em in the crowd at one time or another. And every blessed one was soft in the head, or mighty near it. No offence meant, of course, but you must own ..."

The rain had ceased. The sky was a garish, picture-postcard blue, and while the two men dried their faces their gaze kept straying to the doorway of a white-walled house on the far side of the square. Through a bead curtain one had glimpses of a zinc-sheathed bar, rows of bottles, and an ice-pail.

"Going to stand us a round, aren't you?"

"I asked him yesterday," the Czech put in. "Nothing doing."

"Come along," said Vladimir. "I've changed my mind."

So the three of them planted their elbows on the bar, after a quick glance at the clock, for each minute of their brief leisure counted.

The landlord pointed to the mass of balks and poles piled *in* the middle of the square, and asked dubiously :

"Think you'll be ready by this evening?"

The minutes ticked past; six remained, then five, four, three. Vladimir wiped his lips.

"The same again, all round."

Two minutes. Just time to pay, thrust his change into his pocket and gulp down the last golden drops *in* his wine-glass.

One minute more, and the whistle would sound.

X

WINTER had not quite begun, and the snow held only in patches. But, owing perhaps to the speed of the train, frost-flowers had formed on the windows and, to see outside, one had to scratch a peephole on the pane. Sometimes the heating-pipes were scalding hot, and sometimes, after a long halt at a station, almost cold.

It was what Vladimir called a "real train"; that is to say, one

of those trans-continental expresses which take several frontiers in their stride and are visited at each by Customs Officers, now in green uniform, now in blue, with caps of varying shapes. In such trains the coaches, too, are a mixed assortment, hailing from different countries—France, Germany, Switzerland or Poland—and now and again another is hooked on, bound for Moscow or for Finland. These trains have a smell peculiar to themselves, and the passengers are of a special type; the type of the adventurer or vagabond, emigrant and refugee.

On the seat opposite Vladimir's was a flat-faced Polish woman, who looked about twenty-five and fed her baby at the breast every two hours, while another child, some two years older, slept in a basket on the carriage floor. Her husband, a fair young man with curiously shifty eyes, accompanied her.

The van was piled roof-high with luggage of the oddest kinds; trunks that wouldn't lock and were tied up with rope, wicker baskets, packing-cases, sacks. Many had labels bearing the names of Chicago or New York, or that of an Italian Transatlantic Line.

As they travelled eastwards the shape and colour of the houses changed at every halt. Fences disappeared, fields grew larger, and the rare cottages already had a look of *isbas*.

By now, owing to the fact that everyone alighted at the stations to buy food and drink, the passengers had small change in the coinage of several countries in their pockets. An atmosphere of fraternity and good-humour reigned in the crowded carriage. When he slept, Vladimir pillowed his head on the thigh of a man whose name he did not know.

One of his neighbours was a German, another a Hungarian, but they managed somehow to converse.

"I'm going to Warsaw to find a comrade," he had informed them. He pronounced it "Kamerad" for the German's benefit. Vladimir understood Polish, the Pole some Russian, and the German a smattering of each. Sometimes one of them would make a quaint mistake that set the others laughing.

And now the snow was beginning to hold in the fields, though not yet on the cottage roofs.

"I used to be a naval officer, but my last job was with a travelling circus."

Each of them ended up by telling the story of his life, often revealing details that he would not have imparted to his closest friend. The Pole had spent three years in the States, where his children had been born. As no more work was forthcoming there, he was returning to his own country, in the hope conditions would be better.

"Not a hope," the Hungarian warned him. "You won't be able to find a job. Things are just as bad in Europe nowadays as in America. Where do you come from?"

"Vilna."

The Pole was changing at Warsaw, and had an all-night journey in prospect before reaching his home-town in the North. Vladimir started talking again. His eyes were sparkling with excitement.

"It was a most extraordinary thing. I'd quite lost track of my friend, and I hadn't heard of him for months. Then one day when the circus was showing at Toulouse . . . Any of you know Toulouse?"

The German knew it. He had been there as a prisoner of war. It must have been in summer, for all he remembered of the place was the appalling heat.

"At Toulouse whom should I run into but the boss of the restaurant at Constantinople where Blinis and I worked in the old days. He's a Russian; he used to be a cavalry officer. . . ."

The heating apparatus was going full blast—it was like being in a Turkish bath—but no one suggested turning it off. The baby was nuzzling the plump greyish-white breast. Bottles of beer stood on the floor of the carriage, between the men's feet.

It did one good to loosen one's tongue and chatter away, smoking cigarettes whose flavour, too, changed as the journey proceeded.

"He'd just had a letter from a friend who lives in Warsaw."

Vladimir went into every detail, like those old ladies who, when telling you a story, insist on explaining the precise relationship between the people figuring in it.

"That fellow at Warsaw, now, he'd had a queer life too. Before the Revolution he was studying for the Church—the Greek Church, of course. Well, now he has a job in Warsaw as porter at the *Hotel Europesiki*. He got it because he knows pretty nearly every European language. . . ."

It was ages since he last had had an opportunity of letting himself go like this, *in Russian*, and he was revelling in it.

"And who should blow in at the hotel one day but my friend Blinis? In a posh American car, with a man who'd engaged a whole suite of rooms. That's what I found out at Toulouse; that old Blinis had got taken on as valet by a Belgian millionaire, and come with him to Warsaw. Wasn't it miraculous, my getting on his tracks so easily? And then, of course, my finding all that money where I'd left it, in my trouser-pocket—that was wonderful too. You may call it chance, if you like, but *I* say it's more than that. But I won't try to explain; you wouldn't understand."

None the less, he was burning to explain; to make them see how like a fairy-tale it all had been, with a good fairy pulling the strings. But the Pole's turn had come to have his say, and describe his experiences in the States.

"Speak English?" the Hungarian asked him.

"No, but that made no difference. We Poles had a whole district to ourselves. In the factory I worked at there were two thousand of us. . . ."

They were approaching a big town, and Vladimir gazed almost affectionately at the grey suburban houses and bare trees. He was smiling to himself; he could feel in his shirt-pocket the four thousand francs that remained. He was wearing a new suit, a brown one for a change; it was too narrow in the shoulders and already creased, as the cloth was shoddy.

Presently they went to sleep. When anyone woke, his first act was to go to the lavatory, or to have a swig from his beer-bottle. The Hungarian had stretched himself on the floor, after strewing it with newspapers. The German's head was resting on Vladimir's leg.

A pity, Vladimir was thinking, that he couldn't tell his companions the queerest thing of all: that "they" had never managed to trace him. By "they" he meant the police. His photograph had appeared in several newspapers, but the only one available showed him in uniform, wearing a naval officer's cap. No one would have recognized him in blue dungarees. In any case, he had begun by letting his beard grow, a reddish beard, cut roughly square.

He had taken care to associate with Russians only. In most of

the towns the circus visited he had two or three Russian friends. He hardly troubled to conceal himself—for the simple reason that *he* had no feeling of being a criminal. The idea that he might be arrested and condemned rarely crossed his mind, after the first week anyhow. So convinced was he of his immunity that when he started work in the circus and the others made fun of his beard, he promptly shaved it off.

By then, in any case, the newspapers had found new subjects of interest, and so, no doubt, had the police. And when the usual crowd gathered to watch the circus tent being run up, all they could see was a host of tiny figures high aloft, juggling with poles and pulleys. Even at Antibes he had felt no great anxiety, though he had judged it wiser not to show up while the performance was actually on.

"I suppose it's too early in the winter for sledges to be about," he remarked after they had passed through the Polish Customs.

At the sight of the first wooden village the Pole shed tears, and drank so much vodka at the next stop that he was nearly left behind. Vladimir too. They drank level, and now he came out with everything. He wound up his story by saying :

" So I got across the French frontier without even having to show my passport. A neat job, eh ?"

No sooner were they back in the carriage than the Pole promptly fell asleep.

At Warsaw, as Vladimir had foreseen, taxis had not yet given place to sledges, and the falling snowflakes kept their whiteness for a second only after touching the ground. He had a little thrill of pleasure at the sight of an old Jew in a fur-lined coat—the first of many such he was to encounter in the streets; then a gust of impatience made him quicken his pace almost to a run.

He knew his way about Warsaw, where he and Blinis had stayed some time during their nomadic phase, when every three or four months the two of them would take a train like the one he had been in and cross a frontier, to try their luck in another capital.

A stately, uniformed commissionaire stood on the steps of the *Hotel Europesjki*.

"Sasha!" Vladimir shouted; then burst out laughing. The ex-theological student had grown fat as a well-fed priest, and

sported a gigantic moustache of the kind in fashion at the Russian Court in the Grand Dukes' heyday.

"And who may you be, my good fellow?" asked the big nun condescendingly.

"Don't you recognize me? I'm Vladimir, Vladimir Duloff. Is Blinis here?"

"Blinis? Who's that?"

Vladimir laughed again. He'd forgotten that the name "Blinis" was, relatively speaking, an innovation.

"Sorry. George Kalenin, I mean. He was here not long ago. You wrote about him to Petroff, your friend at Toulouse."

But just then a car drove up and the commissionaire hustled forward; then escorted the guest to the swing-door of the hotel. When he came back he had a worried air.

"Look here, will you meet me at the corner of the street, at seven? Just in front of those big Government offices. See?"

It was still snowing, and the streets were deep in half-frozen slush that passing cars churned up and splashed on the cheeks of passers-by. Everywhere one saw astrakhan coats and pelisses moving against a background of grey houses that looked like disused barracks.

Vladimir paused in front of every shop-window, and sometimes even before a man or woman whose face reminded him of something. Indeed, everything reminded him of something. The city was seeping into him through every pore, and so potent was its magic that he forgot all about eating and drinking till suddenly a tavern that had a familiar look caught his eye. Turning in, he drank six glasses of vodka in quick succession.

Sasha kept his appointment; though no longer in uniform, he was wearing a heavy fur-lined coat, sleek gumboots, and his moustache retained all its impressiveness.

"Where have you come from?" he asked.

"From France, by way of Switzerland. I want to get in touch with Blinis, Kalenin I mean. Isn't he at the hotel?"

They were entering a small restaurant on the first floor of an apartment house. Vladimir felt quite capable of eating every dish on the menu; all the *hors d'oeuvres* especially.

"Well, I'm afraid I haven't an idea what's become of him," the commissioner sighed, after ordering his meal.

"Eh? How's that?"

"That stock-broker was arrested a month ago."

"What stock-broker?"

"That Belgian. There was an extradition warrant out against him. So Blinis, as you call him, lost his job, and he hadn't saved a penny, so I gathered. Also he hadn't got a permit to work; they're very strict about that here, and of course he's a foreigner, like you. Last time I saw him he was selling sunflower-seeds in the street."

"What? Blinis?"

"Yes. I gave him a few zlotys—but I've five children to support."

So the theological student had five children! For some reason, this amazed Vladimir even more than the news about Blinis.

"Can you suggest any way of finding him?"

"Well, you might try Korniloff."

"Who's that?"

"I thought you knew him. He used to be a journalist. As a matter of fact, he's still doing some journalism here, free-lance stuff. He writes for papers in Berlin and New York. You'll find him in one of the new houses. I'll give you his address."

Vladimir was getting anxious. Early next morning, in a thick fog, he set out to find Korniloff. The place he lived in was one of those barrack-like concrete buildings that had sprung up like mushrooms after the Great War; though almost new, it already looked decrepit.

It was in a remote part of Warsaw, and to reach it one had to cross a stretch of waste land, originally intended to be laid out as public gardens. Here, as elsewhere, the intentions of the planners had been excellent; carrying them out had been the difficulty.

As he went up the four flights of stairs he encountered half-dressed women who, teapot in hand, were going to make tea in the communal kitchen allotted to each floor.

Korniloff was in bed with a bad cold. His nose was red and dribbling.

"Shove those papers on to the floor and take a seat. Right. My wife did a bolt last week, and there's been nobody to tidy up since then."

"Can you tell me where to find George Kalenin?"

"**Well, I** can't swear it's true, but I've heard he's sleeping in a doss-house; the West Warsaw Shelter, I believe. Know where that is?"

So Vladimir would have to wait till nightfall. Meanwhile, as he roamed about the city, he turned to stare at every street-hawker and crossing-sweeper.

Street-lamps were being turned on. As he proceeded through the western district the streets grew slummier; whole families could be seen huddled round stoves in tiny basement rooms.

At last the Shelter loomed up through the shadows : an enormous building with the aspect of a medieval prison. Dim forms were prowling round it, and at first Vladimir wondered why they did not enter. Then, as he went up the steps, a voice hailed him from a recess beside the door.

He was being asked for a trifling sum, the smallest Polish coin. Which explained why that ragged crew remained outside; none had even a copper in his pocket. They were hanging about on the off-chance that there might be some free berths at closing-time.

Inside, the air was foul and stagnant; at every step one stumbled over bodies stretched or curled up on the floor, even in the passages. To right and left were big barn-like rooms, the walls of which were lined with bunks, as on a ship, but here were tiers and tiers of them right up to the ceiling, and each bunk contained a man, sometimes two or three. Others were squatting on the floor, or leaning against stanchions. Some had partly undressed and were bare to the waist. The majority were elderly, and there was a sprinkling of patriarchal greybeards, but one saw young men too, with gaunt, famished faces.

"Would you tell me if there's a young fellow here by the name of Kalenin, George Kalenin? He had a nickname too : Blinis."

The man accosted by Vladimir did not deign to reply, and eyed him sourly.

Obviously he was too well dressed for this place—even *in* his shoddy reach-me-down suit. He was wearing a shirt; worse still, a tie! People turned and stared at him without benevolence ; some even spat on the floor, to show their disdain.

Vladimir was beginning to lose hope. There must be fully a thousand men here, perhaps more ; for, apparently, there were more

rooms of the same kind on a higher floor, to which a staircase gave access. What chance had he of finding Blinis in this human ant-hill? Probably the best course would be to go from room to room calling his name; only he didn't dare. . . .

Suddenly there was a metallic buzz, so like the sound of a telephone-bell that, for a moment, Vladimir was taken in, and half imagined all this had been a dream from which a telephone-call was rousing him. The men in the bunks sat up, grumbling, while those lying on the floor rose slowly to their feet, blinking their eyes.

A priest came in, a man in his thirties, wearing a full beard. As he walked slowly down the central passage, the men made way for him, gazing at him lethargically, without affection as without hostility. He opened a black book he was carrying, cleared his throat, and cast a tranquil glance around before crossing himself with sweeping movements that the others copied, more or less decorously.

Meanwhile a feeling was growing in Vladimir that his presence here was resented; at any moment all these down-and-outs might make a rush at him and hustle him out, if not worse. So far as he could see, no official of any kind was in the room, nor anyone responsible for keeping order. However, there was no immediate danger so long as the priest was here. Everyone bent his head while the evening prayer was being intoned, and Vladimir noticed, with a faint wonder, that others' lips beside the priest's were moving.

Another Sign of the Cross, and the priest closed his missal and announced:

"Tomorrow at ten I shall be in attendance for any of you who may wish to make their confessions."

The brief service was ended. Everyone began talking, or went back to bed. No more notice was taken of the priest, who walked out with the same slow, tranquil step as he had entered.

And then, suddenly, Vladimir's eyes filled with tears, something seemed to snap inside him, and he heard himself crying brokenly: "Blinis! Blinis!"

There was no response, and he went to the next room, paying no heed to three men who were dogging his steps, watching him with a malevolent air.

"Blinis!"

There he was, on one of the top shelves near the ceiling! Vladimir could see him sitting on the edge of his bunk, looking down with a glint of panic in his eyes—and the quaint thing was that Blinis, too, had grown a beard, a silky one which gave him the air of a young artist or poet.

"Blinis! It's I!"

The three men stalking Vladimir exchanged glances; should they throw out this noisy intruder?

"Come down! Quick!"

Blinis hesitated, then scrambled down the tiers of bunks. He had no shirt, and was wearing an old coat next his skin. Vladimir threw his arms round him, and hugged him to his breast; tears were streaming down his cheeks.

"Come along, Blinis. Let's get away from here."

A little crowd had gathered. Blinis looked uneasy.

"But—where do you want to go?"

"It's all right. Come along. I've lots of money."

He bit his lip; that was an idiotic thing to have said. It would be lucky now if they could get away without being set upon and robbed. He dragged Blinis towards the door, very doubtful if they would reach it with whole skins.

"I'll explain when we're outside," he whispered.

It was a glorious moment when the big door swung open and a rush of icy air buffeted their cheeks.

"This way, old chap."

Vladimir was laughing now, partly with joy, but also at the bewilderment on his friend's face. His luck had held—and what a relief it was to be outside, in safety!

"Wait a moment."

He plunged his hand in his trouser-pocket and scattered the coins he found in it amongst the men who, for want of a copper, were still hanging round the entrance of the Shelter.

"I've a room at an hotel. We'll go there."

He forced Blinis to board a tram; the passengers stared at Blinis's naked chest and his neighbour edged away from him, for fear of bugs.

"It's a long story. I'll tell you presently. Anyhow, the old life's done with, and we can make a fresh start, you and I."

"But—why ever have you come here?"

"Don't you understand? I want to . . . to make amends fot that mean trick I played on you. Yes, it was I who took that ring and put it in your box. I was jealous, you know. I must have been half crazy.. .. See here!"

Cautiously—for he didn't want to attract the attention of the people in the tram—he unbuttoned his coat and showed the edges of the banknotes.

"They're for you. Yes, they're yours all right. I'll explain. . . . But let's have some grub first."

They lost their bearings for a while on the way to Vladimir's hotel. Also, they had to discover a food-shop still open. Vladimir bought everything that caught his fancy : caviare, black bread, cold sausage, smoked fish, a slab of sucking-pig in aspic, and a big bottle of vodka. While he was making his purchases, Blinis hung back in the doorway, because of his clothes.

"Come along." He took Blinis's arm with a protective gesture, such as he might have used with a girl. "You can't imagine what happened after you'd gone. . . ."

"Have you left Madame Papelier?"

Vladimir let out a cackle of nervous laughter.

"Left her? I should say so ! I'll tell you when we're in my room."

They had to wait in the hotel doorway till the manager had his back turned; then they made a dash for it up the stairs. Otherwise Blinis, dressed as he was now, would certainly have been refused admittance.

The lamp in Vladimir's room gave a mere glimmer. There was a large earthenware stove, but unlit. Vladimir told Blinis to start eating while he saw to the fire. As he was doing this, he looked round.

"You asked about Jeanne just now. Well, the truth is—I killed her. There was nothing else for it." For months he'd been dreaming of the experience he was living through tonight. But there was such a mass of things to tell that he hardly knew how or where to begin. "Go on eating. Fill your glass. Yes, you *must* drink; it'll **buck** you up and . . . and help you to understand. Of course, it was on Helene's account I wanted to get you out of the way. **Remember** how you taught her to play Sixty-six?"

Vladimir's eyes were on Blinis. Suddenly he looked away uncomfortably. He could hardly recognize his friend. He didn't realize it was partly his own fault that Blinis looked as he did, so dazed and apathetic. He was telling him too much at once, stunning him with words, and at the same time pestering him to drink, making him sit too near the stove, which now was blazing merrily.

Somebody in the next room rapped on the wall to make them stop talking, and for a while Vladimir lowered his voice.

"So you see how it was. Things had come to such a pass that—well, it just had to be done. I killed her. Anyhow, it's panned out all right. I mean, I've found you again, and—. You're pleased, aren't you?"

But Blinis was far from sure of this. Indeed, he suddenly started sobbing; then brought up all he had eaten on to the carpet.

"I've been thinking it over, of course," Vladimir continued, "and there's only one solution; the two of us must stick together as we used to. I've got four thousand francs for you. If you like, we can go back to Constantinople, or Bucharest. We'll find a job together, I'm pretty sure."

"Why did you put the ring in my box?" Blinis asked.

"I told you just now. I was jealous. I felt all tangled up, as if someone'd cast a spell on me. And that's why I had to ... to do what I did to the old girl."

"But what was the idea about the ring?" Blinis still completely failed to understand. His head was spinning. No sooner was his glass empty than it was filled again; and Vladimir drank level.

"I've brought the gram., and the records. Look! There they are."

Had it not been that just then there were more raps on the wall, he would have put on a record.

"You can sleep on my bed. I'll doss on the floor. Yes, you must. I insist. And from now on I'll see that you don't do more than your fair share of the work." His face was flushed. He had been drinking steadily, and hardly eating at all. "It was always you who did the chores on the *Electra*, while I took it easy. But I can explain. I couldn't help myself; something had got hold of me. But now—

well, I think I've come clear of all that. You see what I mean, don't you? No, don't go to bed yet. I've just had an idea."

An odd idea! He ran to the washstand, took his shaving-brush and razor, and announced that he was going to shave his friend. And, despite Blinis's protests, he had his way.

There you are! Now everything's just like before. Tomorrow you shall have a bath and we'll get you some clothes."

"What did Helene say about it?"

"About what?"

"About what you did to her mother."

Vladimir started to say something, then looked away. It had been a mistake, drinking so much. Or, perhaps, not altogether a mistake; in the chaos of his mind a new idea was taking form. And yet just now he'd been happy, happy as never before, full of hope for the new life that was opening out before him.

A new life on the model of the old one, in Constantinople or some other city, with jobs for both of them in a restaurant or a factory—or why not in a circus? They'd share a room in some cheap lodging-house, and turn on the gramophone in the evenings, after doing their shopping on the way home, like tonight.

Already, now that his beard was off, Blinis was looking quite different.

"Blast it all! Ain't you *never* going to stop talking and let folks have a sleep?" a voice bawled from the doorway, in which the man from the next room was standing, in a raging temper.

"Sorry! Wait a moment!"

Vladimir brought the vodka bottle to his mouth and drained it at a draught. Then, on a sudden impulse, he dashed the bottle on the floor, where it rolled against the stove.

"There! We've done. We won't talk any more tonight."

He rose to his feet unsteadily. Blinis's face grew blurred, then doubled, with two big mouths, four enormous, wistful eyes.

Then he thrust the thousand-franc notes into Blinis's hand.

"Here you are. Yes, you must take them. It's your money. Helene gave it . . ."

"For me?"

"Yes, for you. Don't you understand?" That word "understand" had kept coming to his lips ever since he met Blinis at the

Shelter. " Don't you understand that I was very nearly going to rob you again ? I wanted . . . No, you wouldn't understand. I wanted us to start again, and everything be like it used to be. Listen, Blinis! I'd better tell you now, while I'm night; tomorrow very likely I shouldn't have the pluck. When I've drunk enough, I know what I really am—a rotter! Perhaps that's why I drink. This is what I want to tell you. You must take that money and go back to Helene. No, don't shake your head; you've got to. I may be tight, but I know what I'm about. She's going to have a baby. You're the father. I'll give you her address. Well, it's not a real address, but you'll be able to find her all right. She's living in a village near Melun . . . "

" Why are you telling me all this ? " Blinis was sobbing. There had been so many shocks in quick succession that his nerves had given way. Even the smooth feel of his chin confused him.

" It's quite true, what I've just told you. Even if tomorrow I try to keep you, and tell some other yarn, don't you pay any attention to it. You see, I'm so mortally afraid of being all alone. "

There was a knock at the door. Vladimir opened it, and was confronted by the manager of the hotel.

" How's it there are two of you ? " he asked severely.

" I'll explain tomorrow. Anyhow, I'll pay for two. It'll be quite all right. "

" Unless I send for the police—as I certainly shall do if you go on creating a disturbance and keeping my other guests from sleeping. "

Blinis was still sound asleep when Vladimir awoke next morning, with a splitting headache. As often happens at the start of winter, the snow had definitely changed to rain. Everything outside the window was black and dripping.

Blinis was sleeping with his mouth open, like a child. He had tossed back the blanket in his sleep and his chest was bare.

Vladimir felt unsure of himself. An acute despondency took possession of him as he gazed out at the drab walls and rain-swept roofs of the houses facing the hotel. He knew he must act at once, or his resolution might falter.

Taking from his pocket a pencil and a piece of paper, he sat down at the table, and wrote in Russian:

"I am keeping a thousand francs to tide me over at the start. She is staying with a nurse, whose name is Mile Blanche, in a small village near Melun. You will find her all right, I know. It was I who put the diamond ring in your box. If you show her this letter, she will know you didn't steal it."

He had no wish to play the hero ; so why not keep that thousand francs ? His plan was to go to ask his friend Sasha, the commissionaire at the *Europesjki*, about a similar job ; for he, too, spoke four languages.

Blinis sighed in his sleep, and Vladimir all but tore up the note he had placed on the table. Then, for some reason, the words came back to him : " If thine eye offend thee

It comforted him to know that the nurse had taken Helene under her wing. Much as he disliked that rather arrogant young woman, he respected her. She, for her part, certainly despised him. Anyhow, she could be depended on ; thanks to her, the child would come safely into the world. Blinis's son!

A last scruple waylaid him. Perhaps he was doing wrong to keep that thousand francs ? Wouldn't it have been handsomer to give up all ? No, merely foolish. And he decided to take the gramophone and records as well. True, these were their joint property ; still, when all was said and done, wasn't it he who had given the greater part ?

He might well have indulged in an orgy of sentiment ; he had only to wake Blinis up and tell him how he felt about *it* all and why he was acting like this. But he had strength of mind enough to refrain.

He left the room on tiptoe. At the foot of the stairs he ran into the manager, whose suspicions were aroused when he saw that Vladimir had his suitcase and gramophone with him.

"Which of you is going to pay me for the room ?"

Vladimir could have paid with ease, but it would have meant breaking into the thousand-franc note. And Blinis had three.

"Oh, my friend will settle."

"Are you sure he has enough money ?"

"Quite sure. You need have no anxiety."

From henceforward he must eke his money out, counting every Sou.

"Well? Did you find Kalenin?" asked Sasha.

"Yes. I think he's going back to France. Look here! Do you think you could wangle a job for me at the hotel? Any sort of job?"

The commissionaire pulled a long face, tugging at his moustache.

"Well, it's not too easy. There's nothing for the moment. But come back and see me next week."

That, most probably, was what he'd said to Blinis. And Blinis had been reduced to selling sunflower-seeds in the street, and ended in the squalor of the Shelter.

There was no more half-melted snow in the gutters; only muddy water.

Vladimir had a thousand francs. Deliberately he changed the note in a small tavern, where the magnitude of the sum seemed fabulous. Then he fell to drinking vodka, glass after glass. After drinking twenty francs' worth he had reached his limit, and, reckoning out, he found that he had a good month in hand before having to do as Blinis had done.

For, in his drunken mood, an idea had germinated; he must make expiation. It was up to him to live through every one of Blinis's experiences, stage by stage, and wind up, bearded and derelict, with no shirt under his coat, in the Night Shelter.

"I may as well tell you," the commissionaire informed him when he came again next week, "that, even if there was a job going, you couldn't have it. You're an alien, you see, and they don't grant permits that easily. . . ."

Vladimir had been drinking, and he greeted this information with a beaming smile. It pleased him to know that, by agreeably slow degrees, he was going the same road as Blinis; the road that ended at the Shelter. So everything was for the best. The more he thought things over, the more convinced he was of this.

It was a Sunday afternoon, and he pictured the Town Clerk at Polyte's cafe, swinging his legs on to the wall-sofa for a nap while Lili washed wine-glasses and tumblers.

All the same, if he'd chosen . . . But he hadn't, and that was why he could smile contentedly; everything was going exactly as it should go.

