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The Pursuer

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THE PURSUER

Books by Louis Golding

NOVELS

FORWARD FROM BABYLON
SEACOAST OF BOHEMIA
DAY OF ATONEMENT
STORE OF LADIES
THE MIRACLE BOY
THE PRINCE OR SOMEBODY
GIVE UP YOUR LOVERS
MAGNOLIA STREET
FIVE SILVER DAUGHTERS
THE CAMBERWELL BEAUTY

SHORTSTORIES

THE DOOMINGTON WANDERER

VERSE

SORROW OF WAR
SHEPHERD SINGING RAGTIME
PROPHET OR FOOL

TRAVEL

SUNWARD; ADVENTURES IN ITALY
SICILIAN NOON
THOSE ANCIENT LANDS: A JOURNEY
TO PALESTINE

BELLES LETTRES

ADVENTURES IN LIVING DANGEROUSLY
JAMES JOYCE

THE PURSUER

by

LOUIS GOLDING

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CHAPTER I

I

What is he running after me for? Harry Wace asked of himself. What have I done to him? I've never seen him in my life before! He'll kill me if he catches me!

Why doesn't he stop? Why doesn't he turn round and bung me in the face? the other small boy asked of himself. *Then I'd bung him in the face. Then we could play together in the croft andjind new oceans and mountains together.*

The breath of the pursuer was hot on the neck of the pursued. Why doesn't he catch me? asked Harry Wace in his anguish. *It hurts me. I can't go any more. If he'd catch me, he'd hit me. And then he'd stop hitting me.*

If I put my hand out I could 'catch him by his coat, gloated the other small boy. But I won't. Let him turn round and bung me in the face. Besides, it's fun.

There were other small boys than these two running down Blenheim Road towards Bridge-ways, four in the group of the pursuers, three

in the group of the pursued. Pursuers and pursued had never set eyes on each other before. The pursued were pupils of the Blenheim Road Elementary School. It was an up-to-date school. They had a big room specially fitted up for woodwork. No other school in the neighbourhood had one. They were rather objectionable about it.

The pursuing boys came from a school about a mile away up the Blenheim Road, in Longton. They were a better class of boys, their fathers were clerks and artisans. But they had no woodwork room. As soon as they went up into Standard Seven, they had to make an excursion every Friday morning to do an hour's woodwork in the Blenheim Road School. They did not like it. The boys of the Blenheim Road neighbourhood were shabby and not many of them wore collars. It was a slum, in fact.

The Longton boys usually went back in a body after the woodwork hour. If they did not, sometimes there were fights. It was a new batch of boys who had come down to Blenheim Road this particular morning. Most of them were glad to get back to the heights of Longton, in fact most of them had already gone. But Sidney Sharpies hung about. He was alert and interested. It interested him that the gravel of the playground was not like the gravel up at Longton. The red

brick was redder. He liked faces, too. It was only a penny tram-ride or ten minutes' walk down the hill from his own home, yet the faces round here were different.

There was a boy about Sharples's age leaning up against the playground wall. He was about eleven, too. He had a rather pale, heavy face, and brown-gold hair, the fringe of which escaped untidily under the peak. Sidney Sharples's hair was black and smooth and carefully brushed. The boy with the brown-gold hair was in no hurry to get back to his dinner. Perhaps he hadn't much of a dinner to get back to. He just stood against the wall and did nothing. His eyes were grey and didn't seem to be looking at anything at all.

Sharples liked his face. He had never seen a face like it before. He would like to talk to the boy, but it wasn't easy somehow. The boy was all wrapped round in being by himself, like a great big towel. Perhaps the boy would think he was being clever and snuffy, because they were dressed so different, Sidney Sharples with a beautiful blue silk bow to his waterproof collar and a lovely shine to his boots, and the boy with no bow or tie at all, and big holes in his toe-caps.

It would have been different if the boy had been a girl. Sidney knew how to tackle girls. He would have gone up to her and said "Hello !"

and she would have had to say " Hello ! " back at him. Girls couldn't help it. Then he would have said : " Let's go for a walk in Victoria Park this evening," and she would have been there.

But it couldn't be like that with this chap. He felt a little flicker of anger shoot in his heart. What right had he to hold himself to himself like that as if he was somebody ? Who was he, after all ? A little slum-boy from Blenheim Road, with holes in his toe-caps. Probably his father was a dustman or a hawker or something.

The boy still looked in front of him, still saying nothing, seeing nothing. Then Sidney Sharpies smiled at him, remembering that his father and mother could withstand him when he stamped and raged, but rarely withheld anything when he looked up from under his lashes and smiled with his green eyes. Several seconds passed by thus. Then at length an awareness came into the eyes and posture of the boy leaning against the wall, an awareness that he was not wholly alone in the world. The eyes saw the eyes that were smiling into them. In the heart of the boy leaning against the wall, a flicker of anger rose, too, a resentment against this intolerable invasion. What does *he* want, eh ? One of those swanks from Longton. Just because he's got all swank clothes on, he thinks he's everybody, does he ? Well, he isn't, that's all.

The anger died down almost at once. The un-moving eyes, the unchanging smile, did nothing to keep it burning. A profound embarrassment took possession of Harry Wace. He blushed to his ears, then with all his power he took his limbs in charge. He shuffled away, his feet crunching across the gravel of the playground. He reached the gate that gave on the Blenheim Road and so turned his face down towards Bridgeways, and home. He was glad to come up with two other Blenheim Road boys of his class about fifty yards from the school. He felt a funny shiver up his arms, as if he were frightened. But what had he to be frightened of? Certainly not that fellow from Longton with the blue silk bow. He was bigger than him, anyway, he could bung his face in, if he wanted to.

" Hello," said Harry Wace to the two others.

" Hello, Wace ! " they replied.

" Hello ! " he said again. The three walked on. A minute or so passed. One of the boys told the others he had now got two pocket-knives, one had a cork-screw in it, the other hadn't. He was prepared to swop the one without a cork-screw. What had the others which might be set against it ? He was not interested in tram-tickets, but he might consider cigarette-cards ... to be going on with.

The transaction did not have time to go far.

Suddenly the three boys heard a whoop of defiance and hatred behind them. They turned. Four Longton boys were coming down upon them, shaking their fists and hallooing, confident in their superiority of numbers. To two of the three Blenheim Road boys the four Longton faces were unfamiliar. To the third one only was familiar, the face of the boy with a blue silk bow, the one who had smiled at him. He was smiling at him now. The smile seemed to say : " Hi, you, let's have a game ! You run a bit, run as long as you like, then turn round and we'll biff each other. It'll be such a lark ! "

The boy named Wace turned from the green eyes. His heart was icy with fear. He lifted his feet and ran, as if a devil were after him. The two other boys, who might have stood their ground, turned tail, too, when they found that one of their number was already running. The chase was still on by the time the two groups had reached the bottom of Blenheim Road, where it debouches into Doomington Road. Two of the Blenheim Road boys turned sharp right, with three of the four Longton boys after them. A moment later they had turned on their pursuers, emboldened by the knowledge that they were in their own home lands, and the others were aliens. They gave a good account of themselves.

But the boy named Wace ran and ran, with the

boy Sharpies two or three yards behind him, never more, just now and again less, so that it seemed to Wace he felt the hot breath of the pursuer lick his neck like fire. He lived in Hornbeam Street, six or seven streets away. He would never be able to get there. His heart was thumping up behind his neck and choking him.

Then he became aware that only a little distance away was the Post Office. He saw the big red pillar-box by the pavement. There were two lovely ladies who kept the Post Office. They were sisters and not married, but they had big soft bosoms. Whenever he went in to buy a stamp for his mother's weekly letter to Australia, they always smiled at him kindly, because they knew he was shy and slow, not like other boys. They wore pink silk blouses and had golden hair piled up on top.

There was this corner, and then the street-crossing, and then the next corner. Oh, could he reach as far ? Faster, faster ! The other one would never dare to come into the Post Office after him, for the Post Office belonged to the King. He was over the street-crossing ! He was here ! He was at the Post Office ! He turned on his left hand, and threw himself up against the three steps. His knee-joints would not work; but, somehow, though his legs were stiff as pokers, he found himself on the top step. He reached to the latch

of the door and pressed it. He heard the bell tinkle above the lintel. He had never heard any sound as glad before. He placed one foot across the threshold, then turned and stared back at the pursuer. The other stood below the steps, watching him with amused eyes. They looked into each other's eyes, as they were to do all their lives long, across a gulf of silence and hatred, of contempt and heartache, as they were to do across the leaves of the books they studied, the figures in their ledgers, the features of the women they wed, across distances minute and enormous, until even the sidereal distance of death was to shrink to a hand's span in the intensity of that contemplation.

Then Harry Wace lowered his eyes. He shivered as if a stick of ice had been laid under his shoulder-blades. He staggered into the shop and almost toppled against the counter.

"Why, young man, whatever is the matter with you?" asked one of the postmistresses, the shorter and stouter one.

"You poor boy, you're shaking like a leaf," said the other, who wore pince-nez, but her voice belied them.

Harry tried to speak, but could not, and did not know what words he would have spoken.

"The boy's as white as a sheet," said the shorter postmistress. "What have you been

running for? Has anybody been running after you?"

He still said nothing. He stood against the counter, his mouth trembling, his eyes large with fear.

"You poor thing!" said the shorter post-mistress. "Oh, you poor thing!" She lifted the flap between the end of the counter and the wall and came round to him. She put her arm round his shoulder and patted him. "There now, there! Was it one of the boys? I've a good mind to write and tell the headmaster!"

Then suddenly Wace found himself speaking. "It wasn't anybody!" he cried passionately. "I was just running!" He threw the woman's arm off his shoulder.

"What?" she cried, blushing with embarrassment. Her voice was sharp. She opened her lips and might have said something quite harsh, when she heard her sister tapping with a coin on the counter. "No!" her sister's lips went. "No!" "Oh, yes, I see!" her own lips went. It was clear to them both they were on the edge of a mystery beyond their talents to fathom. They were females and spinsters. "Very well, then!" she said aloud. She went back behind the counter.

"Can I get you anything?" asked the post-mistress with the pince-nez.

" A penny stamp, please," said Wace. He felt too ashamed of himself to lift his eyes from the ground. His ears burned dull red.

" One penny, please 1 "

He felt in his pockets, from trouser to jacket, from jacket to trouser again. " I—I'm sorry," he mumbled. " I forgot to bring my penny."

" Perhaps," said the shorter postmistress, " you'll bring it in later, on your way back to school."

" Yes," said the boy. He went to the door and hesitated.

" It looks like rain," said the postmistress with the pince-nez, without lifting her head from her sheets of stamps. There was not a cloud in the sky. " Perhaps you'd like to wait for a few minutes."

" Yes," said Wace again. He turned to the posters on the walls and studied them attentively. Five minutes and ten minutes passed. It was getting late. His mother would be wondering what had happened to him.

The boy with the silk bow couldn't be there any more, could he ? And what if he was ? Yes, what if he was ? He'd show him. A sudden wave of anger flooded Harry Wace. He was as good as that swank any day. He'd bash his face in, that's what he'd do. He strode over to the door firmly.

" Good-afternoon, sonny,⁵⁵ said the two post-mistresses. But he did not hear them. He thumped down the three steps and looked round. The other boy was nowhere about. It was as if there had been no such boy at all. He shuffled heavily onward towards the small dark house in Hornbeam Street.

2

Sidney Sharpies took his cap off and hung it neatly on the hall-stand, in the small house in the bright Longton Street.

" I was expecting you twenty minutes ago/⁵ said the boy's mother. " Your dinner's cold. Where have you been ? "

" I stayed on and had a nice long talk with the teacher," Sharpies said blandly. " He's such a nice teacher."

" That may be as it is," the mother grumbled. " I can't have you late for your dinner."

" No, mummy, no. But he was such a really awfully nice teacher." The boy's eyes twinkled with remembered pleasure.

CHAPTER II

i

FOR THE NEXT THREE MONTHS Sidney Sharpies made the journey from Longton to Blenheim Road every Friday morning for the woodwork lesson. The visitors came into contact with their hosts twice, once during the brief interval before the last hour of morning school, and later, when morning school broke up. Sometimes Harry Wace and Sidney Sharpies did not see each other, more usually they did. They were aware of each other though a multitude of screaming boys surged between them. Not a word passed between them. They never looked at each other directly. But they were as aware of each other as if no one but they themselves existed in a playground as desolate as a waste heath.

There was a vacancy about the day, about the whole week, if Friday morning came and went and the two boys, for one reason or another, had failed each other. If they did not see each other during the first interval, they would hang about till morning school was over, until it was quite certain that the one or the other was missing that

day. Neither made an effort to find out who the other was. The name of the one was never uttered by the lips of the other. But they listened. Each found out who the other was, Sidney Sharpies, Harry Wace. Slowly another item and another item added itself to their knowledge. Sidney's father was an insurance agent, Harry's father worked in a wire factory. Both boys ranked high in the respective Standards Seven of their schools. It was intended that both boys should go in for scholarships to take them to the Doomington Central School. The months went by. Not a word passed between them.

Oh, you fool, you fool ! So the words arranged themselves in the thoughts of Sidney Sharpies.

We could be such pals ! Pd fight you, Pd have to bust your face in, so as to stop you looking so frightened. And then when you weren't frightened, we d be such pals.

What did you run after me for ? the words made in the thoughts of Harry Wace. What had I done to you ? I hate you ! I wish I could kill you ! Just because you wear clean collars and your stockings always stick up. And what if I do wear the same sweater so's nobody should see my shirt's torn ? I can't help it ! I hate you ! Oh it might have been such fun going out all along the river together to where the fields are and there's blue-bells ! I hate the grease on your hair ! It makes me sick !

After three months Sidney Sharpies did not come down any more on Friday mornings for the woodwork lesson in Blenheim Road. One Friday morning and another went by and still he did not come.

"What's happened to him?" Harry Wace asked himself fiercely. "Won't he come any more? Is he ill? Is he dead?"

A fierce temptation assailed the boy. He would ask what had happened to Sharpies. What was wrong with that? Nothing at all. Nothing at all. "What's happened to that kid from your school—what's-his-name, Sharpies?"

But he did not. A taboo, august and mysterious, arrested the words on his lips. He did not see Sidney Sharpies a third and a fourth Friday morning.

"Isn't it grand," Wace sang to himself, running home from school that noontime, "I shall never see him again! He's gone!" But he was surly over his food. He ate hardly more than a mouthful. "What's come over the lad?" his mother asked herself. "He's not himself at all these days. Happen he's met some bit of a girl. Ah well, come quick and go quick! Here now, Harry, here! Have this apple! You won't, won't you? Well, you can go and bring up a bucket of coal from the cellar, and quick, too!"

It came at length to Wace's ears, as casually as all he knew about the other boy had come, that Sidney Sharpies had been sent by his father to a school on the further side of Longton. It was a school you paid to go to. They taught French there, and even the early lessons in the *Via Litina*. From that school you had a real chance to win a scholarship to the Doomington Grammar School. It was pretty hopeless to think of winning it without French. You did not actually need the Latin till you got there.

Harry Wace had a book with an embossed blue binding and gilt edges. It was called *Illustrated Europe* and it had been given to him as a prize for being best boy in Standard Five. He had also a snake in a bottle and a pen-knife. He sold these things, which were his greatest treasures, and bought himself Chardenal's *French Grammar* with the proceeds. If they did not teach French at the Blenheim Road School, he would teach it to himself. They might laugh at him in Blenheim Road, but it was his intention to sit for a scholarship to the Doomington Grammar School, though it had not been done from that school before.

Sidney Sharpies and Harry Wace sat down two or three rows from each other, during the scholarship examination for the Grammar School. They

were called up on the same day for the *viva voce* examination in the High Master's room.

As Sidney Sharpies came out, Harry Wace was waiting to go in. Sharples's face was radiant. He knew he had made a first-class impression on the High Master. The High Master had been friendly, almost jocular. He knew that no man so sensitive as the High Master could have permitted himself such amiability if he had not already decided the issue. The scholarship was in his pocket.

He came out and saw Harry Wace waiting to go in. He saw how terrified he was, his forehead was quite clammy. " Never mind, kid ! " he whispered. " It's easy ! Good luck ! "

The boy from Blenheim Road turned, quite startled. He had been in such a state of nerves that he had had no eyes to see what boy it was who had come out of the High Master's room. He could not see there was a hand stretched out to him. He tried to shape a word but dared not. He was so pierced by the kindness of the voice that had addressed him, he was afraid if he tried to speak at all he would break into tears. He turned away from the friendly word and the proffered hand.

The High Master's clerk came out into the corridor. " Harry Wace ! " he called out. " Yes, sir ! " whispered Harry. He disappeared.

Black fury stormed up over the green eyes of

Sidney Sharpies. The lips, which were at all times a little thin and hard, set malignantly.

/'// show him, he whispered, /'// show him ! The bloody little swine !

Sidney Sharpies was duly awarded the scholarship. Harry Wace was not, he had made so unhappy an impression on the High Master during his *viva voce*. His French, too, had been doubtful. The two boys did not set eyes on each other for several months, not, in fact, until the day the Michaelmas term started at the Grammar School, and Sharpies began his career as a Grammar School boy.

Sharpies wore a brand new school cap to go to school with, a blue cap with green circles, crested by an eagle. He had a brand new leather satchel slung over his shoulder. But by the time the school-day was over, the cap looked easy and casual, the satchel looked battered and customary. He was a debonair young man. He had the knack of that sort of thing. Other boys after their first day at school are anxious to go home and tell their mothers what it has been like. He was not. He elected to dawdle about, and to walk home with a group of Bridgeways boys, whom he entertained mightily though he was only a new boy. For some reason he preferred not to take the

direct tram home by the upper route to Longton.

If he had, he would not have been at the corner of Hornbeam Street in Bridgeways just at the moment that Harry Wace reached there, on his way home from the low elementary school in Blenheim Road. Harry Wace would not have seen him standing there, taking his ease with mature young men in the Third and Fourth Form, his cap raked jauntily over one eye. He would not have been able to smile with honey sweetness into the moody heavy-lidded eyes of Harry Wace ... if he had taken the direct tram to Longton.

Hour beyond hour after midnight, Harry Wace still sat over the kitchen-table, acquiring French verbs and more French verbs. He ignored the hollow chuckling of the broken incandescent mantle and the shining parade of black beetles along the wainscotting. "*Naitre n6,*" he moaned, "*acquitrir, acquis*"

Harry Wace was elected to a scholarship at the Grammar School on the results of the next examination. He had not gained self-confidence, but his book-learning was formidable for a boy of his age. He entered the Modern Side, for he had no feeling for the airs and graces of a classical education. Sidney Sharpies was on the Classical

Side. The two boys had no contact at all with each other for a long stretch of time, excepting on Harry's first day ; though you could hardly call a contact something so unsubstantial as a jerk of the head and a thrust of the thumb.

Harry Wace was a new boy. It was a despicable thing to be, he knew ; he knew that the condition exacted odious sanctions. He moved about from class to class dim as a mouse, hoping he might avoid them in his pitiable obscurity. He had safely survived every interval. The day's end came at length. He was on his way to the cloakroom in the basement when a gang whooped by him suddenly. His heart stopped beating. It was clear that they were on the look-out for some forlorn new boy, to submit him to the beastly initiations. The gang had gone by him twenty or thirty yards. His heart beat again. He had not been noticed. Then the gang turned round on its tracks. Another boy had come up amongst them from behind. Wace saw with desperate clearness the thrust of the boy's thumb towards him and the jerk of his head. Then the boy disappeared again, a boy he knew well, and did not know at all. The gang duly frog-marched him off to the lavatory, held his head in a basin till his lungs split for air, twisted his elbow under itself, and uttered the formula of *nunc dimittis*. He was a new boy no longer.

The pulses beat in Wace's ear-drums as they held him under the water. He thought they would wrench the arm out of the socket. But he felt an emotion deeper and more abiding than pain. He did not cry out because of the ease it established in his heart.

ril get my own back, some day, Mr. Sharpies. Tou'll be sorry for this, I think.

2

There was no public rivalry between the two boys. They did not come into contact with each other either in work or play. Their names were never associated with each other in any context, excepting when they attained their respective Sixth Forms, and then only casually. Yet they maintained an unsleeping watch upon each other, from day to day, from term to term. Each was the ruthless tyrant of the other's energies and existence.

Sharpies had been considered advanced enough to go into the Classical Third, among boys older than himself. Wace was put into the Modern Second, for fear that competition with boys older than himself would fluster him. He worked so hard, that when the next year's remove came round, he was promoted to a form on the Modern Side that corresponded with Sharples's on the

Classical Side. In his second year he set to work secretly and won a middle school language prize. As soon as the result was announced, Sharpies got down to it and went one better, he won two prizes, for Latin prose and English verse. Wace was discovered by his form captain to be a useful cross-country runner. Sharpies blazed into prominence as a hundred yards and a two-twenty yards sprinter. Wace hoped his weight would qualify him for his form football team. His feet were just too clumsy. Sharpies went down to the nets a few Saturday mornings and they found him smart enough to play for his form cricket team. He might have played for the School First Eleven, excepting that his indolence got the better of him, and he refused to turn up to practise.

So the implacable rivalry continued throughout their school-days, the barbs all the more deadly because no one else than themselves saw or heard them as they twanged through the air. They hated each other, with a hatred that even at its most inexorable involved elements that in another conjunction might have blossomed into opposite passions as fanatical. It was a hatred that to each had an awful sanctity. It would be a profanation if any other minds than theirs had any cognisance of it. It had its own dreadful honour, and exacted that no lips should for any reason couple their names. There was therefore

a point up to which the persecutions of the one, the retaliations of the other might go, but no further than that. If Sharpies turned up at the Upper School Debating Society because he knew that Wace was going to support the motion, he might attack him with grinning ferocity, but only on the condition that three or four other speakers were attacked as ferociously, so that it might seem an attack on an idea rather than upon a particular person. There would be innuendoes enough to flood Wace's heart with fury, but none saving those two were aware of them, and none but those two would savour the full significance of Wace's polemic in the next issue of the school magazine.

They were conscious of each other's doings with a spontaneity more terrible than that of lovers, gifted with a faculty of building up involved and accurate conclusions from perfunctory indications, a faculty that belonged inherently to Sharples's make-up but in Wace operated in one direction only and with one objective. It was the operation of this faculty that gave Wace one of his few satisfactions.

He withdrew into the doorway of a shuttered shop. It was the only shop in the small and dreadful street. The other houses had wares to sell, but they did not expose them in shop-windows. He had time to wait, but he did not think he would

have to wait long ; perhaps half an hour, at most. He did not need to wait more than ten minutes. The door opened and released upon the sordid air a cracked female cackle. It released Sidney Sharpies, too. Sharpies almost fell down the steps, so intense was the fury of his disgust and humiliation. He was sickened by a twofold failure, each more galling than the other. Harry Wace in his doorway could almost persuade himself he felt the heat of the shame of Sharples's cheeks, across the black cobbles.

Sidney Sharpies strode away. A clammy sweat was on his forehead. He fumbled for his handkerchief, and as he brought it out, he brought out with it his prefect's cap, which he had thrust out of sight the moment he had first slunk round into the street. The cap fell on to the pavement. He had been pleased about his cap. He had been awarded it this term and Wace had not. Wace might not get it for a term or two, or might miss it altogether.

Harry Wace strode swiftly out of the shadow and across the street and retrieved the cap. He made an uncertain movement towards the other youth. Then he stopped short where he stood. He allowed the other to disappear, and then came out himself into the main road. Next day he sent the cap on in a small parcel from the Bridgeways Post Office to Sharples's home

address. The parcel contained no covering word, of course. It needed none.

3

Harry Wace never achieved popularity either as a boy or a man. He was morbid and a little sullen. He was always on the defensive. He looked as if he were afraid of something. Now and again he would suddenly twist his head round, as if he had just heard a footstep come up behind him. He was acutely disappointed in his failure among his fellows. He tried spasmodically to let it be seen he would like to be liked by them, and to like them in return. But he was clumsy in his advances. It was thought he was throwing his weight about.

Sidney Sharpies achieved popularity despite himself. He was insolent, selfish and a bit of a bully. But he had charm. Small boys adored him. He played with his popularity as one plays with a puppy. He made it do tricks and beg and stand on its head. He knew who would be glumly beholding the spectacle and digging his fingernails into the palms of his hands, in his misery and frustration.

The last Speech Day came at length for Harry Wace and Sidney Sharpies. They had finished their school careers. Both had done well in school

prizes and scholarships this final year. The school was assembled in the Free Commercial Hall, distinguished relatives on the platform, less distinguished relatives in the galleries, the multitude of boys in the body of the hall below. School songs had been sung, the High Master had read his report, the Bishop who was distributing the prizes had duly announced that prizes weren't everything, and as for himself he had always been at the bottom of the class.

The older boys now began to present themselves for their prizes. One after another they enfilded before the senior masters, the High Master and his Lordship. Each bowed stiffly or with exaggerated ease, then held out one hand for his leather-bound prize and the other for the episcopal hand-shake. For each according to the esteem in which he was held by his fellows the cheers and clapping and thumping of feet arose in the body of the hall. When the name of Harry Wace was announced, and the heavy-faced pale young man shambled lumpily along the platform, even the Bishop, man of the world though he was, was embarrassed by the paralysis of silence that fell upon the hall. The desultory half dozen hand-claps that greeted him, or that were the residue of the acclamation that had greeted his predecessor, only emphasised the boy's stony failure. Wace had not reached the steps at the

farther end of the platform by which he was to descend into the body, of the hall again, when another name was announced and another young man presented himself to the verdict of his fellows. A roar and a crash like a breaking sea glorified Sidney Sharpies. He came forward easily, his sleek black hair shining, his thin, well-shaped mouth parted in a smile.

A moment's faintness beset the heart of the churchman on the platform. A quick cold gust of wind seemed to strike along his temples. "What's here?" a voice asked within him. "Oh, there's trouble here!" But the green eyes of the adored young man were upon him, the amiable hand stretched out towards him. The Bishop's lips made the stereotyped phrase of congratulation, though he knew it was wholly inaudible in the unabated tempest. The young man descended the steps into the hall, the thunder still attending him. The young man and his glory went in pursuit of the young man who had gone before treading like a leper in his loneliness.

CHAPTER III

SHARPLES won a scholarship to Oxford, Wace to the Technical Institute in Doomington. They did not set eyes on each other for several years. Or only once, at most. They did not cease for one moment to be aware of each other.

Their hatred was indifferent to space as the map measured it or time as the clock measured it. They did not feel nearer or further from each other because a hundred or two hundred miles separated them for months at a time. There were moments for Sidney Sharpies of infamous desolation when he sat alone in his armchair in his rooms in College, with the fire leaping in the hearth and the other armchair empty on the further side of the fire.

" We might have both gone up to this place," mused Sharpies, " mightn't we ? I could have seen you through. You just needed someone to tell you the dodges. I know the dodges, all of them, all the time. There's only one dodge I've never got the hang of. Oh why, why, were you so filthy, so stupid ? Can you imagine what it might have been like, hunting for fritillaries

in the meadows or tracing the white man on the downs ? No, you can't, of course you can't, yousow !"

And there were times when, as Harry Wace came walking from Longton down the Blenheim Road of an evening, it needed all he had of self-control to prevent himself from breaking into a sudden panic run, he had heard with sudden and such dreadful clearness the sound of feet running after him, and felt the pursuer's breath hot upon his neck.

" You can only go so far, and no further," his heart cried. " You've gone far enough, I warn you. I tell you, I'll turn and strike ! Do you hear ? I'll upset the sleek hair for you and twist the smile round to the other side of your face ! You don't believe me ? You're right ! I'm a coward ! If I only hadn't been a coward, all these years..."

They were under the same roof only once during their student days. A young man named Tom Ormerod got married about this time. He was a year or two older than Harry Wace and had been his friend at school, so far as Wace had had any friends. At the wedding-party there was a lot of champagne flowing. Wace was not used to champagne and took rather more than

he could stand. He could not dance, either, but before long he was dancing round with the best of them. He was having a good time. He could not remember when he had had such a good time before. He knew exactly how clumsy he was, but he had completely lost all self-consciousness. He went clopping about merrily on his big feet. He made jokes over his partner's shoulder. Everybody laughed. He knew some of them were laughing because he was making a fool of himself. He didn't care a damn. He shouted " Ho ! " at the top of his voice, seized his partner by the waist, lunged off with her, and nearly sent two other couples headlong.

Then Sidney Sharpies appeared on the scene. He had come down from Oxford only that day. He had learned in the train from some other old Doomingtonian that Tom Ormerod was getting married that same day. He knew that it was more likely than not that Harry Wace would be at the wedding-party, so he determined to turn up.

He had not been invited, but that would be all right. Tom Ormerod was not the sort of fellow to resent an old school-mate coming along to drink a spot of champagne to his bride's health and his own. He was quite right. Tom Ormerod was delighted to see him, and even postponed his disappearance from the party, because

Sharpies brought so much zest into it. He told jokes, he flirted with all the girls, he danced divinely.

Harry Wace had been telling jokes, too, and had been trying to dance. No one was aware he was even in the room any longer. He hung about for ten or fifteen minutes with no one, not even the servants, taking any notice of him. Their ears and eyes were elsewhere. Sidney Sharpies was as much of an enchantment to the men as to the women. Harry Wace slunk out of the room at length. There was murder in his heart.

CHAPTER IV

I

THE TWO YOUNG MEN did well enough in their respective academic careers ; after which Sidney Sharples went into business with a firm of brokers in London and Harry Wace was put on the research staff of a chemical products firm in Doomington. Sharples's mother, who was his sole surviving relative, went to live with him in Highgate, where she died three or four years later. Wace achieved a long-standing ambition and managed to move his parents, who were old and worn-out now, to a pleasant little house in Withington, where there was a garden. The old people pottered about in it quite happily. They had a parlour, too. They loved the parlour, with its yellow plush furniture and green-and-gold plant-pots. They hoped to see their boy married before they were dead and done with. They made no great demands on him. He would be able to keep them quite nicely, even if he married, so long as she wasn't one of these nose-in-the-air, la-di-da bodies, that wore low-cut evening dresses and wanted

to be taken out weekly to dances and theatres. But that wasn't the sort of woman their boy was likely to be taken up with, God bless him. He would marry some nice respectable home-keeping woman and they would see a grandchild or two, as well, please the Lord, running about the place, before their time was out.

And if Harry didn't seem a bit the marrying sort, well no harm done either. Mother was quite capable of looking after him, as she always had done. The old people looked forward to a serene old age. It was not as serene as they had hoped.

Harry Wace was on the technical staff of the chemical products firm, but his superiors discovered that he possessed a business ability at least as valuable to them as his technical knowledge. He had never travelled anywhere, yet he displayed a notable understanding of the economic conditions and potentialities of out-of-the-way regions in Europe and elsewhere. They began to discuss with him the marketing of their processes, with such useful results that he was ultimately transferred from the technical to the administrative department. His employers were a shrewd cosmopolitan lot, Wace looked as blunt and simple an Englishman as any man needs to. It was a useful asset.

Ultimately, they made him one of their premier "contacts" men. In the first place, he knew what he was talking about, from the process and patents angle. Then he always let a client get away with the comfortable feeling of having made the best of the deal, a feeling for which he paid heavily. And finally, and this was important, seeing that a good deal of the firm's trade was foreign, he had a first-rate command of French and German, and a fair knowledge of Spanish and Italian.

He was encouraged to give to his "contacts" a social flavour, at least to his Latin "contacts"; these, more particularly the Spaniards, were not convinced a deal was all it should be if the negotiations at some stage or another had not included a long discussion on art, women and politics over a pot of coffee, a cigar and an anisette.

It was in this way that he drank quite a great deal of coffee and anisette, and smoked quite a few cigars, with Sefior Juan Bienvenida of Barcelona, an agent of some importance in that city, who made a practice of an annual visit to Doomington. The lounge of the Winter Garden at the Central Hotel was no gay substitute for the sunny tumult of the Ramblas, but it served its purpose. There was music, there were women to look at.

Bienvenida liked Wace. The two found they did good business with each other. After a week or so the Spaniard returned quite well-pleased to his native country. On the occasion of their third meeting things were not the same. A week passed by and Bienvenida still lingered in Doomington. The music and women of the Central Hotel did not interest him. His thoughts were elsewhere. Despite the coffee and cigars, the relations between the Spaniard and the Englishman had been purely of a business nature. Now Wace was a little embarrassed to find that an almost pathetic friendliness was creeping into the Spaniard's attitude.

"He's got tied up with some woman in these parts," Wace reported to his superiors.

"That will do nobody any harm," was the comment. "See how much of that chemical manure you can unload on him."

"There is something I wanted to tell you," said the Spaniard one day. "That is, if I may talk of a personal matter."

"I shall be honoured."

"I shall not be staying alone in this hotel when I next come. That may be only a few months from now."

Wace did not quite know how to take the

confidence. Was he expected to dig the other fellow in the ribs for the gay dog that he was? He meant a woman, of course. But surely the Spaniard could hardly consider himself intimate enough with an English business acquaintance half his age to let him know he was bringing some picked-up woman with him? He meant his wife, of course.

"I shall be happy to meet Senora Bienvenida," he ventured.

"My wife is dead. I shall have my daughter with me."

"Oh, indeed, I beg your pardon." He wondered whether he might now change the subject, It was not, after all, a matter of great moment to him.

"You must permit me to present you. I can trust you, Mr. Wace. You are not like other young men."

It was not a very fortunate remark. It was even an atrocious remark. Wace's face remained impassive. This was, after all, what his firm was paying him for.

"I shall be busy," said the Spaniard awkwardly. "I do not know how it will turn out." ("What will turn out?" Wace asked himself impatiently.) "Perhaps you could make time to see her once or twice?" continued the Spaniard.

Wace politely inclined his head.

" You see/* the other went on. " She is fond of pictures. Her mother painted. Perhaps you might take her to the Art Gallery. Oh, no. That would be during the day. How could I ask such a thing ? "

The situation was getting quite awkward. " I am fond of pictures, too," Wace murmured. That did not seem to commit him too far, though it was not true. He was not at all sure that this was, in fact, what his firm was paying him for, that he should act as nurse-chaperon to a young Spanish blue-stockings while her father carried on some nasty little intrigue.

" Oh, did I say," the Spaniard asked heavily, " that my daughter speaks English ? Her mother, too, was English."

" I'm not sure you did," Wace said. (Her mother, *too*. Obviously, the fellow liked his women English.)

" You will not need to bite off the end of your tongue, talking my language," continued Bienvenida, trying to strike a lighter note. " She has an aunt and uncle in London, the aunt is her mother's sister. But they are old people. It would be dull for her to stay with them all the time."

" I am sure that Senorita Bienvenida will find a good deal to occupy her in Doomington,"

said Wace a little frigidly, frigidly enough to make him realise he was doing rather less than his employers expected of him. " Permit me ! " He lifted his glass. " Senor Bienvenida, to your daughter ! "

" Manolita ! " the father whispered. A mist came over his large brown mournful eyes.

One morning several months later Wace was summoned to the office of his chief. He was informed that Senor Bienvenida had arrived and had brought his daughter with him. They were installed at the Central Hotel. Bienvenida had come a number of months earlier than his custom, because apparently it was his intention this time to combine pleasure with business. It had come to their ears, not from the Senor himself, that there was a widow of some means and ample charm who lived in Southport. They had met, it was thought, in St. Jean-de-Luz a couple of summers ago. Apparently he intended to spend at least as much time this year in Southport as in Doomington. The idea, probably, was to see how the daughter and the prospective wife took to each other.

That was as it might be. At all events, it was thought by the directors that it would be good policy to give a dinner-party in honour of their

Spanish customer and his daughter. The Spaniards were a formal people, and that was the sort of attention they appreciated. Sefior Bienvenida had spoken appreciatively of young Wace, and they proposed, therefore, to ask him to come, too. It was just possible that the Senorita and the lady from Southport might not on their first meeting fall into each other's arms. In that case, the directors would not take it amiss if Mr. Wace put himself out a little on the Sefiorita's behalf. It would be kind of him, as well as, to put it bluntly, good business.

A week later the evening of the dinner-party came round. Harry Wace could not remember an occasion he had looked forward to with such sullen displeasure. The party was held in the house of one of the directors, in a rich Cheshire suburb. The furniture was new and shiny and expensive. Even the flowers looked a little vulgar in their great new crystal vases. The crystal and brass of the chandelier were so massive that the whole contraption looked as if it might tear itself loose from its grapplings and come down at any moment.

The girl did not look up when her father presented him to her. She put out a nerveless hand and dropped it almost immediately.

" Oh, my God ! " said Wace to himself. "Look what they've let me in for ! "

The father moved away. Wace hung about for a few moments, but the girl seemed to show no intention of lifting her eyes. She seemed as miserable as himself about the show. He wondered whether the kinder thing was to stay and start some sort of a conversation or just make himself scarce. She seemed quite young, hardly more than a child, as she sat there playing with her fingers and her head drooped towards her chest. He could see the petulant thrust of the lower lip.

Probably the poor creature was more embarrassed than anything else. He had talked enough with Spaniards and Englishmen who had lived in Spain to know how stickily Spanish girls were brought up. They never moved out without a chaperon, perhaps even two or three. Even the most respectable restaurants were only respectable between certain hours ; at other hours they were unthinkable. They never went to parties, even in private houses, without a long and anxious discussion beforehand as to whether the escutcheon of both host and hostess was quite irreproachable.

Of course she was embarrassed. The hostess was quite unused to parties of this size and didn't know whether she was standing on her head or

her heels. She had done nothing at all to make the little foreign girl feel at home. So far from having a chaperon or two to look after her, she had been deliberately thrown at the head of a young man who might well be a horrid libertine.

He stood there looking at her for some time. " Could I get you something to drink, Senorita ? " he brought out at length.

She lifted her head. The eyelids were drawn back from her eyes. It had not occurred to him to ask himself what her eyes were like under those dropped eyelids. He had merely observed without excitement that her skin was beautiful, with the golden bloom of a peach. When her eyes fell on his, he forgot to be sorry for her because she was a little stranger without a chaperon. He forgot the doleful father clearing the decks for his courtship in Southport. He was aware only of eyes larger and more limpid than any he had seen before. They were not limpid. They were lustrous. He felt a sudden weakness at the knees.

She disregarded his question. She attacked him straight away, without any skirmish. He realised his sympathy had been misplaced. She needed no phalanx of chaperons before she dared emit a faint word in a strange young man's presence.

" You're the young man who is to take me to see pictures ? " she said. She spoke with hardly a trace of an accent, with no more than the muting

of the dentals. " I hate pictures ! " she informed him, hitting the palm of her hand with her fist for emphasis. She looked at him with some savagery in her eye, as if it was he who was responsible for the picture idea.

" But so do I, so do I ! " he hastened. His lips trembled in the urgency of his repudiation. Her mouth was a full bow. Three or four jet-black ringlets clustered between her ear and her cheek-bone.

" Please get me some sherry," she commanded. " If they have sweet sherry."

They did not have sweet sherry. It seemed to him a catastrophe of the gravest dimensions. " I am sorry," he stated, " I am sorry. I—er "... Then he completely forgot what he was sorry about. The eyes were brown, with gold flecks in them. Mountain pools are like that with the hot sun striking on their surface through close-knit branches.

She was smiling now. She was a creature who combined a quality at once queerly childish with something almost comically mature. The embarrassed and embarrassing Senorita, the diffident creature who had strayed out of purdah, put her hand out and touched his fingers.

" Then make them give me orangeade," she bade him. " I often take it at home before dinner."

There was some trouble about that, but he got it for her. She sipped at it. Her lips were like a bather hovering at the water's edge. She lifted her eyes towards him. He felt himself submerged in them, with no bottom for his stretched feet and the surface high above his head.

" England isn't Spain ! " she brought out suddenly. He said nothing. " England isn't Spain ! " she repeated. " Is it or isn't it ? "

" No ! I suppose not ! "

" I think in England I ought to be allowed to choose a young man for myself, don't you ? "

She was not being coy with him. He could see that. It was a proposition she put up for his dispassionate scrutiny.

" Yes," he said. " Of course. I think it's a shame——"

" Excuse me ! " she started. Her mind was off on another track.

" Yes ? "

" Do you know what it's all about ? "

" As a matter of fact, I have some idea ! "

" There you are ! " she said bitterly. " Is there anyone who doesn't know ! "

" I'm sorry ! " he said.

" It's not your fault ! " she insisted. Her mind was moving quickly from point to point. " She was so lovely ! I loved her so much ! "

He said nothing. He knew she was speaking of her dead mother.

Her mind sped on again. Her eyes hardened. " I've met this other one. I'm not going to like her. I'm *not* ! She's not going to like me ! "

He was full of distress. " Oh, no ! " he urged. " I *do* hope you're going to be happy ! " He wondered if she could hear him. He could hardly hear himself.

" Do take me out ! " she said suddenly. She threw herself on his mercy. " I like you ! I'm so lonely here ! "

There was a noise in his head like an orchestra breaking into music. He did not know what to say, or if either of them could hear him, with the crashing of all those instruments.

" Dinner is served ! " decided the butler.

She was placed next to him. He ate hardly more than a few mouthfuls throughout the meal. It seemed to him he had never beheld any spectacle more enchanting than the way she handled her knife and fork and lifted a morsel of cutlet to her lips. She attended to her food with absorbed gravity ; and then, the instant a course was over, she gave him her whole mind again.

He was in love, prostratingly in love. He had always thought he was one of those whom love

must pass by, for women either embarrassed or bored him. This girl made every vein in his body run like a spring-time stream. He seemed to himself a defter, a more elegant, a more masterful person. She listened to him attentively, opening her large eyes. Her nose was a little tip-tilted. He wanted to touch with his little finger the black ringlets that clustered against her ear. He wanted so violently to touch them that he was tonguetied for ten minutes.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked.
"Are you cross with me now?"

"Oh, my God!" he said. "I am not! No, I am not!"

He asked Sefior Bienvenida if he might have the honour of entertaining his daughter one day next week, for an hour or two. Bienvenida's next engagement in Southport was for the following Tuesday. It was arranged that Harry Wace should entertain the Senorita the following Tuesday. The absences in Southport became more prolonged. Harry Wace and Manolita Bienvenida saw increasingly more of each other during the three weeks that elapsed before she went back to her relatives in Kensington. He took her round one day to see his parents. She was enchanted by them and their little garden and their yellow

plush furniture. They were a little frightened of her. She was a foreigner, after all, and a lady, rather disturbingly a lady. But they quite liked her. She wondered when he would kiss her first. But he merely sat fiddling with his fingers and looking up into her eyes, minute upon minute.

" Kiss me, you silly young man ! " she said at length. There was a note of real severity in her voice. " I did not know the English were so slow as all that."

He wrote to her every day when she and her father left at last for Spain, and she wrote to him almost as often. But after the second Senora Bienvenida was added to the household in Barcelona, her letters got more and more unhappy. As they became unhappier, they became scarcer. He wrote and told her he was coming out to Spain to deliver her from her wretchedness. He received a wire to let him know she was coming to England. It had been arranged she was to stay with the Littlewoods, her mother's relatives in Kensington.

He went down to Dover to meet her, intending to ask her to marry him. But the Littlewoods were there, too, and he was unable to force the opportunity. Two or three weeks later he paid a formal visit to the house in Kensington. He was

not an unwelcome visitor. The girl's father had written to say he did not disapprove of the young man. Mrs. Littlewood welcomed the thought that Manolita might make up for her mother's marrying a Spaniard by herself marrying an Englishman.

With his knees knocking together in fright, he asked Manolita Bienvenida would she be his wife. She threw her arms about his neck. The words gurgled from her throat like water into a marble basin.

" You fool ! What have I come to England for ? Kiss me ! Oh, not like that ! Like this ! Like this ! Do you see now ? "

CHAPTER V

I

THE OLD STUDENTS of the Doomington Grammar School resident in London had an annual reunion dinner in a restaurant in Holborn. Sidney Sharpies was not a fanatical Old Doomingtonian, but he turned up at these gatherings more often than not. He did not count on meeting any old friend there whom he could not more conveniently meet elsewhere during the course of the year. He turned up because it was a clearing-place for the year's gossip. You learned what had happened to your contemporaries, whether they were judges by now in Borneo or had stayed on in Doomington.

You learned in fact what there was to learn about Harry Wace. You did not need to mention his name. All you needed to do was to give the conversation a dexterous little twist. And yet . . . and yet... was it all just a little fatuous, perhaps? You sometimes wondered whether Harry Wace was quite so preoccupied with you as you were with Harry Wace. Was preoccupation the wrong word? Yes. It was something more and less

than that. You could go for months on end without once thinking of his name. And then suddenly you found there was something with a sharp point sticking straight into your lungs. You were almost bent double with the pain of it, it was all you could do to straighten yourself. You knew what that something was. Oh, yes, you knew well enough. Pretty mad, wasn't it ?

This particular year something more substantial than the name of Harry Wace presented itself at the Old Doomingtonians' annual dinner. It was, in fact, Harry Wace himself. Sidney Sharpies was late. Wace had apparently been there quite a few minutes already, to judge from the gang of people he had around him. There had never once been half such a crowd in his neighbourhood during all the fellow's schooldays. They used to shy away from him then, as if he wasn't quite clean.

He seemed quite happy, very happy, in fact, thoroughly pleased with himself. The devil take him, who in hell did he think he was, standing there, grinning from ear to ear ?

Sharpies moved Up to the edge of the crowd. He put himself in such a position that Wace could not fail to see him. His lips tightened grimly. That would be a nice eyeful for him.

Harry Wace turned as someone addressed him. His eyes fell on the eyes of Sidney Sharpies. They

hesitated there for a moment, no more than that, as if he did not quite remember the name of the fellow who stood on the edge of the crowd there. Then they moved on.

It was preposterous. Surely, surely, the fellow had not seen him. It was impossible that he should have seen him ! What armour had the fellow found to gird on about him, that he could see him thus, and move his eyes indifferently on ?

What ? What was this they were saying ? *What ?* Congratulations, old man ! When's the happy day, old chap ? You gay old dog, you, I hear she's a Senorita, eh ? Carramba ! Give my love to Carmen !

Sidney Sharpies turned away. For a moment it seemed to him that the lamps in the room had fused and all gone out. Then he realised the darkness was in his eyes, at the back of the pupils somewhere.

It was the impertinence that most astounded him. How dare he ? He had not asked Sidney Sharpies if he could go and get himself engaged, had he ? How dare he do such a thing ?

A moment later, he realised how grotesque, beyond the last boundary of farce, his thought had been. He was aware only of a profound and appalling loneliness. He had never known the sensation before in such glacial acuteness.

Oh, no, my friend ! Ton think you're going to leave me high and dry ? Oh, no, not so quick !

A foreigner-, eh ! You'd need a foreigner to make you feelyou were almost as good as a human being, wouldn't you?

A Spaniard, they said, didn't they, a Senorita ? Ho, ho ! That will be very piquant. 016 ! OU !

2

The Old Doomingtonians themselves arranged who their table-companions were to be during their annual dinner. Sidney Sharpies took careful note who the two young men were, sitting on either side of Harry Wace. It was not at all a difficult matter to arrange a little party for cards and coffee one night at which both of these young men were invited. He met only one of them again, as an apparently casual question elicited the fact that the other knew almost nothing of Harry Wace's affairs. From the first he learned the name of the Spanish girl to whom Harry Wace was engaged, and of the relatives in Kensington with whom she was living. He found after a consultation of directories that Mr. Littlewood of such and such a street was an antique-dealer. He had a fair general knowledge of antiques and night and day for two or three

weeks he applied himself to the study of one or two special subjects. It was easy enough to establish contact with Mr. Littlewood. He found the old gentleman so agreeable and full of knowledge that he could not forbear asking him to see the few things he had himself picked up here and there about the place. He found Mr. Littlewood's company not merely so entertaining but, frankly, so profitable, would not Mr. Littlewood lunch with him at his club? Mr. Littlewood had rarely met a young man so talented, yet so eager to learn. Would Mr. Sharpies care to come in and have a spot of food with them one night in Kensington? He had some eighteenth-century bronzes worth looking at. Mrs. Littlewood would be delighted to meet him. He had already spoken to her about him. They had a Spanish girl staying with them, too, a niece of his wife's. A nice little thing.

3

When Sidney Sharpies first set eyes on Manolita Bienvenida, it was not triumph he was conscious of. Indeed the manipulation of the situation had not been at all so difficult as it might have been. He felt an insane desire to slap her face ; or, even more, because she looked extraordinarily

childish, to turn her over his knees and spank her mercilessly. He was furious with her, and unspeakably jealous. Only one person in the world had ever resisted him. That person had not resisted this thick-mouthed cow-eyed young woman. She would see. She would not resist *him*. Oh, no, she would not resist *him*.

None of these emotions showed in his smiling green eyes. His manners, as ever, were enchanting. He paid far more attention to Mrs. Littlewood than to Manolita. He was a great success.

Excepting with Manolita. He did not stay late, and she hung about after he left, long after her usual bed-time. She seemed moody. She kept on thumping the cushion behind her head, then throwing it down, then picking it up and thumping it into position again.

"Whatever is the matter with you, child?" asked Mrs. Littlewood. "Don't fidget so. Why don't you go to bed?"

Manolita pouted. She said nothing for a minute or two. Then she spoke.

"Is that young man coming again?" she asked suddenly.

"I don't know. Why?" asked Mrs. Littlewood. "I suppose so."

"Don't let him come again, please don't!" she brought out. There was a sharp note of pleading in her voice.

" Whatever is the girl talking about ? " asked Mrs. Littlewood.

" Really, my dear/⁵ said Mr. Littlewood. " What on earth do you say that for ? "

" I don't like him ! " she said. " I don't like him ! "

" Whoever heard of such a thing ! " said Mrs. Littlewood. " Such a charming young man ! After all, he didn't come to *see you* I "

" Of course not ! I know ! I'm sorry ! "

Mr. Littlewood was very ruffled. " On my word, Manolita, if you're going to dictate to us who's going to come to the house and who isn't, on my word ..." he rumbled. His cheeks were quite flushed.

Her eyes filled with tears. " Forgive me, uncle, forgive me ! I've got a headache ! "

" Then you'll go to bed at once," requested her aunt. " I'll give you some aspirin to take up to your room."

" Good night ! "

" Good night! "

4

When Sidney Sharpies asked the two Littlewoods and their niece to dinner in a pleasant little restaurant in Soho, Manolita would have liked to refuse. She did not at all know how

Harry would like the idea of his fiancée going out to dinner with a young man, even though she had her uncle and aunt with her. But she was so conscious of her bad behaviour after Sharples's first visit, she did not see how she could make any trouble now. Her uncle and aunt were obviously keen on the young man. She must do her best to make herself agreeable.

Sharpies paid just a little more attention to her this time than before, just a little, not enough to alarm her, any more than she was already alarmed by his grace and wit. She thoroughly enjoyed herself; so thoroughly, in fact, that she found it just a little difficult to mention the episode at all to her lover in her next letter. It was, was it not, a matter of no importance. She did not mention it.

5

Sidney Sharpies worked harder and more delicately to captivate Manolita Bienvenida than he had ever worked in his life before at anything at all. He could not remember he had ever embarked on anything so exquisitely worth doing. The Littlewoods still had not the faintest idea that anything other than his friendship with old Mr. Littlewood brought him down to their house

in Kensington. He was, of course, charming with Manolita, though even yet she seemed not entirely to have got rid of her initial dislike of him. But then he was charming to everybody. He could not fail to be charming.

One day he suggested to Manolita what a great joke it would be if he took her out to tea alone, without the older people being there. She accepted the invitation, because it was impossible to refuse him anything when he asked for it. But she was in a state of fierce resentment against him and herself by the time the day of their meeting came round. She played with the idea of not turning up, but finally decided she would. He knew perfectly well she was engaged to a young man in Doomington. What did he mean by making a secret appointment with her? She determined to tell him exactly what she thought of him. After that, she would simply refuse to see him.

But it did not turn out like that. He was so easy and pleasant, she did not know how to start at him. He took away from the meeting any sense that it might be mean and underhand. He attempted no familiarity of any sort, no accidental grazing of knee against knee, of hand against hand. It was all so agreeable she did not know how to refuse an engagement to lunch jvwith him.

She did not know, either, how to mention these meetings to Harry. She thought it best, on the whole, that she should not.

When he first made love to her, as they sat pressed close against each other, heart against heart, mouth against mouth, she could not forbear from asking herself whether she had been expecting this from the moment she set eyes on him, or whether he had succeeded in betraying her because of the immensity of her astonishment. But the question had hardly more time than to formulate itself. He was more masterly in love than in his other accomplishments. " Oh, when, when," she whispered through her tears, " when do we meet again ? "

6

It was not many weeks later, and only a week or two before the date fixed for his wedding, that Harry Wace received an urgent wire from the Littlewoods summoning him to Kensington.

He took the first train and presented himself. Mr. and Mrs. Littlewood sat alone in their drawing-room.

"What is it?" he asked. "Where's Manolita ? "

" I don't know how to tell you," whispered

Mrs. Littlewood. She dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Where's Manolita?" he asked again.

"Listen, Harry!" said Mr. Littlewood. He came over to him and laid his hand on his shoulder. "We didn't know what we'd best do. We could hardly bring ourselves to write and tell you. We thought you might want to do something, go after her, try and reason with her. So we thought it best to get you to come up to town."

"When did she go? Who with?"

"A young broker, by the name of Sidney Sharpies. He was at the same school as you. He was probably about the same age. Do you remember the name? Poor old boy, I can't tell you how sorry we are."

"No, I don't remember the name."

"If there's anything we can do at all ... you see, in a way, we feel ourselves responsible. If we hadn't invited him here——"

"Excuse me," said Harry Wace. His face was quite bloodless. His eyes were dead as soot. He reached for his hat. His hand was quite firm. "I think I'll just go out a bit and think this over."

Mrs. Littlewood made a movement as if to rise from her chair. Her husband motioned her to remain seated.

/ must kill him. He wants me to kill him. There is nothing else I can do.

7

Sidney Sharpies had had to work quickly. He had no great margin of time at his disposal before the date fixed for the wedding of Manolita and Wace. It may have been his intention to carry away the girl for a week in Paris, and then finish with her. He would have adequately soiled Wace's linen for him in a week.

But a fresh series of considerations presented themselves in Paris, of which the outcome was that he decided, after all, to marry her. She was a good-looking creature, better looking than most. It seemed in some way a pity to slough her like a glove after only a week's wear. He knew he could not retain her much longer than that unless it was quite clear to her they were going to get married. Moreover he realised she was deeply attached to Wace. If she had not been, there would have been no joy in detaching her. He himself had fascinated her, he had hypnotised her. He did not boggle at the words. But that would wear off. He did not propose to expend the considerable and continuous energy necessary to maintain it at full pressure. He did not believe

she had been in love with Wace, in the romantic sense of the word, as without any shadow of doubt Wace had been with her. (Here again, had there been any shadow of doubt, the triumph would have been less delicious.) The women of Manolita's country often fell in love with their husbands after, rather than before their weddings. He believed Manolita's affection for Wace would have mellowed into love soon enough, if the sun had been allowed to shine on it. It was wise, therefore, to prevent the wounded and bedraggled bird from winging its hurt way to his enemy's bosom. He could imagine with what unctuous benevolence Wace would spread his forgiving wings to receive her. Oh, no. So touching a conclusion to the affair must be avoided at all costs, at the cost, even, of attaching to himself for life this thoroughly bed-worthy young woman.

And, of course, not necessarily for life, not *strictly*.

Then this was his final argument. It alone would have been effective, if the others had been lacking. She felt like a little bit of Wace under the same roof with him, behind a locked door with him, in the same bed with him. He smiled. When she opened her eyes on the pillow beside him, the morning after their first night together, she saw his green eyes smiling into her face,

and the thin lips parted, displaying the teeth a little.

A shiver ran through her. Her shoulder was bare. She lifted the bedclothes up to her eyes.
" I feel cold, darling ! " she said.

CHAPTER VI

OLD MR. AND MRS. WAGE did not have so serene an old age as they had hoped for. They were not loquacious and they said as little as possible to their son about his wicked betrayal by the Spanish Jezebel. He had never been much of a one for demanding or accepting sympathy. But they could see he was taking it very badly. Now and again the mother would place her hand on the back of his head, where she knew the ache came when things went wrong. The father might ask him to go round and watch them playing bowls at the little park not far away ; or to take half a pint with him at the Golden Lion round the corner. The old people did no more than that. They were undemonstrative people.

One night they were awakened from their sleep by a noise so loud and frightening it sounded as if the place had been broken into by a gang of toughs. Old Wage got up and fumbled about for matches. " Don't go, John, don't go ! " implored his wife. " Our Harry'll go ! It might be someone who'll damage you ! "

" Our Harry won't go ! " said the old man. " He's not come in yet ! At least if that's not him ! " He struck a match and lighted his bedside candle ; then he went out of the room, his night-gown trailing to his feet.

The gas had been turned on full in the downstairs sitting-room. They usually left it on a small jet when Harry had not yet come in. Harry was standing near the fender, looking down on the wreckage of a set of pot ornaments that had decorated the mantelpiece. The mantelpiece was quite bare now. The expression on his face was very severe. It was as if someone else had swept the mantelpiece bare, and Harry Wace disapproved strongly of his behaviour. He stood quite still, without the faintest suggestion of unsteadiness. He was dead drunk, though a stranger coming in would have not been aware of it. His father, however, was well aware that his cheeks were not usually so deathly pale and that that dull glaze was usually absent from his eyes.

" Harry," said the old man. " Get to your bed at once ! You're drunk ! "

Harry lifted his eyes towards his father, then turned them away indifferently. The old man shivered. He had never seen anyone so desolately drunk before. Harry then went to a drawer in the sideboard, and took out a chess-board and

a set of pieces. He arranged them and made a few opening moves, on each side of the board.

" Harry," the old man said again. " You must come up ! You're drunk ! You'll do yourself no good ! "

This time the young man did not look up. His mouth tightened uglily. The fingers of his left hand fastened round a heavy vase on the table, as if he would throw it if he were spoken to again.

The old man shook his head. He went back again to his wife mournfully.

" He's drunk ! " he said. " It's like somebody else, not like himself at all. He's playing chess with himself."

" He'll do himself harm, John. Couldn't you get him to come up to his bed ? Shall I try?"

" He's best left to himself, mother."

" It's hard, John, it's hard, and us getting on so. I don't remember him ever being the worse for liquor before."

" It's that whore ! Best shut your eyes and go to sleep, mother."

They heard him nearly an hour later come up to his room. His feet did not seem in the least unsteady. They were perhaps just a little more deliberate than usual, tread by heavy tread.

His mother got up next morning to make his breakfast. The chess-board and pieces had been put neatly back into their drawer again. The fragments of the mantelpiece ornaments still littered the mat in front of the fender. She put them out of sight.

" Good morning, mother," he said, as he came in.

" Good morning, Harry," She was bending over the kettle by the hob. She did not turn round to greet him.

He stood a few minutes without saying a word. Then he came a few paces forward into the sitting-room.

" Mother," he said. " Those ornaments are gone from the mantelpiece."

" Yes," she said. She still did not turn round.

" I must have knocked them down," he said quietly. " I'll buy you a new set this evening when I come back from the office." He said no more on the subject. The old people were too wretched to refer to it. His head ached pestilently for several days.

The same sort of thing occurred several times during the next few months. He paid for it with an outrageous headache each time, but it was

not much to pay for the purchase of so many hours of complete oblivion.

His mother once tried to remonstrate with him. He told her he would get drunk when he chose. If she preferred him to go to live elsewhere, he would go to live elsewhere. She did not remonstrate again. But there was no sleep for either of the old people those nights till they had heard him go to his room and his door close behind him. Then, too, it was hours before they closed their eyes.

And then one night he did not return at all. They were awake all night, shaking with fear lest he had done some dreadful thing in his drunkenness.

He came in with a woman next morning. He opened the front door, but she waited for him to go first. He took her straight into the sitting-room. He had a bandage round one eye and his mouth was badly swollen. The woman's face, too, was purple with bruises. Old Wace was out. He had gone to see if he could find out what had happened. Mrs. Wace hurried in from the kitchen.

"Harry," she cried out. "What's happened to you? Who's this?"

" This is Helen. I'm going to marry her when I can get the papers out."

Her jaw dropped. She stared at him. He had not been so hideously drunk before.

" No ! It's all right ! " he told her. " I know what I'm saying. Get me some tea, mother. My throat's as dry as an oven."

It was not at the Golden Lion round the corner that Harry Wace went to get drunk. It was at the Three Tuns, some quarter of an hour's walk away, where the nice district he lived in petered out into a slum. He went to get drunk, solidly, relentlessly drunk. He found out one night, or rather he deduced the morning after, that if he drank long enough, all his griefs and anger, everything that made up the desolate sum total of himself, seeped out through his pores, till nothing was left behind but a shell that comported itself he did not know how, under the direction of some total stranger.

It was about an hour before closing-time at the Three Tuns one Saturday night, when something that was going on in a corner of the bar attracted his attention. He had already drunk a great deal, but he was still some distance away from the complete oblivion that came upon him suddenly, enveloping him like a black cloud.

When he saw it happen, he said to himself it had not happened ; he was already, and sooner than usual, quite drunk and living in a world of chimera. Another pint of beer was brought to him. Then he saw it happen again.

There was a woman sitting in the further corner of the bar, a rather frail little woman. The colours she wore were too gaudy for her. She had too much jewellery on, and all of it was cheap. She had big eyes and tiny fingers that scampered about in her lap like mice. A thick-set fellow sat beside her, wearing a check suit and a heavy gold chain across his waistcoat. His face and chin were beetroot-red despite two or three days* growth of jet-black beard. He looked like a betting-tout. He was having a good time with three or four cronies in the same line of business.

He saw the woman once again pull timidly at the man's sleeve. He saw the man once again strike the cheek with the back of his hand. The blow was so vicious, her head struck sharp against the panelling behind her. The man laughed. His cronies laughed with him.

Wace swigged off what was left of his pint of beer. He ordered another pint. There was no need to do anything, because there was nothing to do. There was no need to go up to the swine and bring his pint mug smashing on his head,

or to plant his feet in that foul belly. The swine was not there. The little frightened woman was not there. He was drunk.

Then the fellow turned on the woman quite suddenly, without any sort of provocation visible to the outsider. The fact of her existence became obnoxious to him. With both his hands he pressed the woman's head back as if he wanted to crack the skull against the panelling. She gave out two or three short loud yelps.

Harry Wace was on his feet. He rushed over to the man and brought the thick glass mug down on his head. The man's feet slid from under him. A moment later the cronies were around him like a falling roof. There must have been others who had noticed the man's brutality ; doubtless they had been afraid to do anything till a lead came from somewhere. These flung themselves into the melée. In the dust and stink and uproar of it all, a single image kept Wace's mind tethered ; the image of the frail little woman, with big eyes and a weak chin, and fingers that scampered about in her lap like mice. He thrust his head through the knotted confusion. Where was she ? He could not see her anywhere. Who was this on the floor ? Was this she ? Were they trampling her to death under their hooves ?

It was not she. It was a man. A woman's hand had caught hold of his. She was pulling him

away out of this. It was she. She had come up from the back somewhere, or had run off and come back. He gave to the pull of her hand on his. He was out in the street with her. " Come quick, quick ! " she whispered. " This way ! Run ! Run ! You're bleeding ! "

" You're not doing so well yourself ! " he wanted to say, her face was so puffed and bruised. But he could not. He could not say anything that sounded in any minute degree facetious. She looked the most miserable and frightened of women.

He went by her side, up one side street and down another and stopped at length outside a small house. They had not said one word to each other all this time. She kept a foot or two ahead of him, as if it might be thought she was alone, should anyone come up after them who would prefer her to be alone.

She fumbled about in her bag. " Oh, my key ! My key ! " she moaned. " Where's my key ? "

" Here, give your bag to me ! " he muttered. How could such silly trembling fingers find anything they were seeking for ? " Here it is ! I'll open the door for you ! "

He opened the door. She slid into the dark lobby out of the feeble light a far lamp threw down the street. She stood there and did not move.

" And now I'll be saying good night! " he said.

He heard the short gasp of terror in her throat.

" Oh, don't leave me ! He'll kill me ! Oh, please don't stand there ! And you're bleeding ! I must see to you ! "

" That'll be all right,⁵ " he said.

Her voice rose into a pitiful thin wail. " Oh, please, please ! " she begged. " There's never been anything like this before ! " She reached her arm out across the threshold and pulled him in after her. Then she closed the door.

" Come in ! " she whispered. " Don't make any noise ! It's this room here on the right ! "

He followed her into the room. She went over and drew the blind. Then she lit the gas ; or tried to. " Let me ! " he said.

" I'll put some hot water on your face ! " she said. " Sit down !—I won't be long ! "

The room was a bed-sitting-room. There was a double bed over against the door and a wardrobe along the wall opposite the fireplace. There was a gas stove in the corner near the window. There were also a chest of drawers, a battered plush armchair and a wooden chair. There was not much room to move in the place.

She found a clean towel and a handkerchief

and some disinfectant. As she got busy, she forgot her fright for the time being ; except once, when she heard heavy footsteps approaching from down the street. The scissors dropped out of her hand. Her mouth became a tiny black hole of terror. Then the footsteps passed on. She became busy again, and competent. She had quite deft fingertips.

" What about you ? " he said.

" I'm all right. There's nothing I can do. I'll make myself a drop of tea. Would you like some tea ? "

He grimaced. " No thanks ! "

" I've got a drop of whisky ! Will you have some ? "

" I must get along now ! "

" Oh, please," she begged him. Her mouth was trembling again. "Just one small drop ! I can't let you go like this ! "

"Just a drop ! "

" Here now ! You will wait till I've made myself my drop of tea, won't you ? Here, have another drop ! "

" All right! I'll wait ! "

He saw how she dragged out the preparations for the tea-making. He sat silently in his chair. Once he moved his glass across to her for some more whisky.

The whisky was having no effect on him at all.

He was stone sober now, as if not a drop of liquor had passed his lips to-night. He saw she had at length poured out her tea into her teacup. She was stirring a teaspoonful of condensed milk into it. She had at length drained the last drop of her tea.

" I've got to get along now ! " he said sharply.
" Do you hear ? Have I got a hat ? "

She went over towards him and put her hand on his forehead. The touch unleashed some hound of fury in him. His eyes opened. They blazed.

" Don't touch me, whore ! " he cried." Where's my hat ? "

She crumpled on to the floor under his feet. She sobbed and sobbed till it seemed her frail ribs would crack. He heard again the sound of his own words in his ears. He bent down to her.
" All right, girl ! " he said. " I'm sorry ! Have a drop of whisky, too, eh ? It'll do you more good than that tea ! "

She got up obediently and helped both herself and him to a dose of whisky. She drained it off. Then she turned to him. " You can go now ! " she told him. He thought a moment or two. " I think I'll stay ! " he said quietly.

" All right ! " She turned from him. " You can sleep in that chair ! "

" All right ! "

She turned the gas almost out. He moved his head away. She undressed ; then she got into a nightgown she had pulled out from under the pillow ; then she got into bed. " Turn out the gas ! " she said.

He obeyed her, then he got back into the arm-chair and tried to sleep. He could not. He knew she could not sleep, too. Once there was the sound of approaching footsteps. He heard the held gasp of terror in her throat.

He was not drunk. He had never been more grimly sober in his life. He was merely destroyed, broken up. What had made life comely was gone, gone. A wretched creature had come up out of the darkness. She lay in bed a few feet away from him. The breath hardly stirred in her, she was so afraid. He might not make life more comely for her, but it would be less perilous.

" Tell me,⁵³ he called out. " Tell me ! You're not married to him, are you ? "

She did not reply for some time. At last she said " No ! " Her voice was so low he could hardly hear her.

" I'll marry you," he said, " if you want ! "

The silence was longer than before. Then, at length, " Yes ! " she whispered fearfully.

" Very well ! "

Some twenty minutes later, she spoke again.

" If it's uncomfortable in that chair, you can come in here ! "

' " All right! " he said. He undressed.

CHAPTER VII

FOR A LONG TIME, for many months, perhaps for two or three years, Sidney Sharpies did not remit in the presence of outsiders his gallantry and tenderness towards Manolita. But if circumstances demanded that their exercise should be extended an hour or two longer than the time in which they were easy or pleasant to him, he made her pay for them after the outsiders had gone. He was never in the least degree brutal, or even rude, to her. But he treated her with a frigidity to which she would have found any brutality preferable. She seemed to become a complete stranger, like a bore one meets on a sea crossing, whom we give as wide a berth to as possible in the cramped quarters available.

Now and again he would sit contemplating her with that queer smile on his face which was so much colder than mere coldness. Or was it, indeed, herself he was contemplating ? The doubt gave his smile an element of the ghoulish. Was he aware of her at all when he smiled thus ? Was it some other person than herself he contemplated with such icy satisfaction ?

Had some woman somehow betrayed him and sought to win him back again, but it was too late now ? Herself, Manolita, he did not love. Oh, no. Whether he had ever loved her at all, he did not love her now. Had some other woman now come into his life then ? She did not see how that could have happened. Though he seemed to take little pleasure in her company, he made no excuses to spend his time away from her. She would be aware by tokens gross and subtle that he had fallen in love with another woman. But he had not.

Why, if he loved her so little now, why had he once pretended he loved her so much, why ? Was it a game he had been playing ? And the game was not with her ? Her blood froze at the horror of the sudden appalling thought. Was it that there had been a woman *then*, not now, when he came down like a horse thief into a stable and carried her away ? The comparison with a horse thief struck her like a blow in the mouth.

Perhaps not a woman. A man, perhaps. Perhaps the very man she had loved, who had loved her.

They were of an age. They came from the same town, the same school. Oh, but it was impossible ! To ruin two lives, three lives, in order to gratify some private rancour—it was unthinkable. And if it was true, what was she, what had she always

been—a cipher in a sum, a smudge on a piece of paper ! She made up her mind she must ask him, she must. He could do no more than strike her, and she knew he would not do that.

But it was not easy to ask him. Night after night she tried to speak to him, night after night the words could not come up to her lips. Then one night, while they were both reading, she found herself speaking.

" Sidney," she said. " I want to say something to you. You won't be cross with me ? "

" But of course I won't, my dear." He put his book down with a smile. " What an idea ! "

" What did you marry me for, Sidney ? "

" But, my dear, how can you ask ? " He sounded quite hurt. " Because I loved you, my dear."

" Sidney ! "

" Yes ? "

" Harry Wace. The man I was engaged to. You know."

" I don't know."

" I wanted to ask you about him."

" There's nothing I can tell you."

" He was at school with you."

" Yes. I think I remember. He was on the Modern Side, though. I was on the Classical Side."

" You didn't have anything to do with each other ? "

" My dear girl, what *are* you talking about ? There were a thousand boys at the school. I don't suppose we ever exchanged two words in our lives,"

" I see."

" Well ? "

" Nothing, Sidney."

" You are a funny girl, *arerft* you ? " He put his book on the chair beside him and went over to her and pulled the lobes of her ears. She was immensely relieved. He was not cross at all.

A couple of years after their marriage, they had a son, whom they called Rupert. After Rupert was born, Sharpies began to find he was even less interested than before in being agreeable to his wife. He worked very hard in his office, but he was getting more indolent out of it, and he found that the amount of energy he used up in being affectionate towards the child was as much as he cared to dispose of. Manolita had done her part well enough in bringing about the little fellow's existence. Well, she had a nice home and a couple of servants and a garden. She could have the local women in for tea and cards when she liked. He sometimes thought it might be helpful if she had a local man in now and again to entertain her, though on the whole he thought it was best not. After all, *he* never had any temptation to entertain himself with other

women. He understood that people called him a model husband.

He did not approve of his wife spending too much time with his son. He did not want to make a milksop of the young man. It might be different for a girl, but a small boy should have as much as possible of the male society of his father, so long as he didn't make a nuisance of himself. That was the only danger—he might make a nuisance of himself.

However, he magnanimously consented to run the risk. He put himself out to endure quite a deal of the boy's company. He even took him away with him for a holiday once or twice, with just a nurse to look after him. After all, his mother had him all day long to herself, while he was away at the office.

He would fill his pockets with sweets and small toys, and have a great surprise game with him letting him run through his pockets. If, on the other hand, he ever saw the boy's mother hand him a sweet, his brow would contract with fury. "What sort of a digestion do you think he'll have if you mollycoddle him like that? Throw it away, Rupert, do you hear? At once! Naughty mamma, isn't she, trying to give little Rupert a bad tummy-ache!"

Sidney Sharpies set himself out, in fact, to enchant his son; as he had done once before,

with a small boy not many years older than Rupert, and failed ; as he had done with the boy's mother, and succeeded. He succeeded again. The small boy idolised his father. He did not go off to sleep if his father did not kiss him good night. If he did not kiss him in the morning before he went off to the office, it was a dark and empty day for him. His mother sat beside him and looked on and mourned. Her heart was heavy.

There came at last a stage when Sidney Sharpies could not disguise from himself the fact that the small boy had, in fact, become something of a nuisance. Essentially, Sharpies was a person who liked to keep himself to himself. There had once been a person who might have made him less of a solitary, but that person had failed him. His wife and his small boy rather got in the way of his books and his collections and his music ; and his dog, too. He was very attached to his dog. He was never cruel to the boy (as he was now and again to the mother) for the simple reason that he did not relish the idea that Rupert might turn to his mother for comfort. If he did that, she might some time usurp the place in the boy's affections he had won with such real hard work.

As far as the boy was concerned, it never

occurred to him that it was not he himself who was at fault, if his father was a little unkind to him now and again. He would lie awake half the night wondering what he had done. If he could find nothing to attach the blame to, however strenuously he sought, he would realise it was because he was a silly boy and had no sense. If he weren't a silly boy, he would realise clearly what it was he had done to upset his kind lovely father. Next morning he would put his arms round his neck very timidly and whisper : " Please, daddy, don't be cross with me any more. I won't do it ever again, ever."

Sharpies would wonder what bug was biting the boy. " All right, Rupert." The old bewitching smile would be in his eyes. " Right you are, then. Be a good lad." He might even remember to bring him back a tin of sweets that day, as he used to while there was still some ghost of competition between himself and the mother.

But, frankly, they were both getting in his way, particularly the mother. He found his temper getting shorter and shorter with her. She was not improving in looks as the years went on. She was running to fat, as women with Spanish blood in their veins tend to do. When she made the suggestion that she should take Rupert for a few months with her to her father's home on the Tibidabo hill above Barcelona, he was so pleased

and relieved he almost threw his arms round her neck and kissed her.

" A jolly good idea, Manolita ! " he cried.
" Go and have a nice long holiday ! "

The small boy did not like the idea at all. He cried a great deal at the thought of having to leave his father. He was not even appeased when his father generously said he might come over himself in a month or two. A holiday would do him no harm, either. When he still went on crying, his father seized him by the shoulders and just looked at him. He said not a word to him, but just looked at him in a funny way. The boy stopped crying. He shivered a little, but he remained dead silent. Then his father stopped looking at him in that funny way and smiled at him just ordinary.

" You will come soon, won't you, daddy ? " the boy asked faintly. " Promise you will ! "

" Of course, I promise ! " said Sharpies easily.
" Now go along and wash your face, there's a good chap ! "

The sojourn at old Bienvenida's house in Barcelona was not a success. It was not a question of money, for Manolita had money of her own and Sharpies gave her a thoroughly reasonable allowance. It was not Bienvenida's second brood

of children, either. They were not kind to Rupert, but they were not unkind to him. They just didn't recognise his existence, and he didn't mind that. If he couldn't be with his father, there wasn't anybody else he wanted to be with.

The trouble was the second Sefiora, the Englishwoman from Southport. She was a large florid woman, a good wife, a good mother, very pleased and relieved to find herself a mother, for there had been no luck with her first marriage. She had sense. She realised after a few days of not very cordial conversation with her stepdaughter that Manolita would never go back to her husband, whether the child went or not. But the child wouldn't go, either. Manolita would do everything either side of hell to prevent the small boy going back, too.

That looked like a permanent addition, or two additions, to the house on Tibidabo. The Senora disliked the idea strongly. She had moved from the house her husband had brought her to because that had been the first wife's house. She wanted no reminder of her predecessor, so she sold the old lot and got in a new houseful of furniture. Least of all did she want her predecessor's daughter about the place, not to mention the daughter's pasty-faced son.

She did not make any violent effort to disguise these ideas from her stepdaughter. Before long,

Manolita got into touch with a number of agents who knew about houses and villas in the Mediterranean resorts. She heard at last there was a suitable villa she might have, with servants, on the " Mountain " above Tangier. She thought Tangier would be suitable, for there were both English and Spanish residents there, and the climate was good. So she wrote and informed her husband that the visit to her father's home had not been a success and she had taken a villa in Tangier for six months.

He sent her a cheque in his answering letter. He also told her she could take on the villa for a further six months, if she felt like it.

CHAPTER VIII

I

"GIVE ME SOME TEA, MOTHER. My throat's as dry as an oven ! " Harry Wace said to his mother. " I think Helen would like some, too."

Mrs. Wace still stood staring. She seemed incapable of speech or movement.

" You'd best take your hat and coat off," he said to the woman. The woman stood hunched up between the door and the arm of the sofa. She looked terrified, as if she thought the older woman would suddenly turn round and let fly at her. She lifted her fingers to her hat, but they trembled so she could hardly move the hatpins.

" Here, let me ! " said Wace. He helped her remove her things. He was about to take them out into the passage to hang them up, when he saw his mother had not yet made a move in the direction of the kettle. " Well, mother," he said. " If you won't make me a cup of tea, Helen will."

The outrageous idea penetrated through her shock. " I was just going to," she mumbled. " I was looking for that poker." The poker was where

it always was, sticking up through the bars of the fender.

He went and hung the woman's hat and coat on the hall-stand, and came in again. His mother was muttering to herself incoherently as she flattened the coal down to take the kettle. Helen was still standing between the door and the arm of the sofa.

" Why don't you sit down, Helen ? " he said. She sat down on the edge of the sofa, like a child in an institute summoned to the presence of the almoner. His eyes moved quickly between the two women. He seemed about to make some sort of an effort to establish some relationship between the two, when suddenly his forces sagged. He felt incapable of the slightest effort. They'd both have to lump it. There'd be time. " Where's the newspaper ? " he muttered. His mother went out into the scullery to fill the kettle. " There ! " She indicated with her chin the top of the sewing-machine. She kept her eyes fixedly away from the wretched creature on the sofa.

She had just poured boiling water into the teapot to heat it, when she heard the sound of the key turning in the front door. She put the teapot back on to the hob so quickly she almost broke it, then she ran to the door.

" What's the matter, lass ? " asked old Wace, trembling. " Have you had bad news ? "

" Come into the parlour,"⁵ she besought him. " Don't go in there ! " She closed the parlour door behind them.

" Why—what ? " the old man quivered.

" He's all right ! He's in there ! It isn't that ! Just a bandage on his forehead ! "

" What's the excitement about, mother ? "

" He's got a woman in there ! He says he's going to marry her ! "

Old Wace breathed a deep sigh of relief. " Oh, is that all ? He's drunk again, eh ? "

" I don't think he's drunk—not now. She's a loose woman, John ! "

" Come on, mother, let's go in ! "

They went in. " Good morning, Harry," said old Wace. " I hear you've brought a visitor ! " He turned round to the woman on the sofa. Her lips were trembling. Tears stood in her eyes. She fumbled in her bag and brought out a handkerchief and dabbed her eyes with it.

" Yes," said Wace. " This is Helen. Her other name's Walker. Mother's told you, eh ? "

" Pleased to meet you," said old Wace. " Yes, Harry, your mother's told me. A bit sudden-like, eh ? " The woman on the sofa caught her breath in a sob. " Don't fret now, lass," the old man requested her. " We'll soon put it all to rights. Were you making tea, mother ? I'll be glad for a cup, too." He was about to ask what was

wrong with Harry's forehead, when he thought better of it. That was the way to handle it, tact, just a little tact. The boy was sober enough now, but clearly he had been far drunker last night than he had ever been before. Sometime during the proceedings he had promised to marry this poor little fly-by-night. He probably wouldn't remember it, but he felt bound to stick by his word. It did the boy credit.

Old Wace was very tactful. He expended prodigies of tact that day, and for days after, but the boy's mind was made up. He ordered the small room on the small landing to be got ready for her. She was to sleep there till they got married, which was as soon as possible. There was not room for the four of them in that small house. The old people were going to stay on, with a woman servant living in, to look after them. The young people were going to have a small house of their own.

The mother tried to argue with him, but she could do nothing more than cry. The old man got tired of being tactful and got angry. But the boy did not seem to listen at all. He seemed to be thinking of something else all the time. One day his father lost his temper completely. He caught hold of Harry by the shoulder, shouting : " Helen ? Who the devil is this Helen ? When are you going to send her back where she came from ? "

But all Harry did was to repeat the name stupidly : " Helen ? Helen ? " as if he had himself never heard the name before.

The old man threatened he and his mother would turn their backs on him. They'd just take their few belongings and go. Harry took no notice of him. " Go," he said, " if you want to ! " The old man would have gone. But it meant the workhouse for them both. He had no right to condemn the old woman to the workhouse for the rest of her days. " All right ! " he said. " Have it your own way ! But you'll rue the day, you mark my words ! "

The woman named Helen kept house for Harry Wace efficiently. She was a good cook and liked crocheting centres for tables and runners for dressers. She rarely smiled but she did not seem unhappy. He got drunk now and again, but very rarely. On one occasion a bout very nearly lost him his job. He decided he would cut drink out altogether, excepting for an occasional night-cap. He kept to his resolution without difficulty.

The house they lived in was bigger than the one in Withington, so the best room was called the drawing-room, not the parlour. There was a piano in the drawing-room. When she felt happy, it did not show in her face ; she went up

to the piano and vamped out a tune, striking very hard with both hands. Her repertoire included " I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls,"⁵ " Thora," " Killarney," and several more songs of the same type and period. When she played a tune, she looked up. She liked to be praised for her playing. Women who spend a lot of their time in the saloon bars of public-houses play like that.

Wace's parents died a year or two after his marriage, within a month of each other. He took it badly, but he got over it in time. He was getting on very well indeed in his office. Outside his office, he had no interests excepting his small garden. He was as keen on his garden as she was on her piano, though he spent many hours at a stretch in his garden, while to her the piano was the vehicle by which she expressed for a few minutes at a stretch the occasions of her greatest well-being.

They had a daughter in course of time, whom they named Judy. It seemed that to Judy's mother the child was more of a surprise than a joy. She could hardly credit it when she found that she was as good as the next woman and had managed to bring a baby into the world. She would look at the small creature minute after minute incredulously, and put her back on the pillow again, shaking her head. The outsider might have thought the nurse was the child's mother,

for the mother seemed almost afraid to fondle her, as if it might be thought she was taking a liberty.

" Give the lass to me," the nurse demanded, a large emphatic Lancashire woman. " Anybody'd think you were afeared of her ! There, now, duck, there now ! Come to nanny ! Don't cry now ! There now, there ! "

" Please," said the mother, some minutes later, " can I have her now, Mrs. Lord ? "

" You'd best not," Mrs. Lord said. " You'd drop her ! "

Mrs. Lord stayed on with the Wace family. She arranged to get herself kept on as house-keeper.

Judy grew up without any great affection for her mother. There had always been moments when Helen had felt she had no right to be there at all, however well she dusted the drawing-room or looked after the dinner. The advent of the child made these moments rather more than less frequent. She could not prevent the idea spreading even to Judy.

There was a sort of conspiracy between Judy and Mrs. Lord. They often whispered and made jokes together, and stopped the moment Mrs. Wace came into the room. Wace was not aware of it, or if he was, it did not interest him. Once his
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wife tried to utter a protest against the way she was being elbowed out of her daughter's thoughts. But she was too inarticulate. She did not manage to convey what she meant. He said : " I don't know what you are talking about, I don't think you do either." She made no effort to utter a protest again.

Mrs. Lord's respect for her employer grew in the proportion that her respect for his wife diminished. He never rebuked her, though her treatment of Mrs. Wace sometimes bordered on impertinence. He was actually not aware of it but she interpreted his silence as approval. He had a certain sort of good looks, and there was always a class of people who thought him really good-looking. Mrs. Lord pronounced him to be handsome as a statue. He attained heroic proportions in her eyes. She spoke of him to his daughter in terms of dithyramb. Judy knew that he was human, too, for he often bought her sweets and toys, being an averagely generous father. These favours acquired a legendary quality, for she now learned he stepped down out of the clouds to bestow them. She thought it a pity he had married a mother so dim and dun. Why had he not married a lady worthy of him, some radiant blue-eyed creature, piled up with golden hair ? Mrs. Lord was awaiting the day when it would be suitable to give the little girl

an idea or two on the subject, for it was one on which she had made herself an authority.

It came when Judy was about six years old. One afternoon, an hour or so before daddy came back from the office, a man called. He was a man, not a gentleman. Judy saw him push the front gate open and come up the steps. He was wearing a check suit with a gold chain across his waistcoat. He had a brown bowler-hat and a red face. It was a big red face and he had a big neck. He was twisting a cigar round in the corner of his mouth.

Judy was in the drawing-room, and the window was open. She heard him ask for Mrs. Wace in a loud voice. The maid, Sally, didn't ask him in. She did not think he was the sort of man to ask in. She asked him would he please wait and she would see if madam was in. She then tried to close the door, but he put his foot in the doorway. He stood there with his thumbs thrust into his waistcoat, turning the cigar round and round in his mouth.

Mrs. Lord then came to the door.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"I want to see Mrs. Wace."⁵⁵

"She isn't in," said Mrs. Lord.

"Well if she isn't, I'll wait till she comes."

" You can't come in ! "

" Oh, can't I ! " he sneered.

" Who are you ? " she asked.

" Tell her it's Charley, her cousin. *She'll* know ! "

Judy could see all this going on through the curtains of the bay window. She could then see a funny face come over Mrs. Lord. She almost smiled at the man, it was close to being a wink.

" Oh, if Mrs. Wace is your cousin," she said. " of course that makes it quite different ! Will you come in ? Come straight this way into the drawing-room. I'll call Mrs. Wace ! "

Judy thought she would die when Mrs. Lord brought the red-faced man into the drawing-room. For a moment she thought of plunging under the table. But she was sure the cigar would make her cough, and the man would drag her out by her legs and pull her hair foplier.

" What are you doing in here ? " exclaimed Mrs. Lord severely. " Get upstairs to your own room at once ! "

She went upstairs and did not know anything that happened in the drawing-room between her mother and the man who said he was her cousin. But she did not believe he was her cousin. She knew he was a bad man and a liar.

Next morning her mother went out shopping. She did not come back at lunch-time nor at

tea-time. Judy went to bed and her mother still had not come back.

She did not sleep all night. She heard her father and Mrs. Lord talking a long time together clown-Stairs. He forgot to come in and say good night to her. She was too frightened to cry. Next morning, he went off to the office without saying good morning to her, either. No one remembered her. She came downstairs in her nightgown.

" Where is mammy ? " she asked. " Didn't she come back last night ? "

There was an air of almost obscene triumph in Mrs. Lord's face. She put her finger to her mouth. " Your father said you mustn't talk about your mother. I'm not to talk about her either. She's gone away into the country. I mustn't tell you more than that. I don't know anything more, either." She cackled, she was so happy.

" But you do, you do ! " said Judy. Her eyes were full of tears. " Has she gone away with that man ? "

" You must go upstairs at once, Judy, do you hear ? You'll catch your death in those bare feet ! Go up at once, I say, and I'll come and dress you ! "

" She shouldn't have gone with that man ! " said Judy. " He is a bad man ! "

Her mother stayed away in the country for three more years. Her father told Judy the doctors had made up their minds it was better for her health she should stay away in the country. She gathered he did not want to talk about her, or be reminded of her. The child respected his wishes. She did not miss her mother, either.

But a change came over Mrs. Lord. She was bursting with satisfaction and inside knowledge. One way or another, she managed to let Judy share some of the inside knowledge, though she made it clear there was lots more, and Judy would share it all with her when she was older. She used to like Mrs. Lord quite a lot in the old days, before the bad man came. But she did not like her at all now.

Then three years later a letter came ; or perhaps several letters. Judy realised quite quickly that it had to do with her mother, who had gone off into the country such a long time ago. She did not believe she had gone away because her health was bad. Mrs. Lord did not let her believe it, either. She had gone away with that man. She concluded that that man had left her now. She was sorry if she was going to try and come back. She had never been a mother like real mothers, either to herself or her daddy.

For several days her daddy and Mrs. Lord quarrelled dreadfully. Then suddenly her father

flared up and turned round on Mrs. Lord with a face blood-red with anger. He told her she could go at once, then and there. She went upstairs and packed up her things and went. Her mother came back into the house two days later. Another woman took the place of Mrs. Lord as housekeeper.

This time her mother stayed with her father only two years. When she went this time, Judy was old enough for her father to tell her something of the truth. She was, in fact, several years older than her age. What he did not tell her, she pieced out for herself, for she was a lonely child, and had plenty of time to brood over it. What she did not understand then, she came to understand later.

She realised that the other man was the whole world to her mother, food and drink, sky and earth, everything. He had always been the same though he hit her in the face and knocked her down and kicked her while she was on the floor. She had been grateful to her father, but she had not loved him. She had not loved the child she had by him. All those years her mother and her father had been together, she had only been living with a little part of herself, almost with nothing of herself at all. There might have been little more or much more. It was not possible to tell. But when that man came back for her there

wasn't anything else for her to do. She went to him.

She had been with the man for two and a half years or more. Or rather he had been with her. He hit her all the time, and then he got tired of her again. Perhaps some other woman had struck his fancy. Whatever happened he left her mother penniless. She had been starving for several months, then she got very low in her mind and had written her father a letter ! She was not a strong person at all, excepting in her love for the man.

Her father had said to himself he would not answer the letter. But another letter came, and probably she threatened she would kill herself. Also, she was the mother of Judy. He wrote to her and sent her money. At last he saw her. She promised on her oath she would never treat Judy and himself like that again.

Once again the man came and asked her to go back to him and she had broken her oath and gone back. There was something more in her than it was easy to see, or that man would not call her in that way. But she had gone. She had gone for ever, this time. She would not write, and if she wrote her husband would not read. But he knew she would not write. It was all over now.

" It isn't all over now," the girl whispered. She stood beside him, but she was not looking

into his face. She was staring away over his shoulder, a long distance away.

"What do you mean, Judy? What can we do more?"

"I don't mean like that, daddy." She still was not looking into his face. She was not finding it easy to say what she meant. "I mean it's not all over. Only in one way it is. In another way it's only just beginning."

He took hold of her shoulders. "You're a funny girl, aren't you?" he said.

She turned her head towards him. "It's like this, daddy. It's funny. I feel I'm to blame."

"Judy, don't talk like that! I never heard anything so silly."

"No, daddy, no. Please don't be cross with me. It's hard for me to say how I mean. I don't mean she went away because I was a bad girl. I don't think I was bad—anything special, like some girls."

"I should think not, indeed."

"I used to be naughty in the old days, while Mrs. Lord was here. But I was young, wasn't I, daddy? And I've not been so naughty now, have I?"

"No."

"But I'm to blame still. How shall I say it, daddy? It's because of me she came. I had to be here, so she came. That's why it didn't matter

if she came back or not, because I was already here. She was just like somebody we knew staying with us."

" My word, Judy, what is the matter with you ? " He took hold of her by the shoulders again and shook her.

" Daddy," she said quietly. " I had to be here to look after you."

" To look after me ? " The lips began to relax into a smile, but before it was achieved, they began to contract again. A darkness came slowly up across his eyes. He said nothing for some time. His ears were filled with the noise of wind and heaving waters. Then he spoke.

" Yes, Judy," he said, " I shall need you some day to look after me. You will, will you, Judy ? "

" You'll see, daddy," she said.

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Two or three years after these events, Mr. Hannan, one of the partners in the firm where Wace was employed, severed his connection with his fellows in Doomington and bought a controlling partnership in a firm of outside brokers in London, with offices in Whitley Court. Mr. Hannan was aware, more than Wace himself, how much the success of the firm in Doomington had been due to Wace's industry

and acumen. He proposed to Wace that he should accompany him to London, with the prospect of a partnership within the course of a year or two. It might have been thought that his first reaction to the proposal would have been at least favourable, if not enthusiastic. But it was not so.

" I—I beg your pardon,⁵⁵ he stammered. He went quite pale. " Did you say London ? "

" Of course I did," smiled Mr. Hannan. " What did you think I said. Hong-Kong ? "

" No ! " said Wace hurriedly. " No ! " His voice rose to a shout. " I won't go to London ! "

" My dear chap," said Mr. Hannan. " Don't bite my head off! It's only a business proposition. If there's any reason why you don't want to go to London, don't go ! Are you quite well, Wace ? Anyhow, take a few days to think it over ! "

Was there any reason why he shouldn't go to London ? Of course there was no reason in the world why he shouldn't go to London. Merely because Sidney Sharpies lived there, was that reason enough to turn down the offer of a lifetime ?

He lifted his eyes to say a further word or two on the matter. He dropped them again. It was not Mr. Hannan who stood before him, smiling a little, winking a little, pointing with one thumb

over his shoulder, downwards, southwards, towards London, out of safety, into peril, into murder.

" I'm not quite well, Mr. Hannan," he muttered. " If you don't mind, I will take a day or two off, to think it over. Thank you very much, Mr. Hannan."

London was a big place. You could go on for years and years without setting eyes on Sidney Sharpies.

Yes, but sooner or later, you would see him. Sharpies would make sure of that. And London is not a big place, the city is not a big place. Sharpies had an office in Mincing Lane, hadn't he ? One day you would be walking towards Mansion House Station at a rush hour, with hundreds upon hundreds of people pressing at your heels. But you would be conscious of one out of all these hundreds, twenty yards behind you, one yard behind you, his breath hot upon your neck.

The fantasy recurred two or three times during the next day or two. It woke him up from sleep. His brow was wet with terror.

" I won't go ! " he cried aloud. But he knew quite well he would go.

He wants me there, does he ? he mused. *Well,*

he'll have me there. He's left me alone too long. He can't live without me. Pll turn on him one day and . . . and . . .

" I'm mad," he said to himself quietly next morning. " Am I going to remain a snotty-nosed elementary school kid all my life long ? Besides, there's Judy to consider. She's fourteen now. She's bound to be reminded of things so long as we stay in Doomington. I could send her to a good school in London. Of course, I'll accept the offer. It's a chance in a thousand."

He asked for Mr. Hannan a day or two later. " Thank you, it's very kind of you. I accept your offer. I hope you'll find me worthy of your confidence."

CHAPTER IX

MANOLITA SHARPLES wrote and thanked her husband for suggesting that she should take on the lease of the house in Tangier for a second six months, if she liked. When she had been there six months, she took it for a further five years, with the option of indefinite renewal. It was possible she might see her husband again, but she was quite sure they would never again share the same establishment. She knew he wanted it as little as she did herself.

She saw that she could get on as satisfactorily in Tangier as she could anywhere in the world, now that her husband had had the little he wanted out of her, and had let her go. Excepting for Rupert. She hardly dared think how Rupert might affect things. Her house stood on a terraced hill, whose flowers cascaded down to yellow cliffs. Great urns of golden lilies stood beside the door. She was looked after by a Moor from the Riff country and his three daughters, who were like the golden lilies at the door. There were pleasant people in the houses on the surrounding hills. The English residents and the

Spanish officials took her up kindly. There was always something doing in the way of bridge-parties in the afternoon and dinner-parties and dances at night. She was a fair horsewoman and she went out pig-sticking into the musky country southward where lentisk and myrtle were smothered at length in sand-dunes and overhead the pink storks went sailing, their feet floating out like trailers behind them.

It all looked as if it might be fairly happy, if not for Rupert. The fact was the boy's heart was breaking with longing for his father. He slept in a room that led out of hers through a curtained archway. Night after night, she could hear him sobbing to himself, when he thought his mother was asleep and he could let himself go in safety. It was hard to get him to eat anything. Even horses hardly brought a flicker of interest into his eyes. She bought him a pony, but he did no more than make him the confidant of his sorrows. The child was fading away visibly.

Something drastic must be done about it. But what could be done? She could only send him back to London to be with his father. But she was not at all sure his father would take him. He seemed to have tired of his son almost as completely as of his wife. He had raised not the least objection when she suggested taking him away; and though there had been a clear

enough understanding between them that they were separating for ever, he had made no stipulation at all about the boy's future. She assumed she could bring enough pressure to bear on him to get him to have the boy. She could doubtless send him doctor's certificates which would make it quite clear that if the boy did not go back to him, the consequences would be dangerous.

Oh, but was it fair, w^ras it fair, the boy should go back to him ? She could imagine how suavely and subtly he would poison the boy's mind against her. He would make her an ogress in the boy's eyes. She would never see him again. There would be nothing at all left to her in all the world.

She was convinced it would be fatal for the boy, as well as herself, if he went back to London. The game of poisoning the boy's mind against her might amuse him for half a year, or a year. But what then ? He would set to work against the boy himself. He would be ruthless. The boy was sensitive. To what dreadful lengths might not his father drive him ?

Rupert must not go back. Far better that he should cherish this false idol in his heart, than break it completely by learning its true nature. But if he did not go back, would he outgrow his grief ? She looked at him wretchedly. He sat before an untouched dish of food, his head

sagging on his neck. He looked like an old man already.

One day she had a dreadful shock. He said he was going down to the stable to talk to his pony. Two hours went by and he did not come back. He did not come back for lunch. She gave the alarm. The place was searched frantically. He was nowhere to be found. Notice was given to the police, while Ali the Moor and his sons and all his friends beat the surrounding countryside.

It was not till quite late in the evening that the police brought him back. He had found somehow that a boat was leaving for England that day, and had hidden himself among some packing-cases and lain there all day long. Then, in the evening, he had sidled forward to the companion-way and tried to walk up as inconspicuously as possible into the boat. When he was stopped, they asked him what he wanted.

" I want my daddy," he said.

" Where is he ? " they asked. " He'll be coming on soon. You'd best wait for him ! "

" He's in London ! " the child said. " He said he'd come, but he hasn't ! I want to go to him ! "

When he saw they would not let him go, he cried like a little animal in pain. He cried in the arms of the police all the way up the " Mountain " to his mother's home.

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Next day Manolita cabled her husband, and a week later Sharpies came. The child could hardly catch his breath for joy. An arrangement was entered into between Sharpies and his wife. Sharpies felt it was less of a nuisance if he came over to the boy than if the boy went over to him. He felt also that the sea-voyage and a week or two's holiday in Morocco would do him no harm. He agreed, therefore, to come over and spend a week or two annually with his son. If she insisted on being there at the same time, well and good. But he would not object if she were not there.

The boy went to school and learned to ride and to stick pig and to disport himself decently. But all the rest of the year was dim in his eyes, compared with the fierce glory of the two weeks' his father spent with him. It was rarely less than two weeks. He struck off day by day upon the calendar, and the day his father arrived, he tore up the calendar and threw the pieces into the waste-paper basket. These ten or fourteen days were of a nature not to be computed alongside of other days. Sidney Sharpies was amused and charmed by his son's rapture. He found it quite a pleasant change to come over from Wimbledon to Tangier.

CHAPTER X

So you've come to London, have you ? mused Sidney Sharpies. *You've come into the City, have you ? And who, pray, said you might come to London ? It seems to me you're asking for it, Mr. Wace. Ifs impertinent, Mr. Wace, and well you know it. Ifs blasted impertinent!*

He tried to work himself up into a fury, but found he couldn't. He realised to his surprise he wasn't angry at all. On the contrary he was forced to confess that the arrival of Wace in London filled him with an extraordinary sense of well-being. He felt he had company again.

And there was a daughter, too.

Sidney Sharpies flattered himself he was a self-sufficient man. And on the whole he was. He found time go by quite as quickly as he liked. He had recently moved into a new house that looked over the Regent's Park Canal. The house had been ignored by the house-hunter, probably because there were warehouses on both sides of it. It had a small garden, and beyond the

garden-railings there was quite a strip of open greenness before you got to the canal bank. It was a perfect place to take the dog out for his night's run. He had fallen for a dog again. When the last one died, he had vowed he would never have another. But there was no arguing with Jock. Jock merely attached himself to his legs and did not consider the possibility of being divorced from them. So he broke his vow and took Jock on. Jock was a carroty tousle-haired mongrel, the only unkempt creature in Sidney Sharples's world.

The house had been built in a good period and there was lots of it, but it was in a bad condition. It took Sharples more than a year to get it as he liked it, before he moved in. And it kept him quite busy after he had moved in. He liked the thought of his suavely lit smoothly panelled house flanked by its uncouth warehouses. He had the house to look after, and Jock. He sometimes went to concerts when Jock inferred he might. He was a ballet enthusiast and went to the ballet without consulting Jock. He was a member of several clubs and collected Victorian glass and mezzotints. There was quite enough in his life to keep him busy and amused.

He had had a housekeeper for several years. She was getting on now. He was used to her and kept her on. There was also a maid living

in. He did not like to feel there were too many people cluttering up the place, so that the other servants slept out, the chauffeur and the gardener and the woman who helped in the kitchen. The name of the housekeeper was Mrs. Carvill, the maid was Jean.

He had an office in Mincing Lane. He had recently entered the rubber market, and was doing very well. It was thought he was doing very well with his life altogether. Both his single and his married friends envied him. He seemed to them to have made the best of both worlds.

But there were moments when he was doing less well than they knew. These moments caught hold of him sometimes even in his office, or among his friends. But nothing happened to his face. He went on talking or smiling. They happened more frequently when he was alone in his house by the Canal. Then he could not bear the faces of the two women in the house. The dog seemed a misbegotten hairy brute. The creature slunk away on his belly, realising that the desolation and the mystery had come.

He was lonely. Loneliness was like a growth inside him, clawing at his vitals. It was not for his wife nor his son he was lonely at these times. It was another than they.

The housekeeper had a large attic at the top of the house. The maid had a smaller one beside it.

One night Mrs. Carvill was awakened by Jean tugging fiercely at her shoulder.

"Get up, get up, Mrs. Carvill !" the girl implored.

"What is it ? What's the matter with you ? " the other asked sleepily.

"Can't you *hear* ? Oh can't you *hear*, Mrs. Carvill ? "

"No I can't ! "

"Hush—listen now ! There it goes again ! "

"Why, yes, I think I can ! It's Jock, isn't it ? He's been locked out ! "

"No, Mrs. Carvill, look ! Shall I switch the light on ? Here's Jock beside your bed ! "

The animal was stretched out close to the foot of the bed, his head between his paws. He was trembling as if he had just come out of ice-cold water.

"What's he doing there ? Why isn't he on the mat outside his master's room ? "

"I don't know ! Listen ! "

"It's Mr. Sharpies ! "

"Yes ! "

"You fool ! He's ill ! He's got toothache ! Why didn't you tell me sooner ! " She thrust her feet into slippers and put a dressing-gown round her. Then she went downstairs.

"Mr. Sharpies ! " she called out. There was no reply. "Mr. Sharpies ! " she called again.

"Can I do anything for you ? " Complete silence. " Are you all right, Mr. Sharpies ? "

The door opened on her suddenly. Her employer stood in the doorway fully dressed. His face was twisted with fury. The green eyes glared like an animal's.

" Go away, you blasted idiot ! Go away ! " he shouted at her. " Don't come unless you're asked for ! " He shut the door in her face.

At last the idea came to Sidney Sharpies that he would send Harry Wace a letter. This was about two years after Wace had come up to London. He knew that he would carry out the idea though he argued against himself for many months.

He'll snub you. And what if he will ? It can't be worse than this. Oh can't it ! Just you wait ! After all, he must be as sick of it as me. We're both getting on now. We're nearer forty than thirty. You've done him harm, he's done you none. What ? He's done me no harm ? What the hell are you talking about ? Done me no harm ? I know you're mad, but I never thought you were a fool.

Then the argument took another turn.

It'll be dangerous. Let sleeping dogs lie. It'll be the element that will send the whole mixture sky-high.

Frightened, are you ? Ho > so you're frightened ! I had

my doubts before, but thafs done them in. Pd like to see him touch me with his little finger. He daren't. If he only would! Thafs what's been wrong all the time, all the time, from the very beginning, all the time.

Don't you see ? Pd like him to. I want him to. Let him turn round and break me into pieces.

But this time he won't. I think he won't. Perhaps he'll write back and say: I think you're quite right, Sharpies, It's gone on long enough.

So the endless argument turned and turned and turned in his brain like a mouse in a cage.

He wrote Wace the following letter. It was dated April the twenty-ninth of that year.

DEAR WAGE,

I've been meaning to write to you for some time, ever since I learned you came to London. I want to say I'm sorry. Would you like to have a meal with me some time, or just a drink, if you would prefer it ? I would like it a great deal.

Yours sincerely,
SIDNEY SHARPLES.

He dropped the letter into the pillar-box and instantly wished it back into his hands again, so that he could put a match to it and burn it. But

at night he was happy. He smiled up into the ceiling. Jock was promoted from the rug outside the door to the rug beside his bed. He stretched his hand out and down towards the dog's coarse pelt and stroked it affectionately. The reply could hardly come by to-morrow night's post. It would probably come the morning after.

It did not come the morning after. The days passed and the reply did not come. He threw himself upon his letters at every post with burning cheeks. The reply did not come.

The months passed by and he did not hear. He could not believe the fellow could or dared humiliate him so. It was unthinkable. The letter had not reached him ; or it had been answered and he had not received the reply.

A whole year passed by thus. He wrote another letter dated April the twenty-ninth, like its predecessor.

DEAR WAGE,

I wrote you a letter a year ago, on the same day of this month. I would be grateful to you if you would let me know whether you received it.

Yours sincerely,

SIDNEY SHARPLES.

A reply came by the evening post of the same day.

DEAR SIR,

I received your letter of a year ago date. I destroyed it as I have destroyed your communication received to-day.

Yours faithfully,

H. WAGE.

Sidney Sharpies lifted the letter at its extreme corner between finger and thumb and went over to the fire with it. He dropped it among the coals and pushed it as deep into the heart of the fire as the tip of the poker could thrust it.

He rang the bell and Mrs. Carvill came in,
" Take that food away," he said. " I won't eat anything."⁵⁵

She saw his face was as pale as ash, but she knew better than to ask him what ailed him.
" Yes, sir,"⁵ she said, and got busy.

He went out and walked about the streets for some time and then came in and went straight to bed. He twisted the sheet into a gag and thrust it into his mouth to prevent himself screaming,

He paid a lot of attention to his toilet next morning. He went to the office looking very spruce.

CHAPTER XI

I

HARRY WAGE came up to London towards the latter end of nineteen-twenty. He took a house in Baron's Court, and travelled home every evening between five-thirty and six from the Underground Station at Mansion House. There is always a great crowd at that hour, thrusting its way towards the station along the converging streets.

Quite a long time passed before Wace recalled a fantasy that had almost prevented him from accepting his job in London, the fantasy he had had of a man coming up after him in the crowd, now twenty yards behind him, now a yard behind him, now less than a yard, his breath hot upon his neck. The man was the man he hated more than he had ever loved anything in the world.

Wace had a lot to think of during those first months—he had to dig himself into his job and make his home fairly comfortable ; there was his daughter, too, and her schooling. He had quite a lot on his mind. Then, one evening, without

any sort of warning, he felt the hot breath on his neck. He turned round, though it was not easy in that crowd, and scanned the faces coming up behind him. None of them was in the least familiar. He looked round again next day, and again none of the faces was familiar. He remembered to look round half a dozen times during the next few weeks, and once or twice he thought he saw the face that was so hateful to him. Almost at once he realised it was not. At length he decided he would not look round again. The habit was becoming an irritation to him.

Besides, he knew the fellow lived in Regent's Park. If he went home by Underground, he went by another station. Possibly he left his office in a car.

At the end of April nineteen twenty-two a letter came to him from Sidney Sharpies. He ignored it. Another came at the end of April the following year. He was furious, and he was frightened. The fellow was after him again. What game was he up to? Could he possibly believe he would be such an imbecile as to swallow the bait? He would see.

He replied to the second letter, a short sharp note. He felt relieved. He did not try to convince himself that this was the end of everything,

though many months passed after this interchange of notes and still nothing happened. But it cleared the air. He felt freer than he had felt till now in London. He devoted himself with more keenness to the business than he had shown till now. He was making a success of himself. Judy was a big girl now, in her last year at school. She would be leaving soon. She seemed happy enough, even though she was a lonely girl, who did not make friends easily. They went about to theatres and cinemas together.

When something happened at last, it was so little it was hardly more than nothing. It was with no thought of Sidney Sharpies at all that Harry Wace turned his head one evening as he was making his way towards the Mansion House Underground Station. He thought he heard someone call his name, so he turned his head. Quite casually his eyes lit on Sharpies. Sharpies was not even looking at him. It could not be he that had called him, because he was too far away to have reached him in so low a voice. Besides, what reason had Sharpies to speak to him at all ?

He peered among the faces nearer to him, and saw none that was familiar. A little strange, he thought ; and, after all, not so strange. Probably it was some name similar to his that

had been called. **Or** it had been some other Wace, perhaps.

And was that really Sidney Sharpies, after all ? How long ago was it since he had last set eyes on Sharpies ? What ? It was twenty years ago, wasn't it ? Twenty years ago ! Then perhaps that fellow wasn't Sidney Sharpies ? Oh, yes it was. He knew his face as well as if he had seen it every day during all those twenty years. In a sense, of course, he had.

Well then. It had happened now. He had seen Sidney Sharpies again. The crowd moved on, and he moved with it. He was through the turnstile now. He was descending the steps now towards the westbound platform.

Don't look round. That's what he wants you to do. Exactly that. Don't look round.

" What an idiot I am ! " he said to himself angrily. " What the hell shouldn't I look round for ? "

He looked round. He could not see Sidney Sharpies now. The staircase was jammed with people. He was on the platform. It was possible to move a little more easily.

Sidney Sharpies was on another platform, probably. Or he hadn't been there at all. Oh yes, he had. That had quite definitely been Sidney Sharpies. Was he somewhere behind that clot of people near the bookstall ? And

what if he was ? Why on earth shouldn't the fellow take a westbound train from Mansion House Station if he felt like it ?

A train came in. It was not Wace's train ; it passed his station. A carriage door was open a foot or two from his elbow. As the train moved off, he made a sudden wild dash for the compartment, and got inside hardly a second before the guard banged the door to.

2

The same thing happened several times during the next month or two. Wace was aware that Sharpies lived in Regent's Park. Now Mansion House was not the most convenient station for Regent's Park. Then Sharpies made some other journey between five-thirty and six every now and again. Why shouldn't he ? There was no reason in the world why he should not. Once or twice they were quite close up against each other, but no sign of recognition passed between them. Was there perhaps the faint shadow of a smile on Sharples's face ? It was an illusion. Wace decided he was incapable of seeing his face without imagining the shadow of a smile on it.

It was upsetting, of course. Wace could not disguise from himself that these encounters—

but you could not call them encounters—put him out for a day or two on end. He became surly. He did not have a pleasant word even for Judy. She kept out of his way.

And then Sharpies turned up at Boulter's Chop-House in Dacey Court. When Wace was not having a business-lunch, he always lunched at Boulter's. It was a quiet old-fashioned place, though it was in the very heart of the city. They did a good steak there and had a good pint of beer on draught. He found Boulter's very restful after the insistent jabber of the telephones all morning.

Sidney Sharpies turned up quite casually at Boulter's, one lunch-time, just a few minutes after Wace had arrived. He turned up just as casually as he made the Underground journey from Mansion House now and again. The place was divided into cubicles. He gave the waiter his hat and coat, looked about indifferently and placed himself in the cubicle facing the one where Wace was already sitting, where, in fact, he sat every time he lunched at Boulter's. It was a coincidence, Wace supposed. He did badly with his lunch that day.

It might have been only a coincidence, but Wace asked to have his cubicle changed next day. In a corner of the Chop-House there were four cubicles which just faced a wooden

partition. He asked to be given one of these.

It was a pity, in a way. The new waiter was less intelligent than the old one. And Sidney Sharpies did not lunch at Boulter's again. Not for six weeks. When he came again, he occupied the next cubicle to Wace's. Somehow it was more formidable to have the enemy invisible, to know that rather less than half an inch of wood separated you from him. For of course it was quite clear now it was no coincidence he had come to lunch at Boulter's. Quite clear.

When Sharpies came a third time, about ten days later, and lunched at Boulter's, rather less than a foot or so away from him, Wace realised that that was the last time he himself would lunch there. It was infuriating. He had liked Boulter's. It had been restful. The food agreed with him.

3

What could you do about it? What in the world was there you could do? What was there to prevent a man taking any journey by Underground he wished to take, or having his lunch where he chose to have it? It was different when he wrote you a letter, or two letters, to be

exact. It was gratifying to ignore the first. It was gratifying, in a different way, to reply to the second,

But what could you do to a man weaving so gossamer a web about you, that you didn't even need to breathe in order to break it, for the web wasn't woven at all ?

Next time you saw him could you go up and smack his face or hit him with your walking-stick ? It would be grotesque and humiliating. Sharpies would enjoy that infinitely.

Besides, not only was Sharpies doing nothing at all, but you didn't know him and he didn't know you. That was what was so wrong and so shocking about the two letters he wrote to you and the one he forced out of you in return. It was breaking the supreme rule of their ghostly and inexorable game.

What could you do then ? Kill him ? It seemed about the only thing to do.

4

The impalpable persecution continued. It was almost more odious than the previous persecutions that had culminated in some tangible wickedness. Sidney Sharpies thrived on it. He was beginning to look fat and prosperous. The hair was going in the middle of his scalp. His

waistcoat began to bulge a little. He looked like a well-groomed bachelor, on good terms with the world and himself.

Harry Wace lost weight. His clothes began to hang loosely on his bones. He looked like a man who was going to the bad with drink. He did not, as a matter of fact, drink at all, or anything more than his usual night-cap. A violent temptation assailed him more than once to drink himself into oblivion, as he had done in an earlier phase of his career, when he wanted to forget a woman who had been stolen from him, and a man who had stolen her.

But it would be odious to let that same man score another and so gross a triumph. He remembered with dismay the headaches that always followed these drinking-bouts. His head ached badly enough already. There was Judy to think of, too. She was not having too gay a time, as it was. He could not go into a train without getting restive. Every time the train stopped and fresh passengers got in, his hands trembled so that his newspaper almost fell out of his hands. He would be looking up every minute or two to make sure the pursuer had not come in after him,"

He had once been a keen cinema-goer, but he never went to the cinema now, not since a certain evening in the New Gallery. He had been

absorbed in a film that night, with Judy sitting beside him, not quite so interested. She was waiting for the shorter film which was to follow. He had been so absorbed he had not noticed that somebody had moved along a vacant row to the seat on the other side of him. When the lights went up, he became aware that Sidney Sharpies was sitting on his left hand. He made a violent effort to master his horror, but it was too much for him. He rose. "Judy," he said to her harshly. "Are you coming?"

"But daddy," she complained, "it's the short film I've come to see. Are you all right?"

"I've never seen such nonsense," he declared, with a fierce attempt to seem at ease. "You stay if you like!" And even as he spoke, his mind filled with a picture of the whole cinema emptied, only those two sitting a foot away from each other. He saw the other sidle into the seat he had vacated. He saw his fingers writhe like snakes on to the thigh of the girl beside him.

"Come at once, do you hear?" he shouted.

She rose. She looked very miserable.

"I'm sorry, Judy dear," he said. The sweat was pouring from his forehead. "I'm sorry I made you miss it, but ... I felt rather faint," he explained lamely.

5

As time went on, there were more palpable injuries. There were obstructions in business due to some influence to which no name or shape could be attached. Then, after he had put up for a business men's club on the persuasion of two or three of his friends, he found himself black-balled. He attempted to buy a house once. He found himself forestalled and outbid. There was one injury that cost him a good deal of his fortune.

That happened in the spring of nineteen twenty-eight. He was a rich man at that time. His position in business was at its zenith. His Doomington partner, Hannan, had retired some two years earlier and Wace had taken over from him the controlling interest in the firm. It was a boom time and Wace came in on it with a very useful combination of flair and north-country caution.

A swindler, Brakeley by name, was the one who actually brought him down. He disappeared with considerable gains, when the transaction was over. But the secret motor of the swindle was Sidney Sharpies, who made not a penny out of it. The part he had played was in no legal sense criminal, but it was a pretty enough move in a private game he had been playing for a good many years.

This was how it had worked. Sidney Sharpies was in Mincing Lane. He had been approached by this Brakeley, who stated he had a friend in the Dutch Government. There was no doubt at all that the friend existed. Brakeley confided after due guarantees that the Dutch Government were coming in at last on the restriction scheme. The price of rubber would soar sky-high within a couple of months. He proposed a deal in rubber futures which would make enormous fortunes for both of them.

It happened, however, that Sharpies was a good deal better informed than even the rest of Mincing Lane. He, too, had friends both in Amsterdam and Malaya, whose information led him to somewhat different conclusions. He gave no inkling* to Brakeley that he had seen through his scheme. He regretted that his firm had too many commitments on hand and suggested the names of two or three firms that had been doing big business lately along those lines. They were outside brokers, too ; they were likelier to have funds available on this scale. He suggested casually that Wace's firm seemed as likely as any, they had been doing particularly well lately. He further implied that it would be useful to keep the name of his own firm out of it, for it would inspire more confidence if it were imagined that the offer had been made nowhere else.

The offer was duly made to Wace and duly accepted. Had it been made a month or two earlier or later it would have been turned down. Wace had been uniformly successful in a series of ventures each just a little more speculative than the last. Had another month or two gone by, some minor failure, in the natural chances of business, would have brought home to him his fallibility. At any other moment than this Sharpies would not have diverted the speculation in his direction. Brakeley had, of course, a good handful of forward contracts, which he generously unloaded on Wace at a more than optimistic figure. The degree of this optimism became clear as soon as "restriction" once again became a dream. Brakeley disappeared from market circles. Wace was left for several months to come paying sixpence for every threepence he received. The sixpences were numerous.

It was not because he pieced together, with an intuition equal to his enemy's, the part he had played in this affair, that Harry Wace determined to murder Sidney Sharpies. None of these injuries precipitated the intention or the execution. He was aware that the murder to which he was dedicated pursued and would culminate a curve which had been decreed many years ago.

It was to murder Sidney Sharpies he had come to London. It was Sidney Sharpies himself who had summoned him to London.

He lay tossing in his bed night after night. The sweat of anguish was clammy on his forehead. A moan like a dying child's forced its way through his clenched teeth. His daughter crept along the passage to his room, and stood there for many minutes. But she dared not invade that grief and terror. She had no efficacy there. She crept back like a forlorn ghost to her own room.

6

" No," said Wace, pushing his plate away.
" I won't eat anything to-night."

" You said that last night," his daughter complained.

" Yes."

" Shall I ask Mrs. Williams to make you something light, an omelette or something ? "

" No. I'll have a brandy and soda. I'll take it into the sitting-room."

" Let me take it for you, daddy."

" Thank you, Judy. You're a good girl."

They went into the sitting-room. She handed him a cigarette.

" You, Judy ? "

" No, thanks. I won't smoke."

They sat in silence for some time.

At last she spoke. She unclenched her fists and her breath came short and sharp, like somebody going out for the first time into the night and the cold, in a dangerous country.

" Is it going to go on like this always ? "

" Like what ? " he asked suspiciously. " Like what ? "

" You look so wretched. You don't eat anything "

" What can I do ? "

" Are you going to build up your business again to where it was ? "

" I've lost interest in my business. "

" Daddy ! "

" Yes. "

" Why shouldn't we go away somewhere ? ⁵⁵

He stopped and looked at her. He said nothing for two full minutes. Then he broke the silence.

" Do you really want to know why ? " he asked.

" If you want me to, " she answered, her voice hardly above a whisper.

Again one minute and another passed before he said a word. Then once more he asked : " Shall I tell you why ? " This time she made no reply.

Still for a long time he considered the matter. Then at last he said :

" Because he'd go after me, wherever I went.³

The silence was so intense and so prolonged they looked like waxworks, placed by another hand in their two chairs.

" Well," he said at length. " Why don't you say anything ? "

" What can I say ? " she murmured. Her face was deathly pale.

" I have an enemy," he said.

" I know," she murmured.

" How do you know ? " He suddenly started in his chair. " Has anybody said anything ? " He looked at her with burning eyes. " Anybody at all ? "

" Nobody at all."

" How do you know ? "

" I've always known. Even in Doomington. It's been worse here. In the train, at the cinema, wherever we went." Her voice was quite toneless. She did not raise her eyes from the floor.

" Daddy, daddy," she said. " What are you going to do ? "

" You know what I'm going to do," he said sombrely.

" No, no," she shrieked suddenly. She rose and stretched her arms out above her head. " No, I don't know anything ! Don't you see ? " She went across to him and held his head between her hands. " It's got to be like that ! "

" Yes, Judy. I see. You don't know anything. It's got to be like that ! "

7

Sometimes he neglected his office for days on end. He left his clerks to look after things. He mooched about in old clothes. She had no idea where he went.

Now and again he came in long after midnight. She dared not ask herself what he might be doing, what he might already have done. She waited till he had gone in the morning and then pounced on the newspaper. But, with the newspaper in her hand, a sudden terror descended on her. She dared not unfold it, for fear of the hideous news it might contain. She opened it at length and her eye passed feverishly from column to column. Then she folded it again. Not yet. She could not see there was any news yet to perturb her.

She tried hard to believe sometimes that it was all a nightmare. She had, somehow, entangled herself, too, in an illusion. There was no pursuer at all. Nothing would happen to endanger her. She picked up the morning newspaper indifferently. But not many days later she might take some journey with him. From the way his hands twitched and his head turned this way and

that, she felt she dared not allow herself to be so comforted—if it was comfort to think a mere spectre so appalled him. Oh no. It was something more solid than a spectre that pursued him and taunted him and bade him strike.

It was long after midnight, one night, and he had not yet come in. She was almost dead with apprehension. She went up to bed, but she could not sleep. She switched her light on, but she could not read. At last she heard the key turned in the front door. She heard his feet, coming up the stairs. They stopped at his own door, then they hesitated. Then they came further along the passage. They stopped at her door. He knocked. He had something to tell her. What was it he had to tell her at this hour? Her heart stopped beating. She could not bring herself to say come in. She heard him move back again along the passage. She jumped out of bed and ran to the door and opened it.

" Yes, daddy ? " she called out. " What is it ? " Her eyes were round with fright.

" I saw your light on," he said heavily. " Then when you didn't answer, I thought you'd fallen asleep."

" Is there ... is there anything you want to say? "

" I thought I'd . . . I thought I'd like to have a word with you."

The colour came slowly back into her cheeks again. " Come in. I'll switch the stove on. Sit down in this chair, daddy."

" Get back into bed again, Judy."

" All right. You look . . . Oh daddy, you look so tired ! "

" No. I'm all right."

" Do you want anything ? Would you like to smoke ? "

" No."

" All right. Is there anything I can do ? "

" No, Judy, thanks. I just wanted to say something."

She waited for him. He must take his own time.

" It's this." He hesitated again, then he went on. " I don't know how it will be. You know what I mean ? No, Judy, no, I'm sorry. You don't know what I mean."

Her eyes filled with tears. " I do, oh I do. Daddy, is it possible ? Any other way ? "

He looked wretchedly into the red coils of the electric stove. " We won't talk about it, Judy. That's not what I came to talk about."

" All right," she whispered.

" What I mean is this. It may be all right, or it may not. You can't tell. I intend to come back, *after*. You won't know. Nobody'll know."

After. She had to bite hard on her tongue to prevent herself screaming. He seemed conscious

of some emotion of dismay or horror that had been generated within her. "I'll go now," he said. She saw the unspeakable loneliness in his eyes. "Don't go," she whispered. "Say what you've come to say."

"Only this. I may come back. Also, I may not come back."

"Where'll you go?"

"I don't know. Abroad somewhere. My passport's all right. People won't connect things, you know. You'll be able to say: It was just his nerves. He simply had to get away. You see?"

"Yes, I see."

"I just thought I'd like to say this. I've got quite a lot of money in bank-notes. But I might be in a bit of a hole some time." He was fiddling about in the carpet with one toe, awkwardly, like a school-boy. "I want to hand over some more to you. You'd help me out, if it came to it, wouldn't you?"

She did not answer. She fixed him with her eyes. "Listen, daddy," she said. "Are you listening?"

"Yes, I'm listening."

"I don't think you remember. A long time ago—I think I was eleven or twelve—I made a promise to you."

"Yes."

" It was after my mother went off, for the second time."

" Oh yes.⁵⁵

" Do you remember ? "

" I don't think I do."

" I said I'd look after you. I meant it. And I mean it now. I'll look after you."

He got up from his chair. He was blushing violently. He turned his back on her. " Of course I remember," he said. He went along to the door and still with his back to her he added, " You won't be such a fool ! I'll look after myself, if I've got to."

" All right," she said quietly.

8

He had decided to shoot him. That was the cleanest and neatest way. He hung about the public-houses in the East India Dock Road and picked up a revolver without much trouble. He set himself to find out all he could about Sharples's habits in his home on the Regent's Park Canal. He was very patient. Time did not matter. There was a public-house on the further side of the canal. It had a big room on the first floor where they had free-and-easy sing-songs now and again. He gleaned a fact or two of great importance from that point of vantage. He learned that,

whenever Sharpies was at home, he never failed to take his dog out into the garden, for a run after dinner, at nine o'clock. It was always nine o'clock to the dot. Sharpies was becoming quite a pernickety old gentleman. It wasn't quite the garden he took the dog into. It had too much rockery and flower-bed and too little lawn for the dog to stretch his legs properly. He opened a gate in the iron railings and went out into a coarse strip of grass between the garden and the canal. On one side the garden and the strip of grass were bordered by the high wall of a warehouse that went straight down to the canal-bank. There was nothing to be done on that side. There was a warehouse on the other side, too, but it was conveniently separated from Sharples's house by a narrow alley. On this side a wooden fence continued the line of the garden down to the canal bank. The fence was finished off with a tangle of barbed wire. It was not impossible to get rid of the wire and worm one's way round the end of the fence into the strip of grass where Sharpies took his dog for the nightly run.

9

Fog was the essence of the matter. There must be fog that night. He waited through the spring and summer days. He thought the time had come

one day towards the end of October, but a wind arose that evening and the fog moved. It was more mist than fog.

A few days later, as he came home from the office, he was startled by a loud report behind his ear. " Sorry, guv'nor ! " a voice said. He turned round. A couple of errand-boys were having a lark with fire-works. Of course, Guy Fawkes' Day was coming. November the Fifth.

" Not at all ! " he smiled magnanimously. " Go and buy yourselves some more ! " He gave them sixpence. The more fire-works went off the next few days the better. He would shortly send one off too, he promised himself, if the weather got a little thicker.

He was there in good time on the evening of November the Fifth, about twenty to nine, not too early. The conditions were admirable. It had been just foggy enough to make it rather difficult to find his way here. It was getting thicker now every minute. On the other side of the canal, beyond the public-house, small boys were letting off fire-works. You only guessed they were small boys. You could see nothing clear even though there was a lamp there. There was no lamp on this side at all, no light except two shafts that escaped from the curtains of Sharples's dining-room, that had not been properly drawn to-night.

KP

There was first that tangle of barbed wire at the end of the fence to deal with. It had been put up to prevent boys working their way round to the strip of grass that separated the house from the canal. He took out of his breast-pocket the pliers that he had bought many months ago in a street-market. Then he snipped through the strands of barbed wire till the heap lay loose. Very carefully with his gloved hands he edged the stuff towards the water where it sank soundlessly. Then he worked his way round the end of the fence till he found himself in the territory he had long planned to attain. The ground sloped down irregularly the last few feet towards the water's edge. He lay full length, waiting.

He did not need to wait long. He heard the click of the French windows as Sharpies pushed them in front of him to step on to the lawn. "Come on, now, Jock ! There's a good dog ! " The dog seemed to hesitate. " Yes, a nasty night, isn't it ? " agreed Sharpies. The dog made up his mind to come. As Sharpies reached the garden-path, there was a loud report on the further side of the canal. The dog started barking furiously.

" That's all right, Jock ! Don't worry ! " said Sharpies, and bent down to reassure him. " Please to remember the Fifth of November ! " He came forward a few yards. " Besides," he went on, " Mr. Wace is waiting for us, just by the

canal there. he won't shoot ! He's frightened ! "

A blackness heaved itself up from the shelving bank. There was another loud report. The dog barked furiously again, and went on barking, but no hand was put out to quieten him.

CHAPTER XII

I

WAGE FLUNG himself to earth again, then withdrew his body at an angle towards the end of the fence. He was in complete control of himself. He worked round the end of the fence quite as competently as before. He was standing on his feet now, in the alley between the fence and the warehouse. He turned and flung the revolver into the canal.

He was in complete control of himself. Oh no, Sharpies had been wrong this time if he had never been wrong before. He was not frightened, not frightened. He put one foot before the other steadily. He was almost out of the alley now, almost in the street now.

Sharpies had known. What had Sharpies known ? Had he kept watch to-night at this small window here on the right ? Had Sharpies known the other nights, too, when he had gone mooching along the opposite side of the canal into the public-house there ?

The important thing was to go steady. He was out in the street now. What a good thing it was

it was so foggy. Somewhere down the road some more fire-works went off. A dog barked. The other dog was still barking out there at the back of the house. He would probably bark for some time. Nobody takes any notice when a dog barks on Guy Fawkes' Night.

It was fool-proof. Nothing could happen. Nobody could know. Nobody connected their two names in any way, nobody ever had. They had both played the game, hadn't they ? That was the one thing they'd both stuck to, always, from the beginning. They'd never let anyone in on this, had they ?

Even to-niglit. Sharpies hadn't said a word to anybody, or written down a word for anybody to look at, in case something happened to him. Had he ?

The great thing to do was just to go steady. Steady. Like this. How easy it was. Left, right. Left, right. Easy. See ?

Then he heard the footsteps of the pursuer coming up after him, coming up after him. Quite clearly he heard the running footsteps. His whole body collapsed into flight. He was a small boy. He was running like mad down Blenheim Road. His heart was icy with fear. The other small boy was wearing a blue silk bow. He

had green eyes. He was smiling as he ran, smiling. The other boy could catch him up if he wanted to, but he did not want to. He let him run on and on, blindly, wildly, into the fog.

" 'Ere you, what the 'ell are you up to ? " a sharp voice asked him. He had edged someone into the gutter. He said not a word. The breath was labouring in his throat. The fog was choking him. He had not the least idea where he was. He did not care. He ran and ran through the steep fog.

" Hello ! What's the game ? " A hand reached out and caught him by the sleeve. It was a policeman, looming up out of the fog. Desperately he tore his arm free, and started to run again. A whistle sounded in the fog behind him. Another sounded somewhere on the left, and another again. He thrust his head low, and ran till he seemed to have come to a corner somewhere. He turned round that corner and round another corner. He ran on and on. He was now out of the zone of the whistling.

Stop, you fool! Stop ! There's no one coming up after you. He's dead I Dorr'tt you realise that! His dead at last! If you don't get yourself under control again, you¹re lost, damned, done for. There now. Walk. Walk ! JVb need to run. Thafs right. Easy, now, easy.

Ten seconds later he was running again, the pursuing feet coming up behind him, closer and closer behind him.

2

His efforts to fit the key into the keyhole were ludicrous, like a drunken man's. By the time he had turned the key, Judy was already downstairs, she was hastening towards the door.

"Daddy, what is it?"

He looked up at her through red-rimmed eyes. "Oh Judy!" he gasped, as if he had not expected her to be in that house, as if he had expected her to be a hundred miles away.

"What is it, daddy?"

He was suddenly aware the door was still open behind him. He turned round and thrust it &> violently. Then he turned again, and stood there, tottering.

She looked at him. He had lost his hat. His collar was soaked with sweat. His breath came in short gasps. The thing had happened. The inevitable thing she had so feared had happened. She assured herself fiercely she did not know what that thing was, any more than she knew who was involved in it. But he had come for her, though he had come for her blindly, not knowing where his footsteps led him. She would not fail him.

" Come upstairs at once ! " she demanded sharply. " I'll make you a hot drink ! "

" No ! " he brought out. " No ! I've come for . . . " He stood there, wondering what he had come for. " Oh, I've come for my passport ! " he said.

" All right. We'll talk about that soon. Come upstairs."

He stood there, hesitating. She took him by the arm and led him upstairs. His weight almost slipped from out of her arm, down the stairs again. She got him into his room.

" Now sit down there ! " she ordered. " I'll make you that hot drink ! You're all right now ! "

There was a desk in the room where he kept his papers. He stumbled towards the desk. " I want my passport ! " he said, " and my money ! "

" I think they're on you ! " she said. She went over and tapped the right-hand breast-pocket of his coat. " That's it, isn't it ? " He put his hand up against the pocket. " Yes, that's it ! " he said. He smiled stupidly. Then he opened two or three of the top buttons of his waistcoat. There was a pocket there on the left, inside. His fingers felt for something. " Yes, the money's there, too ! " he muttered.

" I'll bring my spirit stove in, and boil some hot water. I'll go and get some whisky and a lemon.^{5*}

He tried to get up again. " I tell you I've got to go now ! " he whimpered. " I've got to go ! " He passed his hand through his soaked hair.

" Where'll you go ? "

He looked at her from under his eyelids. " You know where I'm going," he said, surlily.

" I'm going, too ! " she said.

He straightened himself in the chair, his fingers stiffening on its arm. " You're not ! " he cried. " You mustn't ! You can't ! "

" Oh yes I am ! " she said. " You're in a dreadful state ! I've got to look after you ! "

" But, Judy, don't you see ? You mustn't come ! I must get out of the house, now, at once ! "

" Daddy, listen here ! You must be sensible ! You're going away ! I'll see to that ! But I don't see why it should[^]be to-morrow. Must it ? Wouldn't it be better if we went off in a day or two ? Don't forget ! Nobody knows ! Nothing's happened ! "

He put his head in his hands. " No ! no ! " he cried convulsively. " No ! I want to go now, this very moment ! Do you hear ? " His voice rose in a shrill crescendo.

" You can't ! " she said firmly. " That would be absolutely foolish. You can't go to-night. There's no point in it. We'll go by the first train to-morrow. It's all quite straightforward. I'll

be able to explain it quite easily. You're ill, you've taken a turn for the worse. So I've decided to take you away at once. You see ? All as if nothing had happened. Nothing *has* happened. You understand ? "

He was sobbing into his hands. The tears coursed heavily down between his fingers.

She went over to him and pressed his head against her bosom. " Nothing has happened,"³ she repeated softly. " Nothing has happened. I'll get you that drink now, daddy,"⁵ she murmured.

CHAPTER XIII

I

JUDY HELD OUT the passports to the man at the barrier. The man handed them back without looking up. They walked up the platform to the carriage where their porter had found seats for them.

" There you are, daddy,⁵⁵ she said to him easily. " You see ? It's perfectly simple. No fuss at all.⁵⁵

They took their seats in corners facing each other on the platform side of the carriage. " Are those other corners taken ? ⁵⁵ he asked.

" Yes,⁵⁵ she said. " They have reserve tags on. Don't worry, daddy.⁵⁵

He put his coat-collar up to his ears and wrapped the lower part of his face round with his scarf. He could not bear the transparency of the window beside his face. His fingers fumbled upwards towards the blind.

" You can't, daddy ! You can't ! " she implored him. " It'll make people think you want to hide yourself ! Put your scarf down ! ⁵⁵

" All right ! " He got up from his corner and

walked through the carriage to the corridor. He stood at a window there, studying the rails and signals. Their fellow-passengers got in, a couple of maiden ladies. He twisted his head cautiously round to examine them. They did not seem to add to his fears. A moment or two before the train moved off, Judy remembered she had no reading matter. She bought a handful of magazines and newspapers.

The whistle sounded. The train drew out of the station. Wace came back to his corner-seat again. Judy smiled at him. " All right ? " her eyes asked him. He nodded. She sat there looking at him for some five minutes or so. He looked very pale and haggard ; his eyelids fluttered down over his eyes ; his head jerked once or twice. He was falling asleep ; it would be excellent if he got some sleep.

She put the magazines down beside her and picked up one of the newspapers. It rustled and crackled as she opened it out. Suddenly she felt her father's hands fasten round her wrists.

" Put it away ! " he said fiercely. " Do you hear ? Put it away ! "

She tried to steady him with her eyes. " Yes, daddy ! " she said calmly. " It is a rag. I didn't ask for it ! " She folded the paper and put it behind her. " *The Times* is all right, isn't it ? "

" Ye-es."

She did not read *The Times* long, either. She picked up a magazine and skimmed through the pictures. " Would you like one, daddy ? " She handed him another magazine, and he took it. But it soon slipped between his fingers.

Some minutes later she spoke to him again. " Shall I ring for a drink ? Are you all right ? "

" No ! I don't want a drink ! I'm all right ! "

How could he explain to her that it was not wheels he heard, but the sound of feet remorselessly pursuing ? Dub-a-dub, the feet went, dub-a-dub, dub-a-dub.

The rhythm of the engines of the Channel steamer was identical, dub-a-dub, dub-a-dub, the feet, the running feet. He groaned in his misery. " He is more alive than he has ever been before."

2

She had been to Paris a year or so ago with one of her friends, but he had never been. They had only booked to Paris. There had been no time to see further than that.

" Well, daddy,"⁵ she said. " It's going to be fun in Paris. You'll love it." This was on the journey from Boulogne.

" Yes," he said. The word was merely a sound, because she seemed to expect some sort of a sound from him.

" How long would you like to stay in Paris ? "

" What ? "

" How long would you like to stay in Paris ? "

He took the words separately, and then laboriously assembled them again. Their meaning seeped slowly into his brain.

" Stay in Paris ? " he asked. His speech was indistinct. He did not bring his lips together properly as he formed his words. " I don't want to stay in Paris."

She looked round the other people in the carriage swiftly. They were all French, she thought. But possibly some of them spoke English. She would not force the matter now. " No, daddy, of course not," she said easily. " We want to get to the sunshine as soon as possible."

The attendant came round to say that lunch was being served. " You'd best come along and have something to eat," she said.

" I don't want anything ! "

" You ought to try ! "

" No, Judy, I won't go in there ! "

He wasn't only not hungry. She saw he couldn't bear the idea of sitting at close quarters with other people. He would not be able to manage the implements. His hands had been trembling throughout the whole journey.

" All right! " she resigned herself.

" You go ! " he said. The thought for her

entered briefly into the profound gloom of his preoccupation with himself. It was extinguished almost at once. " If you like !" he added wretchedly.

She was extremely hungry. " No ! " she said, " I'll stay. I'm not hungry."³⁵ She had slipped a bar of chocolate into her bag. " This is all I want ! "

Dub-a-dub, the feet went, *dub-a-dub*, *dub-a-dub*.

On their arrival in Paris, she had their bags put into the luggage-office. " Let's go and stretch our feet," she said. " We'll have some coffee and some *croissants* at a cafe near the station, shall we, and we'll make up our minds what we're going to do."

There was no fog in Paris. The smell of the place invigorated her. It was cold, but there were people sitting outside the cafes, at small tables near the braziers. The taxis hooted and swerved. A small boy in his smock walked along the boulevard with a basket from which projected half a dozen thin loaves of bread a yard long. He walked as casually as if this were some small village in the country. A girl stood on the rounded curb, carefully pencilling her eyebrows with the aid of a small mirror. The clean baby on a hoarding the length of a block

of buildings exhorted the world to use Savon Cadum.

" Well, daddy, will this do ? " She had stopped at one of the cafes on the boulevard.

" No," he said. " Can't you find one in a side street somewhere ? We mustn't be long," he added.

They went down one side street and down another.

" Is this all right ? "

" Yes. This will do. No, Judy, no. Let's go further in, away from the street."

" Daddy. We're in Paris. We're in a side street off a side street. Nobody knows us."

" I know," he said. " I know. I want to go to that table down there."

She sighed. " All right." She ordered some coffee. There were some hard-boiled eggs and sandwiches on the zinc counter. She ordered these too.

" We're not going to stay long," he said suspiciously.

" We're all right for time, daddy. We've got all the time in the world."

" Oh no, we haven't. When docs the next train go ? "

^ Where ? "

")\nywhere. To the south. As far away as possible."

" You mean Marseilles ? "

" Yes, Marseilles, then."

" Wouldn't you like to stay in Paris for a day or two ? In some little hotel, somewhere. We could find one where tourists never go."

" I want to move on," he wailed. " It's too near. You needn't come, if you don't want to."

She saw that there was nothing to be done with him now. His nerves were shot to pieces. There was nothing at all to do but move on.

" Of course we'll move on," she said. " There's a darling, get something inside you."

" That man, behind the counter. Is he listening?"

" Oh daddy, of course he isn't. I'll have to shake you if you talk so foolishly. Get on with your coffee."

They finished their meal. " Well," he said. " What about the next train to Marseilles."

"We'll go to the station and find out."

He rose as if to accompany her. Then he sat down again. " No," he said. " You go yourself. I don't like it near the station. I'll stay here."

" Very well then."

" Come back as soon as you can," he called out after her.

3

" Look ! " she cried. " There's the Mediterranean ! Did you ever see such a lovely colour ! "

" It's lovely ! " he said. " It's lovely." Suddenly she found he was crying. The tears ran steadily down his cheeks. He felt about for his handkerchief.

" Daddy ! " she whispered. " Don't ! You mustn't ! Not here ! Those people are looking ! I'll put you to bed in Marseilles and keep you there for a day or two. You'll be all right when you've had some rest."

" I heard his feet coming up after me all night long.³

" You must pull yourself together. Nobody's coming after you, nobody. You've got away. Do you understand ? We're going to be all right. Look ! Those must be olive groves ! Do you see ? Then we'll make enquiries. We might find a little pension somewhere. What's that you say ? Not a pension ? No ? Oh no ! Of course not. We'll see. We've got time. The most important thing is a couple of days in bed in Marseilles. We should be in in under an hour."

She drove him straight to a hotel in Marseilles and gave him a sleeping-draught. He slept for

THE PURSUER

most of the day. She went out in the ev
for half an hour or so in the Cannebi6re. \V.
she came back, she found him in her room.

" What's the matter, daddy ? I'm so sorry.
I thought I needed some air. I was only out
for half an hour."

" Are the tourist-offices closed ? "

" Yes, daddy. Oh you're not going to start
worrying again. You mustn't. It's silly."

" I want to get away in a ship. Judy, do let
me get away. Til be all right, I know I will,
if we get over to the other side somewhere.
Find out, Judy, when the next ship sails to
Africa. It'll be all right if we get to Africa."

She dropped her hands to her sides helplessly.
" Perhaps you're right," she said. She felt very
tired. " The crossing will do you good. And it'll
all be so different there. I'll go and inquire at
a tourist agency the first thing to-morrow morn-
ing."

" You're a darling," he said. He made for
the door of the room.

" Would you like to dress and come out for
an hour or two ? "

" No, I'll stay and watch the people through
the curtain. You're a good girl, Judy. You go
out if you want to."

" Can I ? "

" Don't stay too long."

. boat was sailing next day to Algiers. He
^emed almost gay when the ship weighed
anchor and they moved away from the harbour-
side.

" This is fine ! " he said. " This is fine ! "
He sniffed the evening breeze keenly. " It's
going to be fine, over there, on the other side."

CHAPTER XIV

i

FOR SEVERAL WEEKS Wace was fairly happy in Algiers. He seemed comforted by the thought that he had put Europe a sea's width behind him. He found a little cafe in the upper town, built up against the wall of the Kasbah, and he seemed to draw assurance from the fact that no one could enter the cafe from behind him. From where he sat, he commanded the city and the port and the bay. He drank innumerable cups of native coffee and once or twice playfully put to his lips a pipe of *kif*. Judy looked on watchfully and with approval. She did not think it would be injurious if he dulled his nerves a little by a tug at the opiate stuff now and again. He was quite happy to go up to the cafe on his own and sit there for hours while Judy wandered about the town.

One day she returned for him in the late afternoon as had been arranged, and she found him gone. A panic seized her. He had heard the footsteps again. He had seen the shadow. She had a wild impulse to go tearing through the

narrow streets calling his name. But she told herself she must not be a fool. He had felt unwell and had gone back to the hotel. That was all there was to it.

She went back to the hotel at once and found she had been right and wrong. He was there right enough, but he had locked the door of the room. He had spread a game of patience before him but had gone no distance with it.

"What on earth's the matter?" she said.
"Why on earth weren't you at the cafe when I came for you?"

"I'm not going to that cafe again."

"Why not?"

"Oh it doesn't matter."

"Come now, daddy. Why not?"

"A boy came to the cafe and called old Hussein to come down to him."

"Hussein?"

"Yes, that's the man who keeps it."

"Well?"

"So Hussein went down and talked to somebody. Down in the street. A stranger. I think he was English."

"Are you sure he was English? Did you hear? Hussein doesn't know any English. You remember, we tried him?"

"The man looked English."

"He might have been anything. And what's

wrong with Hussein talking to a stranger, to an Englishman for that matter ? "

Wace's jaw set firm. " I'm not going back to that cafe again."

" All right, daddy. If you don't want to. We'll find another cafe."

But that wasn't enough. They had to find another hotel, too. They moved out to the suburb of Mustapha, and were there only four or five days. They took the train eastward to Constantine. The dark wild hills of the inland country seemed somehow to soothe him. It was as if he thought those sheer walls of rock were too steep for foot to follow and there was not sustenance, even for a ghost, in pastures as arid as these. They stayed for two months in Constantine. He would sit in the cafes looking down on the ravines which engirdled the town. Who would dare follow him here ? One day she saw him thrust through an open window a pot of flowers that stood on a ledge there. They heard the thing smash on the rocks far below. He turned to her and smiled.

But the smile went soon. The fear came back into his eyes again. They were not alone when they went along the rock ramparts in the cool

of the evening. They were not alone when they went back again to their hotel.

So they went on to Tunis. It was in Tunis he called her over to him one day. " Listen, Judy," he said. " I've been thinking about you."⁵⁵

" That's fine,"⁵ she replied jocularly. " Aren't we a devoted pair ! "

" I don't think it's fair to you," he replied sombrely.

" What do you mean ? "

" I'm not going to let you waste your life like this."

" Don't be silly ! " Her voice was quite sharp.

" I want you to leave me. I've made up my mind." He spoke with some pretence of assurance. " You can go back to England, if you like." His voice was less assured.

" I won't go back to England, or anywhere else. You know perfectly well I won't."

" I've told you I want you to go back,"⁵ he said tiredly. " All right. I'll read my book, now." She left him to his book. She was touched and a little disturbed that he should be thinking of her again in these terms. In small matters he had been thoughtful from the beginning.

Three days later she came back from a brief excursion into the bazaars to find out that he had packed up his bag and had left the hotel. He had left a message at the desk to say the lady would

know where he had gone. " Oh yes," she said casually. " I thought it was to-morrow he was going."

She realised immediately that any idea of going out after him to find him was useless and dangerous. He might have doubled on his tracks westward back to Constantine, but she thought that was improbable. He might have gone southward towards Sousse and Sfax. He might have taken a ticket at one of the shipping offices in any direction at all. That would not have been too hard to find out, but she thought it unwise to draw attention to him by instituting inquiries. On the whole she thought it likeliest that he had gone to some other hotel in the town. He would probably keep to his room for days, perhaps for a week or two. Then he would come back again.

Ten days of extreme anxiety followed. How could he possibly get on without her? If a sudden panic descended on him, what might he not do to himself? Ought she not to get in touch with some private detective agency here? Not that, above all. He would be more than morbidly sensitive to the faintest hint that he was being shadowed or inquired after.

She kept herself under control, though it was difficult. On the morning of the tenth day after his disappearance, there was a knock at her door.

It was not her breakfast. They had already brought it to her. She knew who it was.

" Come in," she said quietly.

" Good morning, Judy," he said. He looked very pale. " It's very good of you to be here still"

" What did you expect ? "

" Pm glad you're here," he said. " I was very frightened, sometimes."

" You'd best have a good hot bath," she said.

" They hadn't any hot baths where you were ? "

" No."

" All right then. We'll go out to lunch when you're ready, shall we ? "

" Yes, Judy, thank you." He was very subdued.

They made an excursion next day alongside the flamingo-haunted lagoon to La Goulette and two or three miles further, to Carthage and its ruins. The ruins did not stir his sullen imagination, but the flamingoes delighted him. He chuckled with pleasure. A flush came back into his cheeks again. He seemed like someone about to take a turn for the better after a long illness. There was a serenity in the way he sat back that night, after dinner, over his coffee. He asked for a cigar, too. It was becoming urgent to say one or two things to him, but she thought it would-be

unkind to invade this poor mood of quietness, which came upon him so rarely. She spoke to him the following evening.

" Are you all right for money, daddy ? "

He smiled at her slyly. " That's all right. I saw to all that. We can go on for a long time as we're going on now."

" The house is locked up, you know."

" Yes."

" Would you like me to get Mrs. Williams back some time ? You won't want to be travelling always, will you ? "

All the colour left his cheeks. He put his hand before his mouth. " Hush ! For God's sake, be quiet ! Don't mention names ! "

" But, daddy, there's a hundred thousand Mrs. Williamses. All over Wales——"

He got up from his chair. " Pm going ! " he cried. " You're bad to me !" His lips were quivering.

She felt that now, having gone so far, she must go a little further. She rose, too, and put her hands on his shoulders. " Sit down, daddy ! " she bade him. " Sit down ! " He doubled up limply into his chair. " Listen ! Nobody can hear in this room ! I wouldn't talk if there was the slightest chance of anybody catching a word. If you're happy travelling about from place to place, Pm happy, too. Most girls I know would give their

eyes for the chance. But I want to make sure it's the best thing for you. It might be perfectly all right for us to go back to England. We can't know unless we make some effort to find out."

All the colour left his cheeks. His lips were almost as pale. " I can't go back to England ! " he whimpered. " I can't ! Leave me alone, Judy ! "

" Daddy ! " She went over to him and sat on the arm of his chair. She passed her hand gently over his forehead. " Daddy, darling, I'm here, see. I'm beside you ! What are you frightened of? You were so clever, weren't you ? You know you were."

He made no reply.

" Yes, daddy ? " she insinuated gently. " If you'd only let me know what you're frightened of. Is it people ? Is it something less than people ? " She went on playing with his hair, one arm round his shoulder. Then slowly she became aware there was too much stiffness in the head, the whole body was rigid. She whipped round and faced him. His eyes were staring straight in front of him. They looked like opaque glass balls. Only in his fingers was there any movement at all. They dithered faintly like moths half dead. She seized his head and chafed it between the palms of her hands. She snatched the flowers out of a vase and sprinkled the water on him sharply.

" Daddy ! Daddy ! " she moaned. " Til never talk like that to you again. Never again ! "

His eyelids flickered at last. He looked up into her eyes stupidly. " What were you saying, Judy ? What were you saying ? "

" Til put you to bed ! " she whispered. " Come, darling ! "

She was awakened a couple of nights later by the sound of feet in the next room marching steadily, a few paces forward, a few paces backward, then forward again. It was her father. She debated with herself whether she ought to go to his room and reason with him and urge him to get to bed again. She wondered whether he would resent her intrusion. Must he be left alone to fight his daemon ? As she lay there, miserably wondering what she had best do, the feet halted. She heard him open his door and come along the passage to her room. She had jumped out of bed and opened the door before he knocked.

" Oh, daddy, what is it ? Can I do anything ? "

He held a folded handkerchief to his cheek. " I have a tooth,⁵³ he said. " Do you happen to have anything ? "

" Oh, you poor thing ! " She rushed back into her room and searched her things. " Nothing, nothing at all ! Oh yes, some aspirin ! Shall we

wake the people up and find out if there's any chance of a dentist at this hour ? "

" No, I'll wait till to-morrow. If I could only get an hour or two's sleep. . . ."

" I know. We'll wake Ali up. He sleeps on a mattress in the passage. He knows where everything is. He'll get us some brandy." She remembered that she could usually get him off to sleep with a glass of brandy and a couple of aspirins. " I'll powder a couple of aspirins, too, and put them in the tooth. Come to the light and show me."

That is how it came about there was a whole bottle of brandy in his bedroom, excepting for the glassful he had taken to swallow his aspirins.

He went to the dentist next day and had the tooth drawn. The next few days were unusually tranquil. He went to bed that evening and read for an hour, then switched his light out. But as he slept, one after one the hounds of nightmare were unleashed. He ran and ran with the hounds in full cry after him. He turned his head and saw their fangs grinning and their slavering chops. He threw himself down before them so that they should at length fall upon him and tear him to pieces, so that he should be at peace at last. But an invisible hand restored them to their leashes, so that, though they strained towards him, coughing and grunting hideously, they got no

nearer to him. At length he rose wearily to his feet, and began running again. Reran faster and faster, but the beasts were slipped from their leashes again. They ran as fast as he.

He woke up from the nightmare in a pool of sweat. His pyjamas seemed to have been steeped in icy water. He remembered the brandy on the shelf above the washstand and filled his tooth-glass with a hand that shook like a leaf. His hand was a little steadier when he filled the glass a second time. He went on drinking till he had drained the whole bottle.

He had hardly taken more than a finger or two of strong drink for many years now. He was drunk. He had passed completely out of himself. He looked round the room cautiously to see if he was looking at himself. Then, to make sure, he went over to the bed and thumped the bed-clothes. No, he was not there. He was not under the bed, either. Satisfied, he went back to the brandy bottle. He had drained every drop of it, so he looked round for some other occupation. His eye lit on a blotting-pad on the small table by the window. It was a blotting-pad, but it had no blotting-paper. There was also a bottle of ink there, and a pen, and one or two hotel sheets of paper and envelopes. He was shivering a little, so he went across to the hook where he had hung his dressing-gown and put it on. Then he sat down

at the table again and wrote a letter. It was very brief.

DEAR SHARPLES,

I haven't any doubt you are in hell. My only regret is that I didn't send you sooner. I am in hell, too, if that's any comfort to you. But you've not caught me yet.

Yours truly,
H. WAGE.

He noticed there was no blotting-paper in the pad, so he waved the letter before his face for a minute or two, breathing on it now and again. He then passed his finger over it lightly to see that it was quite dry. Then he folded it and put it neatly into one of the hotel envelopes. He addressed it to :

SIDNEY SHARPLES
In Hell

and made sure the envelope, too, was quite dry. He then addressed himself to the process of the best way to get Sharples's letter forwarded, and he decided the people in his office in Mincing Lane would probably be in touch with him. He forwarded it in their care.

Then he went over to his coat and took out his wallet. No, he had no stamp. He had written no letters lately. He had best hand it over to the

youth, AH, to post it the first thing to-morrow morning. AH was the hotel youth-of-all-work. By day he did all the running and fetching for the hotel, by night he slept on a mattress extended along the stone passage in front of the entrance door. Wace opened his door carefully and went downstairs. AH was leaning up on his mattress, supported on the palms of his hands.

"Yes, *monsieur*" he whispered. He had been used more than once for delicate errands with which clients of the hotel thought it best not to entrust *madame*. But now he was required for no such gallant service.

"Post this letter first thing to-morrow morning," said Wace. "Keep the change from this note,"

He had not only a bad cold but a worse headache next morning. He saw Judy's eye rest a moment on the empty brandy bottle on the shelf above the washstand. He hung his head like a guilty schoolboy.

"Yes, Judy," he said, "I'm afraid I did, every drop of it. You'd best not leave any more about."

"I won't," she said grimly. "Trust me."

She doctored him very capably and he was all right again in a week or so.

•The nightmare came back to him. The pursuer looked at him through the café windows from under the brim of his hat. The pursuer came running up in blue overalls from the docks, his feet going softly dub-a-dub, dub-a-dub, on the cobbles. Wace went into his daughter's room early one morning.

"Judy,⁵³ he said. " I know you like this place.^{5*}

" Yes," she replied, a ray of hope quickening her heart. Yes, she liked this place. If they had to be away another few months, or a year or two, it might as well be Tunis as anywhere else. Was he feeling safer here ? Did he think he had got away at last ?

" It's the nicest place we've been to, isn't it ? " he went on.

" I think it is in many ways ",

" Would you like to stay here ? "

" What do you mean ",

"Till I come back for you? or might for you ? "

Judy, Judy, I must be thinking about, daddy ? "

" Then you shall go, "

"There are so many people here. He looked about him helplessly. too many people! im frightened ! Let's go to some small place i rU be quiet there ! Just a few

" Yes, daddy. When shall we go ? She knew

that as soon as the sickness came upon him again, it would brook no delay.

" This morning ? " he asked eagerly. " Can we go this morning ? "

" Yes, of course, daddy ! " He did not hear her faint sigh or mark the hopeless expression in her eyes.

They went on to the small towns of Sousse and Sfax, but the pursuer went after them. From Sfax they took the single-track railway into the heart of the country and attained the oasis of Gafsa. From Gafsa they went still further afield to the oasis of Tozeur. Here he walked with a firmer foot. His shoulders straightened. But the railway went so far as Tozeur. He felt he was still vulnerable. They bumped out on an old Citroen over fifteen miles of baked sand-tracks and so reached the oasis of Nefta, which stands on the edge of the enormous barren inland sea called the Chott Djerid. " I think I shall be all right here," he said. He looked as bronzed and fit as a soldier of the legion. " I'm sure you will, daddy," she said. " This isn't the other world at all. It's a world all to itself. It's lovely ! "

2

Yes, Nefta was a world all to itself, poised between two dimensions of deep greenery and

white hallucination. He would often sit for hours in the shadow of the mosque with his back to the palms and the pools and the lilies, tracing fantastic designs in the hot sand, till at length the fervid disk of the sun sank and the desert owls came whooping out of the emptiness.

They arrived towards the latter days of the fast and feast month of Ramadan. The minaret that by day had been a white tulip, blossomed into flame at dusk. The oil-lamps were lit round the circuit of the parapet, so that it seemed as if a handful of stars had tumbled down from the sky head-over-heels and were caught in the iron sconces of the parapet while they fell. All night long they wandered about from booth to cafe, from cafe to booth. They sipped the cinnamon-scented tea, cross-legged on the straw-matted platform of the cafes. They went to the booths of the dancing dolls and the booths of more alluring dancers—the Circassian Fatima, whose face was a magnolia-bud and whose limbs were as volatile as water, the Kabyle Ayesha, who danced like a willow in a wind. Or they saw Mustapha enchant his four deadly snakes out of their wicker basket, numbing them with the wail of the desert bagpipes, stupefying them with the thud of the drums, till they were poised erect like a sculptor's snakes, carved out of cold jade.

Then Ramaddn came to its appointed end, and

the suspension seemed to leave him blank and timorous, as if only that unconscionable excitement had held his doom at arm's length. He had been so interested, so genuinely happy all this time, that the first relapse struck her like a blow in the face. They were sitting at a cafe one evening under its plaited palm-leaf portico, when suddenly he seized her by the arm.

" That man there ! " he said sharply. " The one coming down the market-place ! Who is he ? "

There were half a dozen Arabs approaching, their burnouses drawn over their foreheads. She looked round the square to see if there was any European who had caught his eye. There was none. Elsewhere the Arabs sat about, squatting on their haunches, talking gravely with one another, or not talking at all. There was little animation in the square. It had been intensely hot all day. Everybody was happy enough to stay in his place, savouring the soft wind that had sprung up not many minutes ago.

" Who do you mean, daddy ? I don't see anybody ! "

" What's he hiding his face like that for ? "

" Which one ? He's not hiding his face. He's just got his burnous down like the others ! Which one ? "

" The one hanging behind there ! Do you see ? He's looking at us. Now he's looking away ! "

" I don't know who he is ! Just one of the Arabs of the oasis ! Oh, daddy, *please* ! "

" I don't like him, Judy ! "

" Hello, look ! He's coming here ! He's probably got something to sell ! Yes ? Yes ? " she asked the Arab eagerly.

The fellow was standing beside them. He had noticed there were a couple of strangers at the cafe. He dived into a worn leather satchel suspended over his arm and brought out an assortment of rough desert brooches and bracelets. " *Tris bon!*" he insisted. " *Bon march!* " "

" There you are, daddy, you silly creature ! " she chuckled. " Buy something, daddy ! Buy that brooch ! I could use it as a hat-pin."

" Sorry, Judy," he muttered, shamefacedly. " Silly of me. It won't happen again ! "

It did not happen again for several days. And then she knew the respite was over. Her heart flooded with wretchedness. He was afraid to go through the narrow streets of the oasis at night on their way from the little square to their hotel, for his fear would suddenly fix on some hapless Arab approaching them with his burnous drawn down over his forehead. He would turn suddenly in his tracks. " Come this way ! " he would beseech her piteously. " That fellow there ! He's

no ban Arab at all ! He doesn't walk like an Arab ! "

They arranged one morning to go out with one Abdul, a young guide from the oasis, to take a walk along the edge of the Chott. A faint breeze was blowing and she felt that his spirit might expand in the spaciousness of that white desolation. When they had gone on thus for some time, Abdul suggested that they should turn in upon a strait which led across the Chott here, where it was narrowest. Nowhere in that region were the mirages so clear, with the shimmering salt-wastes on every side and the alchemic sun overhead dissolving in its own heat and light. Abdul bade them keep closely behind him in single file, for it was only to his trained eye that the path presented a different surface from the salt scurf of the Chott on either side of it. Her father walked between herself and Abdul. She did not know how long or how far they had gone on thus, for time and space seemed outside their normal dimensions. She heard bells ringing and camels snarling far off in the shaggy rondure of the oasis, but it seemed those sounds were checked and refracted from the convex surface of a globe that isolated them. Tiny worms and large snakes of heat undulated and curved round upon themselves and so consumed themselves. The level salt at the edge of the horizon suddenly cracked like

ice in a thaw, and blue water flowed up v, the fissures. A lake of incredible blueness spread on that region and a dark shore asserted itself where there had been no shore for countless salty leagues. One date-palm larger than all the rest spread out its fretted vans over the sweet water.

Then suddenly a movement near at hand threw a quick grey shadow over the blue myth half a continent away and extinguished it. Her eyes were aware that the solid line that, with herself for one of its termini, for few or many minutes, few or many hours, had been moving along the solid strait, the assurance of truth and safety in that false and perilous world, had been broken.

"Daddy !" she shrieked. "Daddy ! Where are you going ? It's not safe !"

But Abdul had sped after him. With both his lean brown hands on his collar, he pulled him away from the quaking salty quick-sand that was already rising round his ankles.

"*Pas bon !*" he said severely. "*Tris mauvais !*"

Wace's face was as pock-marked and ashen grey as the Chott itself. He was panting like an animal at bay. "He was after me !" he whispered, his eyes large with fright. The sweat ran down his face in a steady sheet.

"Come carefully, daddy !" she said. "We'll

go back. There's room enough. Don't be frightened. I don't think we did right to choose this place."

" It was like a lot of horses galloping ! " he breathed.

" Yes, daddy," she said. " But there aren't any, are there ? Take your time. That's right. That's fine."

3

He had a fierce repugnance against going back the way he had come. It was as if he felt that his only chance of escape lay in moving on and on until he had attained some place where the pursuer was at length outwitted. If he went back on his tracks again, he would come up against him, in some small waiting-room. Their trains would come alongside each other in a siding. He would be waiting for him at a ticket-barrier.

He was aware it was possible to go from Nefta deeper into the heart of the desert, on to El Oued and Touggourt. He tried hard to make Judy go that way, but she stood firm. She knew he was quite unfit to stand the hard travelling by desert car. She knew also that the same difficulty would present itself a day or two later. They would go to Biskra and from Biskra they would have to come out on to their former track again. There

was nothing for it but to go back to Tunis by Sfax and Sousse.

He was very dispirited when they got to Tunis. " I don't like coming back ! " he repeated. " I don't like it ! We'll take a boat somewhere at once ! To-day ! "

" Yes, daddy," she agreed. " It'll do you good to get out to sea. The sea-wind will clear your head. It'll be fine."

He grimaced. " It was a mistake to go to the desert. It was dreadful."

" Wouldn't you like to rest up a day or two in the hotel where we were before ? I think you ought. Besides, we may have to. It depends on the boats."

" No," he said. " Not there. We mustn't go back there. Let's put the bags away and go and find out."

" Where would you like to go ? Tangier ? We could probably get a boat to Tangier."

" Hush ! " he bade her. He looked round suspiciously. " Don't talk so loud." He raised his voice. " Yes, we might go to Tangier." Then he dropped his voice again. He spoke to her without turning his head. " We'll go the other way instead, see ? You know where I mean ? "

They took tickets that morning for Alexandria. There was a boat sailing that same afternoon. It meant, too, that they did not need to go to a

hotel in Tunis. He was distrustful of Tunis. He sniffed the air suspiciously.

" I don't like it," he said, more than once. " I wish we hadn't had to come back here."

" But daddy, there wasn't anything else for it."

" I don't know. I suppose not. I don't like it."

He refused to go into the town, so, after taking their tickets they drove out to the Belvedere Park. They spent an hour or two there and had an early lunch, then, though it was still several hours too soon for the boat, he insisted they should go down to the dockside. It was as if he wanted to keep the boat under his eye, to make sure it would not go off without him. He was irritated to find that a big warehouse fronted the part of the quay where the boat was berthed. Unless they loitered about on their feet for some hours, in the dust and swelter, they would have to move further off. They sat down under the tattered awning of a cheap cafe, their bags under the table between their feet. A short distance along the waterside, between the boat from Alexandria and the cafe, a small passenger-steamer was getting under way. The passengers were already arriving, luggage was being trundled up the gangways. Its siren hooted once and again. There was, however, still little sign of life on the boat for Alexandria.

" I wish they'd get a move on," grumbled

Wace. " They've not even got the gangway down."⁵⁵

" We're not due to leave for some hours," his daughter said patiently.

Then suddenly a hearty voice hailed them.

" Hello, *monsieur*. Hello, *mademoiselle*. How are you ? " It spoke in bastard Arab-French.

" Who the devil's that ? " Wace whispered fearfully. A large dark face was grinning friendly into theirs.

" Oh, hello, AH ! " said Judy. " It's the Arab boy from the hotel," she explained. " Don't you remember ? "

" Oh, yes," said Wace hurriedly. " Give him a few francs. Tell him to go."

" Here. Buy yourself some cigarettes ! " requested Judy.

Ali grinned gratefully, displaying teeth as white as soap-suds. " Thank you. Thank you." He was about to proceed on his errand, when suddenly he recalled something. " Oh, yes," he said. " I hope the *monsieur*, he find you."

" What ? " said Wace. " What's he saying ? " His eyes were starting from his head. The fingers round his coffee-cup trembled so that it clicked in the saucer like a castanet.

" What are you talking about ? " said Judy sharply. " You mean some guide, do you, who wanted to take us round ? "

" Oh, no," said AH, quite crestfallen. " He was not guide. He asked for the *monsieur*. He was sad the *monsieur* had gone."

Wace's breath came heavily through his nostrils. " Ask him," he bade her, " What sort of a gentleman he was ? What did he say to him ?"

" What I say to him ? I say the *monsieur* and *mademoiselle* have gone to Sousse. See, I remember." He looked up pathetically for approval. " I hold the bags, while *mademoiselle* buys tickets."

" You'd best go now, AH, do you hear ? " She felt she must get rid of him that very moment, at all costs. What was the lout standing about for, with his great goggle eyes and his thick lips ?

" No." Her father's voice came faintly. " Ask what was he like. We must know."

" What was he like ? " she asked furiously.

The youth's wits were quite scattered now. His head was shaking from side to side ludicrously. " He was like ? How shall I say ? He was a *monsieur*"

" Was he English ? French ? "

" I not know. He talk French, I think. Yes, he talk French."

" Was he big ? "

" Not big."

" Was he small ? "

" Not small."

" Father, we can get nothing out of him. Let's get rid of him."

" No, Judy, no." He himself addressed the Arab. " What more can you remember ? See. Here's money. What can you remember."

The lad gazed covetously at the money. It seemed to set the mechanism of his mind working. He described a cut in the cheek, he suggested a limp, alternately he said the man had a beard, and that his cheeks and chin were pale like *mademoiselle's*.

" Father," she begged. " He's just lying for the money. I'll send him away."

He sank back into his chair, with his eyes closed. There was not a vestige of colour in his face. " I'm glad we're going to Alexandria," he said, very articulately. " That doctor in Alexandria should do me lots of good."

" Yes," she whispered. She wondered if the lad's news had sent him quite crazy.

" Send him away," he went on. " Give him a decent tip."

She got rid of him. The boy went off bowing and smirking, but there was an air of bewilderment in his face. Judging from the tip, he had not done wrong, after all. Yet they had seemed very angry, very strange, he did not know why. He ~~went~~ went off, scratching his thick pate.

"Daddy, what did you say that for? I don't understand. Listen, daddy. It's nothing at all. It needn't be anyone at all——"

"Which way has he gone?" he asked. He did not open his eyes.

"Towards the town. Quite likely it was some tradesman or other that the people at the hotel——"

"Is he still in sight?"

"Yes. No. He's just turned the corner. I'll get you a drop of brandy. It'll pull you together."

"No. I don't want anything at all." He spoke in measured tones like someone rehearsing a part. She looked at him in astonishment and alarm. She had been more than half afraid he would give way to a wild fit of panic the moment the blundering fool of an Arab boy left them, but this grey immobility was more frightening. He thought for a little while, then he said: "How long do you reckon it will be before that small steamer moves off?"

"Which one? The one along the waterside?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Impatiently, he answered his own question. "Less than a hour, I should think. I should say half an hour. What do you think?"

"I'll go and ask, if you like. Or the man at the cafe here is sure to know."

" You must do nothing of the sort. The mail-bag is still hooked up on the gangway ? "

" Yes."

" There's still a certain amount of stuff to go into the hold ? "

" Yes." She had not the faintest idea what he was getting at.

" Pay this bill." She paid it. He opened his eyes. He looked calm and collected, as if he were in his office in London, settling the details of some deal. " We'll take our bags and go along the quayside to the right. There are some taxis there behind the warehouses. We'll get a taxi and cruise about. Ten minutes later we'll ask the driver to drive us straight to that boat."

" What for ? We don't know where it's going,"

" Exactly," he said.

" But our tickets, daddy. We've got our tickets for——"

" Be quiet, Judy ! Are you ready ? "

Then she looked at him. At last she understood.

" Sorry ! " she muttered. " What a fool I am ! "

Twenty minutes later, a taxi deposited them on the quayside opposite the boat. They rushed up the gangway, breathlessly, only a few minutes before it was detached and trundled away.

" That was a close shave !" they congratulated each other. The steward taking the tickets smiled sympathetically.

" Tickets, *monsieur* ! "

" No time to get tickets ! " Wace gasped.

" Thought we'd best do it on board ! "

" *Molto piacere* ! "

The boat was making for Messina in Sicily, by way of Trapani and Palermo. They booked for Messina.

4

She could not remember when she had seen him in such good form. Every now and again he chuckled to himself like a small boy who has got the better of a schoolmaster. As they steamed down the canal towards the harbour opening, and the minarets and towers of Tunis dwindled behind them, he stationed himself in the stern and gazed triumphantly at the city he had outwitted. She thought once he stuck his tongue out at it. But she herself was not happy. She had no idea where they stood now. She had little enough idea before, but she had worked out some sort of system in the light of which she resisted or yielded to his fears. She had tried to extract from him the exact nature of those fears and had not succeeded. But as far as her own knowledge or experience was concerned, she had treated them as purely psychological, they had no relation with tangible fact.

A fresh element had now entered the situation.
NP

Who was this mysterious caller who had inquired after them in the Tunis hotel ? Had he inquired after her father, or after both of them ? Was it not even possible that he had inquired only after her, some preposterous gallant who had eyed her with favour, found out where she lived and imagined he had only to present himself to get what he wanted out of her ? The thought sickened her, but she would have infinitely preferred that facile solution of the mystery, and she knew in her bones that she would cheat herself if she would permit herself to accept it even for a moment.

The caller had inquired after her father. She reproached herself bitterly for not having made a more intelligent effort to extract from the boy, Ali, some coherent picture of the stranger. She should have handled him differently, she should have wheedled him back into peace of mind again, or bullied him until he was too frightened to think of telling anything but the truth. But it had been impossible at that moment to think of anything at all excepting the effect that the boy's news might produce on her father. For the first time since they had left London, he was made aware that something more substantial than a ghost had come up out of the darkness and interested itself in him. If mere ghosts had so hounded him, how would he react to grim flesh and blood ? She had been ready for anything.

She had been ready for him to dither and foam in panic, to fall back in a dead faint, from which someone not wholly the same as he might emerge.

But no, he had not reacted so at all. The colour had left his face, but his hand had not trembled, his mind had worked clearer than it had worked for months. And once he had carried through his plan, once they were embarked on this unanticipated journey, he was, if only briefly, a bright-eyed young man again. The steamer was swinging out now into the open gulf, midway between the two breakwaters that protect the harbour. He threw back his head and laughed loudly. It was a grand joke.

Then suddenly she realised that it was precisely because the thing that had now manifested itself in the course of this insensate pursuit was something more substantial than a ghost that the monstrous burden of his heart had been lightened. He had not himself been able to distinguish whether any carnal creature flung the shadow that fell so menacingly before him on stone pavement and salty sand. Now he had the testimony of another human being that it was flesh and blood that followed him, testimony all the more valuable because a wretched half-breed lad provided it, who slept of nights like a dog on a straw palliasse. It was human, it had no more than one

brain at a time and two pairs of limbs. It was something you could outwit, you could cut and run and dart off at right angles, leaving it bewildered in the rear, to go puffing and lumbering off to Alexandria, say.

He would regret it later, but there was no time to regret it now, the fact that he did not know whether the creature was fat or slim, old or young, fair or dark. It was enough for him to know it was merely human.

But was he fair or dark ? Was he fat or slim ? She found herself looking round among the passengers on deck, the commercial travellers, the small farmers or shopkeepers, to see if any of them might be he. As her neck twitched towards her shoulder, as her eyes swivelled sideways and took in all they could see and then swivelled back again, she was conscious of an imitation of her father's gestures so exact as to be in the nature of parody. She smiled wryly. It was not that she feared for her own sake the incubus of his nightmare. She knew, whether it was a matter of days or a matter of hours, her father would soon enough need once more all she could supply of quiet nerves and a clear head.

About a couple of hours after Tunis had gone dpwn into the sea behind them, a mountain

came into sight, condensing into shape between the blue vacuums of sea and sky. It was the island of Pantellaria. Like the suspended cup of a streaked tiger-lily the volcano floated on the waters.

" Hello ! " said Wace. " We seem to be making for this island here. Do we stay long ? "

" We anchor out here for a couple of hours," said the steward who had greeted the panting Englishman and the young lady at the top of the gangway. He had taken a great fancy to them. He thought their feat very English and comical. " You could not rush out to the boat from Pantellaria at the last moment as you did in Tunis, *signore* ! " He thrust his elbow lightly into Wace's ribs.

" No," said Wace, " no ! " His eyes were shining. He turned suddenly to the steward. " If I were in Pantellaria—is that how you pronounce it?—I shouldn't want to ! " His daughter looked at him with surprise and pleasure. There was a flush on his cheeks. His shoulders were thrust back to let the sweet sharp air flow into his lungs. " What an idiot I was to let him go to the desert," she told herself. " The sea's the place for him ! He'll be himself in a few weeks with this air and sunshine. We must find some small place by the sea, somewhere in Sicily ! "

" Hello ! " cried Wace. " There seem to be fires all over the island ! That's strange ! There isn't anything to burn, is there, up on the hill-side ? "

The steward was delighted to take him in hand. " Those *arefumaroli*, as they call themselves. The whole place is a volcano, not quite dead yet. The *fumaroli* are whiffs of sulphur from below." He pointed downward facetiously, and imitated the devil's horns with two fingers on his forehead.

" Straight from Hell, eh ? " laughed Wace. He found the idea irresistibly funny. He laughed again, quite uproariously. The steward joined in the laughter, till the two gentlemen stood and swayed on the deck, the tears pouring down their cheeks. The passengers near by looked on curiously. One or two smiled. One or two moved away.

" If I lean down over the hole," asked Wace, " could I look directly down into Hell, do you think ? "

" Ho ! Ho ! Ho ! " laughed the steward. " You could see all the little devils ! "

" And the big devils ? I'd like to see the big devils, too ! "

" And the big devils, of course ! "

" If you'd hold one of my hands," said Wace, " I'd reach down with the other till I could

pull their tails. Would you give me a hand ? "

" If you wouldn't pull me in ! " gasped the steward, patting his belly under the distended blue trousers.

" No, I wouldn't pull you in ! " laughed Wace easily. Then his face darkened. " What do you mean ? " His tone was cold and severe. The steward goggled, puzzled. But the gaiety came back into the Englishman's face again almost as quickly as it had been eclipsed. " I should like to live in Pantellaria," he said. " It must be a gay place ! "

" Ah, gay, that is another matter ! " the steward was forced to qualify. " A diet of fish and raisins is not gay ! "

They were letting the anchor-chain slip through the hawse-pipe into the water. A tiny armada of rowing-boats hove up along the narrow channel that led out from the harbour into the open roadstead. Wace turned to Judy. An idea had struck him.

" What would you say, Judy ? " He spoke in a half-whisper. " How about going back in one of those boats ? We didn't even know ourselves the steamer was going to stop here. Wouldn't it be a brilliant idea ? " He looked at her a little doubtfully ; once more there was something of the schoolboy in his demeanour, the schoolboy who makes a suggestion too

clever by half to his teacher, and is rather afraid he will be snubbed for his pains.

She felt he had had his head too much that day. Sooner or later he would pay for these indiscretions, these colt-like buckings and boltings.

"Listen, daddy!" she said urgently. "It won't do ! It won't do at all ! It was all right once. Jumping on board, I mean, without tickets. That can happen to anyone. But we've booked to Messina, remember. We can't jump a second time. We just can't do it ! "

He looked at her scornfully. "What are you afraid of, Judy ? " he sneered. "What are you so nervy about ? All right ! I'll give in to you ! I'm enjoying the voyage anyhow ! " Then he bent towards her ear. "We've got clear, I tell you ! Do you understand ? We've got clear ! " He walked away from her and joined his friend, the steward, who was getting busy with the ship's ladder. The rowing-boats had come within hailing distance. Wace made a megaphone out of his hands. "Hi ! " he bawled. "*Come sta ?* "

"*Bern ! E lei?*" the first boatman replied to the jovial foreign gentleman.

They did not disembark either at Trapani or Palermo, though her father had assured Judy cordially there was no reason at all why she should not get off and stretch her legs for a few hours. The thought of Sicily had always

attracted her, but somehow she felt she could not leave him on the boat behind her, and he flatly refused to go ashore. He was more vulnerable, she felt, in this mood of queer fixed gaiety than in the dark moods when every nerve was alert for the pursuing shadow.

"It would be different," he said, "if Sicily was really an island. But it isn⁵t. It⁵s too big. It's a country. I don't want to go into a town either. I'm happy here, in this boat. I wish we could stay on for weeks and weeks." He looked round the boat affectionately, as if he had designed it, or had something to do with the sailing of it. For herself, she found her cabin stuffy and the food dull. She did not like the way her father's friend, the steward, ogled her, and she got no pleasure in the contemplation of any of the passengers. She would be glad when they got to Messina.

Both at Trapani and Palermo, when the new passengers started embarking, she found herself hanging about the head of the gangway, scrutinising them as they came aboard. "But this is stupid!" she reproved herself. "This is completely ridiculous! What interest can these people be to me? It isn⁵t as if there can be the faintest connection between our friend in Tunis and any of these people! I wonder what's happening to me! I'm going silly!" She looked

at her father. He had emerged out of his shell completely. He was in the middle of a group of passengers who had embarked at Tunis, chattering away amiably. He puffed every now and again at a cigar.

"Judy," he called out to her. "Come and meet Cavaliere Respighi. Isn't it funny ! We used to import pumice from his brother, in the old days in Doomington ! Pumice from the Lipari Islands ! We're going to pass quite close to them, just short of Messina. This is my daughter, *cavaliere* \ "

Her heart sank. She was appalled. Hitherto he had not even uttered her name aloud. He had given no hint who the young woman with him might be, daughter or young wife or nurse. Now he summoned her by name as his daughter. He spoke of his old associations with Doomington. He was littering his trail as thick with clues as the hares on a schoolboy hare-and-hounds chase. She came over to the *cavaliere*, stood about awkwardly for a minute or two, and then, before she was quite aware of it, she was standing once more at the head of the gangway, looking suspiciously out of the corner of her eye into the faces of the new passengers. "Though God knows," she said to herself bitterly, "what I expect to see, or how I shall recognise it when I see it."

From far off across the limpid night the high-lifted torch of Stromboli announced the Lipari Islands, where the ancients fabled that Æolus ruled his winds. That night he had them well at heel, except for one small zephyr that had begged if it might go wandering over the violet silk waters. It was a zephyr so small and cool that the silk fabric was not more ruffled than if a swallow or two had stroked it. The stars blinked as if Stromboli's torch had come up too close to the night's forehead. The engines rumbled sleepily.

Judy was standing in the stern looking down at the filigree of ivory lace that momentarily was ravelled and unravelled in the boat's wake. She felt a finger on her shoulder and heard a whisper in her ear. " Come this way, Judy. I have something to tell you."

" Certainly, daddy." She wondered why, if he had something to tell her, he did not tell her there and then. She wondered why he needed to bend and whisper so melodramatically in her ear. She walked after him. He walked with exaggerated softness. He turned and put his finger to his lips and said " Hush ! " Then he halted against the boat-rail at a spot not at all more secluded than the one where she had been standing.

" Are you sure there's no one about ? " he asked, and looked round.

" I don't think so. What's all this about, daddy ? "

" Turn round,"⁵ he said to her. She turned round. " Don't look at me as if I'm talking."

" All right," she said, puzzled. Then she heard him chuckle. She realised suddenly he was making fun of her. He was parodying the caution which had made an agony of their lives for so long for both of them. She bit her lip to prevent herself breaking into tears.

He was not in the least aware how his humour was affecting her. He continued with his joke. He spoke to her without turning his head, and with an exaggerated muting of the consonants. " When we get to the end of our journey . . . won't say where . . . wild horses wouldn't drag the name of the place out of me . . . we take the first train back along this coast. . . . Hello, did you hear a footstep ? "

" No, daddy, no."

" You get to another little port . . . find out name when we get there . . . from there we go to certain group of ... they're all surrounded by water, anyhow, every one of them, see ... we're going to have fine old time ... how're you feeling, Judy, are you all right ? "

" Father," she said to him quietly. " Are you drunk ? "

He whipped round and blazed at her. " What

the hell do you mean, am I drunk ? You know I never touch a drop ! Oh, you make me sick ! "

He turned on his heel and strode away furiously.

5

It was very early in the morning when they reached Messina, but the idea of resting up for a few hours did not seem to occur to him. They drove straight from the port to the station, where he deposited her with the bags in the waiting-room. He was still a little peevish with her, for the exaltation of the previous day and night was already wearing off. He went off to get tickets, and found that the ticket-office would not be open till a few minutes before the train left. They had some breakfast and kicked their heels in the waiting-room for a couple of hours. Then at last he asked her to follow him. It was not until they got into the train that he let her know the name of the station they were making for, and even then, with the same cynical exaggeration of caution as he had adopted the night before, he did not actually utter the name of the place. " Here ! " he said. " This is where we're going to." She read the name Milazzo on the tickets.

Something had happened to upset his temper considerably. " It's a nuisance," he grumbled. " We arrive twenty minutes too late."

"What for?" she asked. She was not aware that they were overburdened with engagements.

"You'll see," he said.

Then he saw how her face fell. His conscience pricked him for being so ungracious. "I'm sorry, Judy, I'm sorry." He leaned forward and patted her hand on her knee. "Forgive me for being a crusty old gentleman."

Immediately she warmed again towards him, as a chilled landscape will smile with all its woods and waters when the sun shines out briefly between masses of cold cloud. "That's all right, daddy. I've been rather silly myself."

"No," he said sombrely. "Not half so silly as me."

"No, no," she urged him. "It's exactly what we both need. To get away. To forget."

"Oh, Judy, Judy." His voice was very sad. "If I only could."

"You shall, daddy, you shall. First for hours at a time. Then it⁵ll be days at a time. The days will be weeks and months before you know where you are."

"I wonder." He looked up at her and smiled wanly into her face.

"You see, daddy, I've been thinking." She stopped and looked into his eyes. "Shall I go on?"

There was no one but themselves in their

carriage. He looked round again to make sure that somehow someone else had not ensconced himself there.

"What did you want to say?" he quivered timidly.

"Daddy, daddy," she begged him. She seized his wrists and pressed them firmly. "I love you. Remember that. Please don't be so frightened."

He realised she censured him for the timidity of his voice. "What did you want to say?" he asked again. His voice was firmer this time.

"Just one thing. Then I won't say any more. Yousee——"

"Yes?"

"I can only get things said now and again, when a moment comes. Then the moment goes. I mustn't say any more. You won't let me."

"There's nothing you can say."

"Oh, yes. There's one thing. Nothing was your fault. Nothing, nothing, nothing. If I didn't honestly believe that, I couldn't have kept going. And I don't think you could, either."

"The wounded animal keeps going till it finds a hole somewhere and creeps into it and dies."

"But you're not going to die!" she cried fiercely, shaking him by the shoulders. "You're not going to die! We're going to have a grand time!"

"Yes," he sighed. "I think we might be quite

happy in those islands. It is a damn nuisance ! " he broke out, for the mention of the islands already put his grievance back into his mind.

" What ? "

" We arrive about twenty minutes too late for the morning boat ! "

" That's all right, daddy. We'll take the boat to-morrow. Here we are, all on our own in the wide wide world." She stopped. " Nobody knows you're going to the islands ? "

" No," he replied bitterly. " I wasn't quite such a fool as that. I let slip we were going across to Reggio and Brindisi."

" Well then," she smiled. " Let's have a lovely day to-day. Let's get some eggs and bread and sardines and walk and bathe. Shall we ? "

" I'd like to have been in time for the boat," he said unhappily.

They booked rooms for the night at a little inn at Milazzo and got the people to put up some food for them in a bag. They learned that the coast here at Milazzo prolonged itself in a promontory that nosed three miles northward towards the Lipari Islands.

" That's fine," said Wace. " Let's go that way. We can bathe if we feel like it. Anyhow we can look at the islands."

They thrust their way through a tangle of myrtle and arbutus down the hill-slope to the sea, a minute or two's walk from the lighthouse at the top of the promontory. "Go and have a bathe, Judy," he bade her. "I'm quite happy."

And, indeed, as he sat there leaning against a rock gilded with lichen, his elbows on his knees and his chin cupped in his hands, he looked like a pilgrim who sees the sanctuary he has been making for only a day's distance away, and smiles a little, and sighs. For now he embraces the whole of it as a single spiritual entity. To-morrow he will arrive. He will be able to put out his hands and feel the walls. He will need to think of it in terms of food and drink. It will create its complex of minor problems. But now—it is exempt from problems now.

"I'm going in, daddy," she called out from behind a rock. "You'd best come in too, won't you?"

He did not reply. He had fallen asleep, his forehead resting on his knees.

The mood of gaiety returned to him the moment he set foot on the tiny steamer next morning which was to take them out to the island of Lipari.

"I think," he exclaimed, "I shouldn't ever
OP

have been a business-man. I should have been a sailor."

" Why not ? " she said. " If we're not spent up, we'll buy a boat. You'll be the captain and I'll be the crew."

" We'll do hornpipes ! " he promised her. " Look ! Do you see Stromboli there ? I like Stromboli ! The hole at the top there is bigger than any of those wretched little scratches in Pantellaria ! " An odd expression came into his eyes, a certain malignancy screwed up the corners of his mouth. " You're bound to get a much better view of Hell from the top of Stromboli ! " he announced.

She shivered. It was as if a tiny gust of cold wind came up from the north and flicked her face. Then the gust went out like a candle-flame. He seized her by the arm. " Look at the colour of this water ! " he bade her. " If you put your hand in it, it would come out Prussian blue ! "

" What lovely people ! " he exclaimed benevolently, as they drew up against the landing-stage. " All of them ! All of them ! " He opened his arms, as if he would embrace them, the freckled fisher-boys, the almond-eyed broad-browed girls, the housewives with their aprons, the waterside officials, here at the end of the world, who were to give him peace at last in

the warm shadow of their churches and the coolness of their rock-hung waters.

" I wonder," his daughter mused, " how long he'll find them lovely. It's a strange place and a far place. But I wonder if it's far enough."

They found rooms in the house of a stout vague lady named Donna Francesca, of whom it was vaguely thought by herself and her daughters that her father had been a prince from Mantua. The daughters and the mother moved about the rooms of their house with a dim swishing of their skirts and a sleepy whisper of curtains pulled open and pulled to again. There was a dove-cote in the courtyard behind the house whence a sleepy murmur came, hardly more drowsy than the voices of the ladies so augustly descended. The front windows looked out upon the garth of the cathedral which was so crowded with golden flowers that, seen obliquely, it looked like a sheet of beaten metal ; until, looking more closely, you saw the million flower-heads incline to the probing of the bees. The million-fold buzzing became a quality of the very air, till a torpor numbed the brain as insidiously as a distilled opiate.

This, at least, was the effect of Lipari on Harry Wace. To Judy the place was sometimes

almost painfully exciting. She saw and almost heard the great lateral puffs of smoke hissing out of the horizontal rifts of Vulcano over the water, under which the naked deposits of sulphur glared balefully. Closer at hand, on Lipari itself, sulphur flowered riotously in a broom more furious than any she had set eyes on. The monstrous-leaved fig-trees gesticulated fiercely against the smoking summits of the volcanoes.

Her nerves became unsteadier from day to day, while the torpor of the doves and bees seemed to possess him more and more completely. His movements were circumscribed within an area of half a mile or less—with the harbour and the cathedral hill at its frontiers. He had promised Judy more than once they would go out on an excursion to one of the other islands, Filicuri or Alicuri or above all, Stromboli, which had so vividly provoked his imagination when he first steamed into these waters. But somehow the desire went from him. He let the days slip by like pebbles released one by one softly into a blue pool. There were times when Judy felt like banging her head against a rock with the gnawing tedium of it. She had to stuff her handkerchief into her mouth to prevent herself crying aloud. She was tired of the ineffable blue of sea and sky. She yearned for the soapy scud of the

tide flooding the grey reaches of the Thames estuary. She ached to go out bare-headed into Doomington rain, sour with the impurities it combed out of the charged atmosphere. At these times, she set herself to a determined effort of the imagination. She recalled the hunted, haunted creature her father had been, fleeing with staring eyes from his pursuer, down interminable streets and vast savannahs of desert. She looked at him now, where he lay motionless as a lizard on the warm rock. Or they might be out with Rosario in his rowing-boat. He would get tired of dabbling his hand in the water, and would dislodge Rosario from the thwart, and take the oars in hand. He would screw his head round towards her, with a grin of pride in his accomplishment, for he had never been any sort of an oarsman before. So, as she contemplated and compared these aspects of him, her nostalgia would be attenuated. She sighed deeply, and if he heard it, he imagined it was a sigh of well-being. "Happy, Judy?" he asked her. "Tremendously," she replied, smiling. "That's fine, Judy. That's fine. We were right, weren't we? It's a grand place, eh, the only place in the world."

The thought of the future now and again knocked on the door of her mind. But there was nothing to do at all but to refuse it admission.

The weeks, the months, would achieve themselves, the years, perhaps. The formulation of the word filled her with desolation. She had vowed herself to him, to fulfil the debt another had contracted. If it was to be years, well and good—let it be years.

But it would not be. How long would it take before the inquirer in Tunis nosed out the trail again ? Had he drawn blank in Alexandria ? Had he drawn blank in Reggio ? How long would it be before he sniffed the trail again in Milazzo ?

How long ? She was a raving fool ! The fellow had merely come to sell them something. The people at the hotel provided the carpet touts, the coffee-set touts, the rug and perfume touts, with the names of the foreigners staying with them. They got a rake-off out of the proceeds. Why, her father himself had forgotten the episode completely. But completely. He never talked of it. The shadow of it never came into his eyes.

The weeks went by and the nostalgia recurred less frequently. The hot sun, the aromatic odours, the perpetual dazzle of the sea, were coursing along her veins like some injected anodyne. If there had once been a Judy Wace, there was less and less of Judy Wace now, as the days, pearly with white heat, heaped themselves above her prostrate body like the fall of

petals from an orchard where the blossom was renewed as soon and as silently as it had expended itself.

She, too, at first, had gone down with him every morning at ten o'clock to see the steamer come in from Milazzo. It was, after all, the great event of the day. And what else was there to do but see the steamer come in from Milazzo ? Excepting on those gala days when in addition there was a steamer from Messina en route for Naples, and the same steamer, half a week later, from Naples en route for Messina. They were his pinnaces, he told her playfully, for he had become ^Eolus, lord of these islands, and these craft sped to do his bidding. Once or twice he succeeded in provoking himself out of his indolence, and he remembered his earlier curiosity regarding these islands. He declared that one day or the day after he would charter one of these steamers, for they were all his own, so that they might undertake a tour of investigation. From the smaller and nearer islands they would return the same afternoon. But they would stay half a week in Stromboli, he would not have the Stromboli boat upset its routine for his convenience. Or why not stay on in Stromboli for a week or two weeks ? The place evidently intrigued him.

After some time he dropped the idea, if he

had ever seriously maintained it, and Judy did not wholly regret it. Their lodgings in the house of Donna Francesca in Lipari were far from luxurious ; but they were clean and quiet. She gathered that their quarters would be primitive indeed in Stromboli. She was managing gradually to adapt herself to this hypnotic routine ; she was relieved to think she would not need to dislocate it until the time came at length to leave the island.

She was happy to think that the arrival of the steamer could be a matter of such unfailing interest to him, day by day, long after it had ceased to excite her. But now and again she found the steamer a bit of a tyrant. She would have liked to set off now and again quite early in the morning, before it became too hot, to the Monte Sant' Angelo, where the island heaved itself up against the sky through banks and bars of thyme and broom and rock-rose and tree-heath. There, from under the shade of a wild fig-tree the mountain would extend her dreaming limbs till her toes dabbled in the creamy edge of the sea. She would thrust out her arms across the blue vacancy till in the palms of one hand and the other she balanced Filicuri and Stromboli. But her father did not like her to go until after the steamer had come in and disembarked its slender complement of passengers. And then it would be

almost time for lunch. And perhaps in the afternoon another steamer might be due. One way and another, her father did not move far from the harbour-side.

One day it happened he overslept. She feared he had had a bad night, and decided not to awaken him. He woke up about five minutes before the morning steamer was due, as if his subconscious mind would not allow the signal moment to go by.

"Judy," he called out to her. "Are you there?"

"Yes, daddy."

"My watch says its five minutes to ten. It's not, is it?"

"I think it is," she called out. "Didn't you sleep well, daddy?"

He flung open the door of his room. He had already struggled into his shirt and trousers. "Why the devil didn't you waken me?" he shouted. "Get out of my way!" His face was livid with fury. Without tie or coat he hurled himself out of the room and out of the house. It was then she realised for the first time that the morning excursion to the steamer was not the genial little hobby she had imagined it to be. It seemed to her likely that to him, too, that same realisation had come for the first time.

A couple of hours later, he went up to the little

restaurant where they took their lunch, looking rather crestfallen. He had been back to Donna Francesca's for his tie and coat. He had found some roses somewhere.

" Here you are, Judy," he said. " I thought these would be nice on the table."

She smiled. She bent forward and made a better job of his tie. " That's better," she said. He smiled back awkwardly.

Then one night it happened that he slipped on Donna Francesca's doorstep and sprained his ankle. The limb swelled monstrously, the pain of it racked him all night long. Judy was with him most of the night applying compresses. She gave him as much aspirin as she dared, but he did not have a wink of sleep. Next morning at nine-thirty he asked her to reach him his clothes, and help him on with them.

" What on earth for ? " she asked.

" You know perfectly well ! " he snapped.

" But you can't go, daddy ! It's ridiculous ! "

" Oh can't I ? " He showed his teeth. " You'll just see if I can't ! Ask Donna Francesca for her stick. I've got my own stick, too ! "

She tried hard to restrain him, but he would not be moved. " All right ! " she conceded at length, grimly. She knew that as soon as he had

gone two steps, he would realise he could no more hobble down to the harbour than fly there. The sweat poured down his cheeks in thick runnels. The veins stood out like coarse cord on his forehead. " No ! " he gasped. " No ! Help me back to bed again, Judy ! "

She got him back to his bed and made as if to help him out of his clothes. " Stop a minute ! " he bade her. " You could get Salvatore and Ciccio to carry me down. They could make a chair out of their hands."

She looked at him. " Don't you see what ideas it will put into everybody's head ? No ! It can't be done ! "

He turned his head to the wall. " All right ! " he brought out between his teeth. He refused to utter a word in reply to anything she said for a good many minutes. Then at last he spoke again. " Go down to the harbour," he requested, " and see who lands from the boat. Make quite sure nobody slips by you—nobody."

" Yes, daddy," she assured him. " You can rely on me." She walked down to the harbour swiftly and reached the waterside in time for the first boatload of disembarking passengers. She scrutinised them as carefully as she had promised she would, though she did not know what purpose she could serve by her scrutiny, and which of its objects was more open to suspicion than the one

that preceded or followed it. " But it's all over," she said to herself. " It's all over. Where can we go to now ? There's nothing but the sea itself, the bottom of the sea. Would we be safe even there ? I'm tired. I'd like to try it, anyhow."

She went back to her father brightly. " If there was anybody in that ship who'd make you lose a minute's sleep," she told him, twinkling, " I'd eat my hat ... if I had a hat worth eating."

" They didn't notice that you were on the look-out ? " he asked anxiously.

" No, I was awfully casual. I just sat dangling my legs over the water. Nobody took the least interest in me."

" I want you to go down this afternoon, too. The Messina boat comes in to-day."

" Of course I will. I'll keep a look-out till you're better."

" Damn this ankle ! " he swore. " Damn this blasted ankle ! "

It took him well over a week before he could hobble down to the harbour-side again. But she could see from the furtive way he looked left and right that the island had lost its innocence for him. He saw an unfamiliar face in the cafe and at once it produced in him an agony of apprehension. He was hardly reassured when he heard the man break out into a torrent of broad Lipari. **He** could not eat his lunch at the restaurant

because a stranger spoke to him, though the stranger was manifestly the most harmless little German archaeologist in the world, complete with sketching-block and camera and measuring instruments. It was not enough for him to go down to the harbour-side when the steamers came in. He would climb up to the citadel and sit down in the shadow of the wall and look out to sea for hours, as if he feared some sail might come up over the horizon that boded no good to him.

His greatest distress, however, came from the fact that he feared Judy's perspicacity was not to be trusted. She had taken his place at the harbour-side for more than a week. Was it not possible that someone had landed whom she had not noticed? Her attention had wandered, perhaps, or she had not been acute enough to spot him. The pursuer was on the island somewhere now, in some peasant's or fisherman's cottage or over in the village of Canneto where they handled the pumice-stone. He was biding his moment, for he had time enough to play with. It was not easy in Lipari to run away on the spur of the moment. The pursuer was enjoying the procrastination. From some unsuspected coign of vantage he, too, was watching the steamer, but he was watching to see whom it carried away, not whom it brought. He was watching to see

whether it carried a grey-haired man away, an Englishman, and the young woman he had with him. It would carry away on its next voyage one more passenger who had been thought to be a commercial traveller, a wandering scholar, an engineer. But he was none of these things.

He was paralysed by the dilemma that faced him. He dared not stay on the island. He dared not leave. Whichever he did, he was watched, he was palpable. At length Judy herself put a cunning idea into his head.

The Lipari dentist was an uncouth amateur who came over from Milazzo once a week. He took a room for the day and put up his equipment between a couple of brass bedsteads. Wace had had occasion to visit the dentist some weeks ago, and though he himself had not been in a fit state to be so sensitive, Judy had sworn that if ever a dentist became necessary for either of them, she was absolutely determined that they would go over to the mainland for him. She had been horrified by the casual way in which he had gone on from mouth to mouth with the same instruments, without worrying about sterilising them, or even washing them. The little table between the bedsteads looked like a butcher's slab.

One night Wace noticed that Judy put the tips

of her fingers a little delicately up against her cheek.

" Hello," he asked, " anything wrong ? "

" No, not much. A bit of a hole, I suppose. I'll have to get it attended to."

" Let me see. What day's to-morrow ? Wednesday. The dentist will be here the day after to-morrow."

" No, thank you," she said firmly. " I'd rather get one of the fishermen to yank it out with a stone and a bit of fishing-tackle."

" One of the fishermen, eh ? " he asked. " Oh, one of the fishermen ! " His idea had already taken possession of him. " Well, go to sleep now, Judy. Take an aspirin for to-day."

She went to sleep. The pain wasn't serious. It passed off and she was soon sleeping soundly. She was awakened by her father, tugging at her shoulder and whispering into her ear.

" Judy, get up ! Get up ! "

She awoke with a start. " What is it, daddy, what is it ? "

" Salvatore's down below," " Get up and pack your things ! I've settled with Donna Francesca ! "

" Salvatore ? Which Salvatore ? "

" Salvatore with the motor-boat ! "

" What on earth's Salvatore waiting for ? "

" It's a calm night ! The sea's as flat as glass ! "

" What do you want, daddy ? What do you want me to do ? "

" You're suffering agonies from toothache ! You can't wait till the day after to-morrow till the dentist comes from Milazzo ! "

" I'm perfectly all right, daddy. Honestly, I am ! "

He got hold of her by both shoulders and shook her fiercely. " You fool ! Don't you see ? This is our chance ! He's sound asleep somewhere ! We'll steal a march on him ! We can get away while the whole island's asleep ! Will you get up now ? "

" I'm very tired, daddy ! "

" Oh, Judy, Judy ! " He got down on one knee beside her bed, and buried his face in the counterpane. " The sea's worse than the desert, Judy ! It's like a prison-wall ! It smiles and sneers at me the whole day long. I hate the sea ! One more chance, Judy ! I think now we'll find a place. . . . Judy, try and believe me ! I want to get into a train again. And we'll get away. And we'll find the place. We will, Judy. I promise you we will ! "

" Yes, daddy, I'm getting up now ! "

" Oh, you lovely Judy ! ⁵³ He threw his arms around her. His face was wet with tears.

6

Salvatore was informed that the *signore* and his daughter were going to buy themselves some things they needed in Palermo and would return to Lipari several days later. " *Ebben!*" said Salvatore. He bowed courteously to the Ingrisi, accelerated his motor-boat and chugged away towards the harbour-mouth. " *Fra pod giorni !* " he called out to them. " In a few days ! " repeated Wace, and turned his back on the boat, on the island, on the pursuer who might at that moment be stirring and yawning in his bed.

" We're going to Messina, I suppose ? " said Judy.

" Unless he'd think we'd gone to Messina because we said we were going to Palermo,³ " he speculated.

She shrugged her shoulders. " There's no end to that."

" Yes," he admitted. " Which then ? Which way ? " He stood irresolute, as if the decision must be reached there, at that moment, at the harbour-side.

She put her bag down and sat on it. " You sit down, too, daddy. We can get a cab when we want to. Nobody's listening, daddy. Sit down, let's have it out."

"What is it, Judy ? " he quivered anxiously.
" You don't mind leaving Lipari, do you ? "

" No," she said. " It was getting on my nerves."

" Well, then."

" We've got to have it out."

"<What do you mean ? What do you want me to do?"

" We must go somewhere and stay somewhere. Otherwise I'll die."

"What are you saying, Judy? You look so strange. Are you ill ? "

" I know what I'm saying. I'll die. We must rest somewhere. If we don't, you'll be alone. It won't be my fault."

" Where ? " He paused. It was as if he asked himself the question with an intensity he had not brought to it before. Slowly, in a voice of utter mournfulness, he answered the question. " There isn't anywhere."

She looked into her spirit to see if there was any reserve of strength she might draw on. It was dark and empty as a cupboard, where musty cobwebs hang in the corners like pockets. She had no word to say.

He opened his lips and spoke again. The voice was so toneless, so colourless, he sounded almost like a machine speaking. " If I were a man, Judy, I'd send you on from here. You'd find

your way back into the world you came from. And to-night, when these people had gone to bed, I'd walk to the edge of the jetty, and one step further. If I were a man, Judy . . ."

She rose, stung by a sense of his extreme unkindness. " It's not for this I've come with you, all these months, all this way." Tears stood in her eyes. " Are you coming ? "

He rose wearily. " I'm coming, Judy." He followed her like a dog. There was a cab waiting. " To the station ! " she ordered. He got up into the cab after her.

" And then ? " he whispered fearfully.

Her cheeks flushed furiously. " How should I know ? How the devil should I know ? "

They arrived at the station. A porter came up and took the bags down from the place behind the driver. They descended, then she turned away, hiding her face from him. He looked at her as at a stranger. In his utter wretchedness, in the wretchedness of her bent shoulders and bowed head, he was no longer father, she was no longer daughter. She was a shabby woman, with shoes worn down at the heels, and a hat like a limp bundle of straw. He bent towards her as a man might in a caprice bend to a strange woman in the street, where nature seems too fine for the shoddy it is dressed in.

" We'll go to a big city," he said. " You ought

to have some clothes." He booked for Naples as if it were a stage on some carefully contrived journey. He bought clothes for himself, too, as well as for her, in Naples, and destroyed every stitch of the clothing they had worn till then. It was as if he sought to create two new creatures from crown to heel. He allowed his beard to grow, too, and took to wearing a pair of dark spectacles. But he could not change the contraction and dilation of the valves of his heart, nor expunge from his ears the rhythmic tread of the feet that were as audible on the great smooth promenade as in the narrow alleys where the tall houses leaned towards each other so closely that they shut out the blue day.

It was in Naples, in the middle of the second week after their arrival, that the episode occurred which gave its final form and aspect to the drama of Harry Wace. They were staying in a hotel under the Castel Sant' Elmo. The house was scrupulously clean and the streets that flanked it were less noisy than most streets in Naples. But it was tall and narrow and there was no lift. Their rooms were up on the fourth floor, and it happened one day that Wace, more preoccupied than usual, went up beyond the fourth floor, to the fifth floor, and even to the sixth, before it had occurred to him he had gone high enough. He went to the end of the passage and opened the

door on the right-hand side, under the impression he was entering his own room. His eyes were still misted over with his thoughts and he advanced several paces into the room, before he realised that he was not alone. He became aware that there was a woman in the bed, an old woman. But before he was aware that she was a woman or old, he was aware of the happiness that radiated from her and filled the little room from the door-jamb to the cornice. Her eyes were mild and peaceful, her cheeks had the warm flush of an apple, her hands rested lightly on the coverlet, a rosary draped around one wrist. On the wall above her bed were stuck a number of holy cards with paper lace round their edges. There was a framed oleograph of the Virgin and Child on the wall to the left of the window that faced her, and filled her eyes with sky and sea.

"I—I—beg your pardon," he stammered.
"I thought it was my room."

She turned her head towards him as if she were aware of him for the first time when he spoke.

"*Fa niente*" she said. "It matters nothing." She looked at him intensely for several seconds. "It is a long time since I have seen a strange face,"

She spoke with the accent of a peasant woman, but the quality of her voice was fine and gentle. She wore a small cape of coloured wools round

her shoulders, knitted presumably by herself. There were balls of wool and needles on a table beside her.

" I—I'm so sorry,"³ he said again. He walked towards the door, then turned towards her again. He had had no curiosity about any human being for a long time, not even about his own daughter. He found it impossible to restrain the questions that came to his lips now, regarding a quiet old woman whose room he had blundered into, in an obscure hotel in Naples. " Who are you, *signora* ? Are you unwell ? You are happy, why are you so happy ? "

" Am I unwell ? " She pointed to her limbs which seemed so slight they hardly made a curve in the bedclothes. " I have not moved from this bed for twenty years. But I am well enough. I am very happy, *signore*. Who am I ? I have almost forgotten that. The world has forgotten. My son remembers. That is enough for me."

" Your son ? "

" He is the *padrone* of this hotel. He brings me my food and drink. What more do I need ? The rest is from God."

" You have not moved out of this bed for twenty years ? "

" It seems like a day." The old woman smiled. Her fingers played with the beads of her rosary.

" The world has forgotten you ? "

" I am happy."

Scalding tears came to his eyes. He could not trust himself to speak to her again. He turned to the door. " Good-bye, *signora I* " he brought out.

" May God be with you ! " she said.

7

He did not speak to Judy for two or three days, more than to say good-morning, or would she pour out for him. She did not force herself upon him, for she sensed that he was not sulky or angry. For a time even fear was suspended. He forbore from looking round if he heard foot-steps following him and did not peer suspiciously into a face if it was half-hidden by the brim of a hat. Something new had entered his mind, an idea on which it had fastened with energy. Then at last he spoke to her.

" Judy," he said. " It's not been bad in Naples. You've seen that, haven't you ? "

" Yes," she said, a little wearily. " It's not been bad." She knew well enough it was merely a matter of a day or two, or a week or two, before Naples was as bad as elsewhere.

" You're right," he said, as if he saw her thoughts written out before him. " It would

only be a matter of a day or two, a week or two. I've a plan to put before you. I'm going to disappear. I'm going to disappear from the world completely."

"What?" she cried out angrily. "Is that all you've got to tell me? Is it fair to bring me in on it? What do you want *me* to do?"

"No, Judy, you don't understand me. I'm not going to do away with myself. It may be that I'm too much of a coward for that. But it's not only that. Oh no. After all you've been through, it wouldn't be fair to you, for one thing." She smiled bitterly. "Don't smile like that," he requested her. "If I thought you wanted me to go, I'd go," She said nothing. His voice and demeanour were so solemn it was impossible to attack him with tears or anger. "I know you're ready to carry on," he continued, "and so am I. I've said it wouldn't be fair to you, if I gave up, and I mean it. ... And it wouldn't be fair to him." He stopped. His eyes were full of grey speculation.

"*Him*?" she asked. "Who on earth do you mean?"

"Nothing. Nobody."

"What are you talking about, daddy?"

"I'm talking about my plan. If I can still have your help, it can be carried out."

"I've not failed till now."

" We must go to some great city, I haven't thought which. We must enter it by different times and at different places. You will have some sort of home there, a place for yourself alone. Do you understand ? *It must be a place for yourself alone.* It should be high up, where there'll be air and sunlight. It should not be overlooked."

" What are you driving at ? "

" One day I shall come to see you ; not as myself, of course. Others should be coming at the same time, shortly after. It wouldn't be impossible to work out. We would be tradesmen, messengers. The others would go. I would stay—if you'd let me. I'd never go out again."

" Daddy," she whispered. " You might as well be dead."

" Judy, it would be far better to be dead than to go on like this, hounded from shadow to shadow."

" How could you bear it, daddy ? "

" Oh, Judy, if you'd let me, I could be so happy. I'd be at peace. And you, too, Judy. You'd know what it was to have a roof over your head again, and your own chairs and tables and books to come back to. There's nothing else in the world, Judy, nothing else at all."

" You'd never go out again ? " she repeated

incredulously. Her scalp tightened with the horror of the thought.

"To what? To the following feet? To the shadow in the doorway? Will you, Judy, will you?"

Her head fell on to her bosom. It seemed for several minutes that she was asleep. Then she spoke, without lifting her head.

"We'll try it, daddy. Of course we'll try it."

CHAPTER XV

I

HE HAD RECEIVED some comfort and inspiration somewhere, she did not know how or where. He made plans with a resolution he had not displayed since the morning of their escape from London. He took the initiative entirely into his hands. He seemed to be acting in the quite conscious realisation that he was making a final bid for the resolution of his dreadful problem. He might now at length succeed, and win for himself a certain measure of serenity ; or he might fail, and there would be no trying ever again.

He had strength enough to envisage and execute a plan, or a series of plans, in which he was deprived of his daughter's support over long days of travelling and far stretches of country. Once or twice the ordeal was almost too much for him, and she picked him up again at the agreed station or hotel on the very point of collapse. But he won through. They reached their goal from different points and at different times. They met and proceeded to bring their

programme to its delicate and dour finale. He booked a passage on a steamer that went by Marseilles to Barcelona, but from Marseilles he returned to Genoa where he joined up with Judy again, who had gone north by train. They travelled together as far as Milan, though he insisted that they should travel in different compartments. Then once more they separated. He made for Germany by way of Strassburg, she by way of Innsbruck and Munich. So at last they circled round upon Berlin.

For it was to be in Berlin, he had decided, that he would seek the constricted theatre of his experiment. It was necessary that it should be in one of the major European cities, where he might disappear soundlessly among its millions like a stone in a vast lake. Rome and Vienna were not large enough. They were not excited enough, he felt, about their own business, their spreading out into new suburbs, the provision for themselves of their food and the traffic to convey it. There was something of the large village, or the collection of large villages about them. He had a fear that they would not be able to suppress an interest in Judy's menage ; who was this foreign girl living quite alone, as they were to think, in a hive of strangers ?

Paris was large enough and sufficiently indifferent to the stranger who foisted himself upon her. But Paris was too near the city he had fled from, and it was by the Paris route he had fled. No, Berlin was the place. There was no other place for him than Berlin in all the Old World, and he did not contemplate the New. He shied away instinctively from the thought of a long sea voyage, on which he might find company so hideously inescapable. The logic of the situation inevitably drove him upon Berlin. It was his fatal error not to realise that if he was to be driven by logic, not he alone would be so driven. At least the thought did not present itself to him for several months.

2

They put up at different hotels in Berlin and met in the evenings at a sequence of prearranged cafes. After a search that lasted several weeks, Judy at last found the place she had been looking for. She took an apartment in a high block of flats some little distance north of the Lehrter Bahnhof. The flats looked west over a small municipal park. Southward was the dark Spree, northward were the pine-tree tops of the Jungfernheide. In between, a network of streets and roofs made a glistening design in sun and rain.

But it was the municipal park that most delighted Wace when she brought the news to him. He rubbed his hands with glee. " That's grand ! " he exclaimed. " It means that nothing can be built to overlook us ! It means we're free, Judy, we're free ! " He very nearly hugged her in his excitement. The other occupants of the cafe thought the pair were taking things a little quickly. The Herr Auslander had only picked up the wench five or ten minutes ago.

Judy took the flat in her own name and for one person. It was unfurnished and she set to work to get some things together. She had two divans brought in, not one, and they were brought in on different days. But if anyone had noticed it, which seemed unlikely enough in the first place, it could hardly be a matter for comment that the young woman might want to put up a friend when she felt like it. She got her bedroom to rights first, so that there was a room to keep locked if any porter had something to bring or any workman any work to do elsewhere in the flat. A few days later she finished the furnishing in a sudden spate of activity. At one time there were four or five men from as many different establishments in the flat within the same hour, depositing kitchen material, a small table or two, a picture or two and certain other objects which she had overlooked till the last moment. There

were in point of fact five men, not four, who came up to her flat by the service staircase ; but there were only four who left, if careful count had been taken. The fifth wore an apron and a blue-peaked porter's cap like the others, but when he came he went further than they did. He had something to do or deliver in the young woman's bedroom. She opened the door and turned the lock on him. He did not emerge till that evening when no more goods or messengers were expected. He stepped across the small lobby that separated her bedroom from the living-room of the flat. The place was flooded with westering sunshine. The oblong of window consisted of nothing but light and cloud. A bird's wing darted across its diagonal. A tray was laid out on a table she had wheeled in on castors from the kitchen.

" Well, daddy," she said, and smiled at him. " Are you ready for a meal ? "

He bent down and seized her two hands and kissed them. "Judy ! Judy ! " he whispered. He could say no more.

" Don't be silly, daddy ! " she said. " Come on! Your eggs will get cold ! "

3

The months that now followed were happier than any he had known since his brief, doomed

love-affair with Manolita Bienvenida, years ago. For a long time it caused no distress in him at all that though he had feet, the whole compass of their wanderings was reduced to a few yards, from room to room and back again to his chair at the window. The view at that window was spacious, and the variation of cloud and wind, sun and moon and star, sufficed during those months. There were times when it was clear that his eyes saw nothing, placed as he was in his easy chair before the parted curtains. It was enough for him to be sitting in one place, a place he had won to so arduously and slyly, where there was no danger that the shadow might fall upon his path or the sound of the footsteps come up after him. It was enough for him to sit there, to be there, to draw breath evenly.

When at night he turned from the parted curtains he realised with amazement how much there was for him to do in the sealed and cosy room. The old woman lying in the bed in Naples had given him an inkling of how contentedly the years might go by in a world more desperately confined even than his, but she had religion to console her, and he had not. Religion had not come into his life at all, and the thought had often enough occurred to him, hiding in the chill shade of churches not only from the sun's pursuing eye, that God might have been sanctuary

even from his enemy, if he had not made his enemy his god.

There were books and newspapers to read. They had a gramophone and wireless in the flat, and Judy played quite prettily on the piano. He had loved his small garden once—but not half so passionately as the handful of flowers she brought in every day or two. They began to collect etchings, too, at this time. Judy began to spend quite a lot of time rooting about for etchings in the second-hand bookshops, which was an occupation that could not awaken in anybody the slightest suspicion. Why should the young woman not go rooting about for etchings? So now and again she brought back a beauty she had picked up for a mark or two, and they gloated over it for hours together.

She went out and did the shopping herself, instead of having it delivered at the flat. He became very clever in the kitchen and managed to turn out little dishes of great delicacy, out of unconsidered trifles that most people would have destroyed. It was good fun, in the first place. It taxed his ingenuity and took up time nicely. Then it was good policy. The quantity of food brought into the house was never such that it might occur to anybody that the catering was for two persons, not for one. And finally, it was economical. Living on this scale, they had

money enough to last them as long as they might need it.

4

It was about half a year after they had taken possession of their flat that the evening papers began to mention a bitter controversy that was raging in the district council administering the area they lived in. The park which the block of flats looked over had been bought not very long ago from some private corporation and left to the people of Berlin in the buyer's will. When his affairs came to be examined, however, it was discovered he was in no position to leave behind him as a graceful gesture so valuable a property. He had left a great many creditors who were clamouring for the realisation of all his assets. The left-wingers in the council swore that they would sooner come out into the streets and fight than let the site be handed over to the businessmen. The right-wingers declared that the sacred principles of the rights of property and the payment of debts were involved. The controversy raged for several months. But at that period in the history of Berlin the forces of the right were consolidating their positions all along the front, in preparation for that smashing attack which was not long to be delayed now. The right-wingers

in the local council won the day. The site was handed over to a firm of building prospectors, and before a few days had passed, the flower-beds and trees were already uprooted and the footings for a large block of buildings were being excavated.

It transpired quite soon that the large block of buildings was to be a block of flats that would stare back at the flats that already stood there, window by window. As the storeys of the new building climbed up the scaffolding nearer and nearer to his own eye-level, Harry Wace glared at the inexorable scaffolders and hodmen like those condemned wretches of the Middle Ages who saw the brick wall growing course by course, which was to incarcerate them in a living tomb. But when his daughter said to him : " Daddy, if you're afraid of being overlooked, we'll go out of here, we'll find another place ! " the idea seemed dreadful to him.

" No ! " he exclaimed. " They'll see me go ! I'm all right now. They don't know I'm here. But if I once leave this place, I'm lost for ever ! I'll stay here ! You must get some thicker curtains than these ! They mustn't see two figures against the curtains when they're drawn ! We'll have to be careful, that's all ! I mustn't sit in front of the window any more. It'll be quite easy, Judy ! You mustn't worry like that ! "

She stared at him with eyes full of horror and pity. He had deprived himself already of almost all his faculties. Now he announced that he was going to cut down the circuit of his eyes' scope to a few cubic yards of painted grey wall and whitewashed ceiling. She stared at him as if he were someone to whom she were not bound by spoken and unspoken vows, as if she had never set eyes on him in her life before. How could this man still find life tolerable when he had hacked from it almost all its virtue ? What a gnarled branchless sapless rootless hulk was left to him ! How was it possible that he should prefer to be the blind stump he was than to throw open that window and for a few wild whirling seconds at least, to be one with air and sun, with bird and wind !

Her imagination crashed suddenly against the steel-like pavement below, and spread in a ruin of smashed flesh and bone. The light went out of her eyes and every vestige of colour from her face.

" What's the matter with you, Judy ?" he asked, alarmed.

" Nothing ! " she whispered. " Get me a glass of water ! I'm faint ! "

" Yes, Judy, yes ! " He carefully hugged the wall of the living-room till he reached the door. There were workmen at their level on the

scaffolding opposite. It would never do if they saw there was not one person, but two persons, in their flat. Perhaps someone had already given them an extra mark or two to keep an eye on the flat and report anything that seemed worth while.

He came back with the glass of water, hugging the wall again. " Here you are, Judy ! I wonder what came over you, all of a sudden ! "

The respite of delusive content that had been granted him was revoked now. Yet he managed to adapt himself even to this disastrous attenuation. The block of flats opposite was occupied almost before the paint was dry on the woodwork. To Wace each of its windows was a pair of eyes which was devoted to the task of discovering whether the young woman lived alone, or another lived with her, whom she concealed. Judy tried to convince him that by day it was quite impossible for any watcher to penetrate through the lace curtain into the comparative gloom of the room behind it. She bid him look across the street into rooms made by their daytime curtains equally impermeable. But he was not convinced. He spent a great many more hours in his bed now, for the window faced a blank wall. When he emerged into the sitting-room, he was extremely circumspect in his movements, above all towards night-fall, when the

time came to switch the light on. He exacted an undertaking that she would never press the switch till she had called out her intention to do so. He would then move off into a corner of the room well beyond the possibility of any espial. Then she would pull down a blind and draw a pair of thick curtains. Then at last she was free to let the light flood the room. He, too, was free to turn his attention to his books or etchings. Or he might switch the wireless on, and extend his limbs along the sofa, in a cadaverous imitation of well-being.

Slowly the last vestiges of colour left his cheeks. His face grew dead-white and bulby like a plant that is grown in the forepart of a cellar, where hardly any light penetrates. His other faculties began to lose their edge; hearing and taste and sight. But he clung to what was left of them and of himself with a tenacity at once pathetic and desolate. "I must keep on and do my share," his daughter vowed. She clenched her fists as she lay in her bed and managed to keep back her tears. But she knew it was getting harder day by day. She felt her strength waning from the tips of her fingers and the bones of her feet. He, at all events, must not notice it. She went about the flat with a fixed smile on her face. Sometimes she would break into song for his benefit. His ear was

not fine enough to perceive how toneless the voice was, springing from how forlorn a well of heartbreak.

CHAPTER XVI

THE trail led to Berlin, to two blocks of flats that faced each other, north of the Lehrter Bahnhof. The young man was aware that one block was several years older than the other. He was grateful to the district councillors who had put up for him so convenient a point of vantage. If he had picked up the trail earlier, he would doubtless have been able to rent the flat immediately opposite the one occupied by the young Englishwoman. But perhaps it was better that he hadn't. He was less conspicuous in his vigil a couple of storeys higher and a few windows to the left. He was glad that the entrance to the new block was not in the same street, either. He was anxious she should not isolate him from the hundreds who lived in the flats and the thousands who moved to and fro across the Spree bridges ; not, at all events, till the moment was at last ripe for confrontation.

They had put him off the trail quite cleverly at Tunis. But he had not been annoyed when he found they had swung him off on so wide a detour. There had been several occasions both

before and after Tunis when he might have come up with them, he thought, if he had troubled to accelerate the speed of his movements. But he did not want to move more quickly. It flattered him that he moved with the undeliberate leisureliness, the unforced insistence, of Death itself. When the time came to strike, he would strike. But these thousand minor blows he struck by not striking too soon—they were sweet and deadly. He licked his lips as if there were honey smeared on them.

At Naples again they had tricked him. So far as Naples they had certainly travelled together. From that point they had as certainly parted, if only to join up again, later on the northward journey. At length the old man had attained Berlin. The daughter's trail was fresh and clear all the way to the block of flats she was now living in. What had happened to the father? Had that been the father she had met from time to time in one cafe and another? Had the father ever turned up in Berlin at all? If he had ever turned up in Berlin, where was he now?

Where was he now? It had taken time and patience and the exact deduction of fact from fact to attain this stage of the pursuit. Neither luck nor caprice had been on his side. Impelled by circumstances at a certain stage of their development, what next step would any normal

human being have taken? What step would he himself have taken? What step, therefore, would Harry Wace have taken? The vast desert and the small island had given him no shelter. This city for this reason, that city for another reason, could not shelter him. His daughter alone, or he with his daughter, had chosen Berlin for a hiding-place. Could any vast city at all, any more than any tiny village, be the hiding-place?

The whole history of their relationship indicated that he was not, he could not be, alone. Was he with her then? Had he entered her flat, perhaps while it was being equipped, in the guise of some other than himself, covered by the porters and messengers who would have goods to deliver at that time? Had he entered her flat and never come out again?

Was that where he was now? Absorbed, invisible, smiling at the discomfiture of his enemy?

He took a flat in the opposite building, overlooking as closely as possible the flat occupied by Judy Wace. The father did not seem to be there. If he was, he limited his movements with a frantic circumspection. If he was not there, the chase would begin again, though no clue offered itself anywhere at all. If he were there, skulking from wall to wall, cowering in dark

corners till curtains were drawn and lights lit, how contemptible and how comforting a picture he made !

It was a bit tough on the girl, perhaps.

Yes, it was a bit tough on the girl. He saw her leave the building every morning with a shopping bag over her arm. She had as little stuff as possible delivered by the tradesmen. The creature seemed not merely hardly a woman, but hardly human. Her father had made of her an extension of the functions by which he scuttled from place to place, and of the functions by which he now kept himself alive in his funk-hole—if he were truly there, behind that blank uninforming wall.

He could almost have brought himself to be sorry for the girl, if his hatred for the man did not annihilate every other emotion that came into its orbit. And if it were not fatuous to be sorry for a creature so dessicated into mummy-faced automatism.

Was she alone there ? Was she not alone ? That must be found out sooner or later. Sooner rather than later. Supposing the man expired there, manacled in that prison-cell with fetters so much weightier than steel ! That would be sad indeed. It must be found out, whatever action he himself might then take, or whether, for a time, he took no action at all. How to find

out then ? There was only one way to follow, one person to help him. He must go the way the girl led. She was not wholly a machine. In some moment of utter weakness, when the strain was just at the point of breaking her, she would betray them both, somehow, somewhere.

He determined that sooner or later he would scrape up an acquaintance with her, though he knew it would be difficult. If the father was immured in the flat with her, he had most certainly given her the most urgent instructions that she must on no account whatever allow a stranger to enter into conversation with her. But the time for that had not yet arrived. He would follow her, with the inconspicuousness of which he had become a master. He would see where she went, what she bought, what she was up to when she went out into the town.

She went shopping. Never by any chance did she buy provisions enough to suggest she had two people to look after, and one of them a man. She poked about a bit among the second-hand shops and now and again bought a print or an engraving. Sometimes she strolled among the cases of a museum for an hour or so, or saw a picture through in the afternoon. She was always back at home in the evenings. If she was

delayed for some reason, no light was ever switched on till she was there to switch it. When an afternoon cinema seemed a little stuffy, she would go to an open-air beer-garden and take a cup of coffee or a glass of lemonade.

Her purchases and journeys seemed to take him nowhere at all. He began to wonder whether the time had not come for him to attempt to establish some sort of contact with her. He wondered how long he could dog her footsteps in this way without making her aware she was being followed and studied. It was true he knew how to modify his appearance by a variety of slight and effortless changes—but it is impossible to alter the gait and the set of the shoulders, excepting very artificially and for brief periods. He was convinced she must have sensed him before if her long servitude to her father's obsession had not blunted the edge of all her faculties. More and more she walked about in a dreamy torpor. If it was true that within those few square yards of blind wall and blinded window, he kept her to that unspeakable treadmill, he was still more abominable than he had held him to be. The young man felt his fingers twitch in the extremity of his loathing.

It was while he was still meditating the best way to make her aware of him, that he happened to follow her one afternoon into the beer-garden

at the Zelten, where for the most part soldiers and servant-girls go. It was a hot day and she seemed extremely tired. She wanted to sit down in the shade of a tree and feel a breeze on her face if any should be stirring there. She wandered about from table to table forlornly, and finally found a vacant place in the shade near an open-air stall where they were frying the savoury sausages of Thiiringen. He placed himself at a stall near by and wondered whether here and now was not the time to approach her. No, I had best not, he decided. The soldiers had not come out of the barracks yet, but there was already quite a lot of winking from table to table between unattached youths and girls. ("A cup of coffee!" he heard her order.) It would be the last word in clumsiness to make her feel she was being picked up like a housemaid.

A good many minutes elapsed before her order was attended to. Although he had the opportunity for the first time, and she inspired in him a monstrous curiosity, he could not bring himself to let his eyes rest too long on her face. He was too fiercely sensitive of the man who had fathered her for a mist of red fury not to generate between his eyes and hers.

The waiter she had given her order to came now. He passed just beside the young man, and set down a cup of coffee on a table quite

close to him. A number of glasses of beer were left on his tray and two more cups with a hot drink in them. The drink in both was cocoa, not coffee—the waiter had obviously put down Judy Wace's coffee at a table where cocoa had been ordered. He put down one of the two cups of cocoa on a table en route, then went on with the other to the Englishwoman's table.

"Hello," the young man said to himself. "Here's my chance. I'll point out to the waiter he's made a mistake, and then——"

But he realised the idea was foolish as soon as it had presented itself. It really was too slender a thread to pull at in order to force himself on a strange young woman's acquaintance. Besides, the waiter moved quicker than seemed possible on such flat feet among such a tangle of tables. The second cup of cocoa was already steaming on the table in front of Judy Wace.

For a moment or two she did not seem to realise it was there. Its odour might have impressed itself on her, but it was extinguished in the smells of trodden leaves, cheap powder and frying Thiiringer. Then, as if she concluded from the fact that the waiter had been and gone that he must have set down her coffee before her, and without lowering her eyes on to the table, she reached her fingers forward to find the cup's handle, found it, then lifted the

cup to her lips. She could hardly have taken more than a sip of the chocolate, but the stuff had an immediate and frightening effect on her. She went quite green with nausea. She was almost sick then and there.

He looked on dispassionately, with an almost academic interest. There was certainly nothing wrong with the cocoa itself. The stout lady before whom the waiter had set down the other cup was drinking it with every mark of appreciation. It was quite clear that Judy Wace had a constitutional intolerance of cocoa, a sort of phobia. She left a couple of coins on the table, staggered to her feet, and threaded her way out of the beer-garden. The young man did not follow her. He knew there would be no lack of suitable opportunities whenever he chose to take them.

One morning about a week after this episode, he noticed her going into the grocer's store where she did her shopping. It occurred to him to slip in after her, for he had had a sense from the beginning that he might learn something from her most worth learning when she was engaged in some such matter-of-fact occupation. He heard her order one article of food and another, such as a young woman living alone

would naturally order for herself—a pound of sugar, a packet of rice, a packet of macaroni. She stuffed these things, and some others, away into her bag. Then she looked again at her little book. Yes, she had forgotten something. " A quarter-kilo of cocoa ! " she said.

" Oh indeed ? " the young man sang to himself. " A quarter-kilo of cocoa ? For whom, little maiden ? Not for yourself, I think ! " he gave a brief order and walked out of the shop.

" Well, now we know ! " he whispered. " Look out, Mr. Wace ! The windows are smashed and all the doors are open ! Look out, Mr. Wace ! "

CHAPTER XVII

i

HESAV, "JUDY WAGE leave the building that same day, an hour or so after lunch. There was nothing to prevent him going up to the flat she and her father occupied and knocking at the door, as if he were a canvasser, or had merely mistaken that door for another. He played with the idea for a few minutes, for he found it difficult not to celebrate somehow his delicious discovery. But he turned it down at last. It was, of course, certain that Wace would not open the door. He would be paralysed with fright, which would be agreeable in itself. And then ... he might either attempt to get away again, which he might succeed in doing, or he might not. Or he might run over to the window and throw himself out into the street, and that was a finale which the young man wished to avoid at all costs. It would be over far too quickly.

No, the way to the old man must be by way of the daughter. He must somehow get to know the girl. There is nothing intrinsically suspicious in the desire a young man on his own might have to get to know a young girl on her own.

He was aware, as a matter of fact, that he was not the only young man in the neighbourhood who had tried to force himself upon her, though the others had had other motives. It would certainly not be said she was beautiful, though there was a certain appeal in her large dark eyes and her pallor, too, had a sort of beauty. But she was young and a woman. That had been enough for them. One or two had been touched by her loneliness and mystery. They had made their approach with an awkward delicacy that might have prevailed on many another young woman, alone, in a strange city. But she had fled like a startled deer from the least hint of approach.

He realised that he could not take the risk of forcing himself upon her in such a way that if he failed once, she would recognise him when he made the effort again. She would be suspicious of such persistence. How then to win through to her? He devised a plan, at length, so sensational that it was almost laughable, but he knew it would serve.

She walked quite frequently in the early evening along the Kronprinzenufer. It was a curiously deserted area at all times of the day for a promenade so near the centre of the city, but even if there happened to be more people about than usual when he brought off his coup, it would

be so swiftly over, it seemed unlikely there could be any hitch.

And there was none. The two tough young men he had employed at a handsome consideration to be his accomplices, stood leaning over the parapet, looking into the river. He himself was stationed in a doorway not far from them on the opposite side of the road. They had not been waiting long when the young woman appeared. They were on the look-out for his signal. He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. They turned round casually to the river again. She came up along the pavement and as soon as she was a yard or two from them they turned and fell upon her. One knocked her down, the other seized her handbag. In that same moment, the young man was on them. He let out right and left and knocked both the footpads down. He retrieved the handbag, then they were both on him again. The melee was short and furious, but he kept the handbag. A moment later the toughs had taken to their heels. They had disappeared down a side street.

" *Armes Fraulein !* " he cried out. " Have they hurt you ? The *Schweinehunde* \ "

" No ! " she said faintly. " No ! I'm all right ! " She had not had the strength to lift herself up from the ground. She was leaning against the parapet, her face as white as paper.

" At all events, I have it. Here is your bag ! "

" Thank you ! It is most kind of you ! I must go now ! " She tried to struggle to her feet, but could not manage it till he put his arms forward to help her.

"It has been a great shock ! Come, *Fraulein*, that cellar across the street is a *Bierhaus* \ You must have a drink of brandy ! "

" No ! No ! " she insisted. " I tell you I must go ! "

" I wouldn't dream of it ! Besides, I need a drop myself ! "

" Oh, of course, of course ! How selfish of me ! Did they hurt you ? I am so sorry ! "

" It will pass. It is not myself I'm thinking of. "

" Please go yourself, " she begged piteously. " I must go home ! " She tried to tear herself from the support of his arm, but the effort was too much for her. She collapsed and would have fallen again had he not seized her. He took the matter into his own hands and carried her across the road to the *Bierhaus*, her feet hardly touching the ground. He got her down the cellar-steps and set her down in a deep ingle-bench. " Brandy, quick ! " he ordered. It came. He put a glass to her lips. " There, now ! " he said. " Feeling a little better ? "

" Yes ! " she murmured. She did not open her eyes. She seemed to have gone into a light sleep.

He looked at her intently. She was the daughter of the creature he hated with a hatred he had not believed it possible for one human being to entertain towards another. He asked himself did he hate her, too ; was it possible that, standing so close to it, she should be excluded from the fierce heat in which the object of his hatred was wrapped round ? He realised in the act of asking the question that he did not hate her, else he would not have formulated it. It seemed that the other drew from him every emotion that he was capable of experiencing towards every human being and concentrated it into one jet of demon hatred.

He scrutinised her dispassionately, her heavy lids, her long lashes, the extreme fatigue at the corners of her mouth. He had no room in his charged heart even to be sorry for a frail creature who had laboured so mightily. Her fatigue, her loneliness, were all counters to be used in the game he set himself to play. It was more than probable he would have to go through the pretence of loving her. He would do that, too, of course. He had no sense of shame or chivalry.

At last she opened her eyes. He expected her to say again she must go at once. But she did not. The resistance within her had grown flaccid. Her mind felt curiously dim and weak. It was as if her limbs had been immersed for hours in warm

water and an indolence had seeped into the very sockets of her bones. She said nothing for some time. She looked at him with a fixity that produced in him a vague discomfort.

" Who are you ? " she said at length.

" I am a student," he replied. " I am here in Berlin studying the History of Art."

" You are a foreigner, then ? "

" Yes. And you, too, I think ? "

" Yes."

" Will you have another sip of brandy ? "

" No, no, I'm all right now."

" Where are you from, if I may ask ? "

For a brief moment her sense of caution awoke in her and lifted its head. " What does he want to know for ? Why is it his business ? " Then she remembered his kindness to her. It was so lovely to be talking to someone young, only a year or two older than herself. He would disappear again into the loud emptiness from which he had emerged. She had been so lonely, so long.

Besides, it was pretty clear where she came from. Her accent told that. She thought he had an English accent, too. " I'm English," she said. " And you ? "

" I'm English, too. But we've been living in Calcutta for a long time."

" Oh yes ? Calcutta ? " she murmured. Then she seemed to drowse off again for some minutes.

When she opened her eyes again, she reached for her bag. " And now I've got to go," she said. He saw she meant it this time. " I want to say again how much I thank you." She was talking English now.

" You must let me see you home," he said.

" Oh no. Please no. I can manage."

" I insist. . . Miss ... I don't even know your name."

" Smith," she told him. " Mary Smith."

" I'm Williams. John Williams. You don't imagine, Miss Smith, I could let you go home alone ? "

" Please, I want to. I'd much rather."

" But why ? "

She felt it was dangerous to be so insistent, lest she should arouse some suspicion in his mind. " Fd like to be on my own. I've got to go somewhere. Come part of the way with me, if you like."

" All right." He, too, felt it would be unwise to insist too much. " You won't tell me where you live ? Fd like to find out if you're quite all right."

" No," she said fiercely. " I said I'm all right."

" I'm sorry, Miss Smith. Very well, then. I'll be glad to see you part of the way home, if you'll let me."

She took him across the Moltkebrücke some distance along Altmöbitt. He talked of the latest

films and shows and of the museums. She hardly answered. She had drawn back into herself again, "And now," she said, reaching out her hand stiffly, "I think I'd best say good-bye, Mr. Williams. I thank you again." The deadness was back in her voice again, the eyes were again remote and impersonal.

"Good-bye, Miss Smith. Look here, just one thing. I'm going to keep my eye open for you again. I hope you won't mind."

She turned on her heel. "Good-bye," she said curtly.

2

He realised that he would himself have to be careful how he approached and left his flat. She was aware of him now. He must take care that she did not see him about the place before he thought the time had come for their second meeting. But when a few days had passed, he realised his caution was superfluous. She seemed to have fallen in upon herself since the episode of the bag-snatching. It was as if it had made her realise for the first time how depleted she was, what a poor shell of a woman her dreadful task had made her. She moved about to do her errands heavy-footed and heavy-eyed. He came up to her about ten days after their first meeting, He had followed her into the Tiergarten, to

within a short distance of the Kroll Opera House.

" Oh hello, Miss Smith," he called out. " It is you ! I've been hoping to meet you one of these days ! "

" Good-afternoon ! " she said, and walked on.

" Oh no, you don't ! I don't think it's at all kind of you ! " He came up to her and was walking by her side.

" Won't you go away ? " she asked. She looked straight before her. She did not turn her head as she spoke.

" Listen, Miss Smith. I'm on my own. And you are. We're both English. We ought to do something about it."

She made no reply. She moved on for another twenty or thirty yards. Then she became aware there was a park bench beside her, at her left hand. She felt suddenly she would fall if she did not sit down. She found he was sitting beside her.

" You're not looking a bit well," he said severely. " It strikes me you don't look after yourself."

She looked down at the gravel beneath her feet. Her lips trembled a little.

" What's the matter ? " he asked. " Could I do something ? I wish you'd let me."

" No, nothing," she replied. " You can't do anything." She extracted a handkerchief from

her bag as if she was about to lift it to her eyes ; but she did not. She crumpled it up, tore at its ends nervously once or twice, then put it in the bag again.

" Look here ! " He bent over towards her urgently. " I'm fed up with Buddhas and Shivas and things ! Pm going to take a day off. Why don't you ? Do you know the Nachmittags Kabarett ? Let's go along for an hour or two. It'll do us both good ! "

" I can't! " she complained feebly. " I can't! "

" Oh come ! " He got hold of her arm quite roughly. " Why shouldn't you ? "

Why shouldn't she ? Because she was tied hand and foot, and ear and mouth and eye. Because she was not a human being any longer, but a blind function. Because she was dead, she was not alive any longer.

A sudden gust of profound self-pity seized her. Tears rose in her eyes and coursed down her cheeks. He looked at her sharply.

" Well ? " he rapped out.

She lowered her head. Her voice was so faint, he could hardly hear it. " I'd like to go ! " she whispered.

" Right ! We'll get a taxi ! " His voice was as matter-of-fact as a hotel clerk booking a room. But triumph beat in his heart like a strong wind.

3

They met each other once or twice a week at first, then they met every day. She did not ask herself whether she loved him. He became as necessary to her as the air she breathed, more necessary than food or drink, in which she had long lost all interest.

She had been away one afternoon nearly three hours. When she came back, her father seized her by the shoulders. His face was death-pale in his anxiety and fright. "Where have you been?" he cried. "What right have you to be away all this time?"

"I wanted to be alone."

"You wanted to be alone? Do you think I'm a fool? You've been with some man!"

"I haven't!"

"Look me in the face! You've been with some man!"

She was silent.

"There!" he cried hysterically. "Who is he? What's his name?"

"I've been alone!"

"Don't lie to me! I forbid you to see him again! When you've done your shopping, you must come straight back! Do you hear?" He shook her. "Do you hear?"

"I'm tired and ill," she said. "If you talk

to me like that, I won't come back at all. I saw them take a girl's body out of the Spree this morning. She was about my age."

He removed his hands from her shoulders as if flames were burning them. He slunk away towards his bedroom, hugging the wall. He uttered no word on the subject again that day or the next day. Then, the day after, he took her hand in his. " If he asks you anything, don't tell him, will you, Judy darling ? " he pleaded tremulously.

She turned her head away. The young man was her secret, hers alone. She would not share him. He had no existence for anyone in the world but her. Everything else but him she had abandoned.

" I don't know what you're talking about," she said.

4

" I am not in love with her," said the young man to himself. " I shouldn't see her again, if I could get at him any other way than through her. But if there were any room for love inside me, I should love her. She is beautiful, and she is dying. There never was any human being as brave as she is. I mustn't force her to speak. She'll speak to me herself. She's too weak now

to be able to bear her secret alone. In a week or two she'll tell me. She'll hardly know what she's saying, or that she's saying anything at all. But she'll tell me. She'll die if she does not. And when she does—what'll happen then? I don't know. I don't know. She mustn't get in my way, though she's dying, though she's beautiful. Else I'll have to kill her, too."

5

It was in the pine-woods near the Wannsee she spoke to him at length. For a long time she lay against his breast, his arm round her. She did not move. The breath hardly seemed to enter and leave her lungs. Her cheeks were as pale as the wood-anemone.

"John," she breathed. "Listen to me ! "

" Yes, Mary, I'm listening. I thought you'd fallen asleep."

" I'm not strong enough not to say it. I love you. No, don't say anything. I don't know if you love me or not. I think you don't."

" Mary——"

" Please. It's not about you and me I want to talk. It's about someone else and me."

" Someone—in Berlin ? "

" I've got to tell you. If I didn't love you, I'd not be able to tell you. But I'd die, I think."

"What are you talking about, Mary? Are you ill?"

"Oh yes. But that doesn't matter. Nothing can be done about that now!"

"Don't talk nonsense!" There was anger in his voice. "What do you mean nothing can be done now? You must go to a doctor! Berlin's bad for you! You must get away!"

"I can't!"

"Oh can't you? And why? Now listen——"

"Because of my father!"

"What? Your father? What's he got to do with it?"

"He's in Berlin!"

"In Berlin? Is he? Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I'm not going to ask you not to tell anyone in the world what I'm going to tell you now. But I think you won't."

"What's all this about, Mary? Of course I won't"

"What is it all about, John? I don't know. You won't believe me. But I tell you I don't know. This is as much as I know."

So she told him what she knew to tell, and he knew of it little less than she did. When she finished speaking, she lay in his arms like a dead creature. He bent down and kissed her on the lips. "There was never so brave a girl," he

murmured, " in all the world. Or a man so wicked."

6

About a fortnight later he determined that the moment had come for him to act. He must act for her sake, not his own. For himself, he could afford to wait.

" I want you to go and tell your father about me,"³ he said. " Tell him we love each other, you and I. Tell him that to-morrow I'm coming back to the flat with you. I'm going to help you look after him from now on. Do you understand ? We share it all, from now on."

" No, no ! " she cried, wringing her hands. " He'll go mad with fright ! Not to-morrow ! Not to-morrow ! "

" I'm doing it for your sake, not for his. You're not going on another day like this. You're more than half-dead already."

" Not to-morrow! Not to-morrow," she moaned.

" All right. You can break it to him gently. Next week, if you like."

7

A few days later she told her father she had fallen in love with a young English student she

had met in Berlin. She expected him to storm and rage at her, but he did no such thing. He turned his head away and sighed.

"Why did you lie to me then?" he asked quietly.

"Because I was frightened."

"Aren't you frightened now?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"The time has gone by for that."³⁵

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you know what I mean?"

He remained silent. He did not turn his head.

"If John weren't here to share things, I don't suppose I'd last out much longer."

"To *share* things? What do you mean, Judy?"

"I can't look after you alone, daddy. I must have his help."

"What are you saying?" His voice rose in a thin wailing. "What are you saying?"

*'He's going to come here, daddy. I can't keep it up without him."

He threw his head back and suddenly burst out laughing. His laughter became wilder and wilder. Tears poured down his cheeks." Oh Judy, Judy!" he cried, when he could at last speak at all.

"How funny you are! How dreadfully, dreadfully funny! Ha! Ha! Ha!" he began again.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!"

" You'd best be careful ! " she said coldly.
" That window's open ! You'll be heard ! "

The laughter went from his face like a breath from a mirror. He turned his head round anxiously. " You don't think anyone heard, do you, Judy ? "

" Perhaps not."

" Close the window, Judy ! No, Judy, don't ! What does it matter ? You say you're going to let him come here, don't you ? Tear those curtains off the rings, Judy ! Open the window wider. Tell them all I'm here, Judy ! Shout, shout, at the top of your voice ! Say your father's a murderer ! Say he's been hiding here all this time ! Say anybody can come and fetch him now !

" Well, why don't you ? Why don't you, I ask ? What's the matter with you, Judy ? Are you asleep ? Are you dead ? Get up, Judy, get up ! Let him come ! Well, why don't you get up ? I tell you I don't mind if he *does* come—as soon as you like ! Ah, there you are, Judy ! That's better now ! Did you hear what I said ? I said I don't mind if he *does* come ! I mean—if you're quite sure he's all right, are you ? Just tell me that, Judy ! Is he all right, Judy ? "

He stared into her eyes haggardly, waiting for her to speak. But she felt it was more than she could do even to breathe yes to him. She turned her head again.

He got up from her side and left her, muttering querulously to himself. " She ought to say he's all right. She ought to say that, at least. It's mean of her. I never thought she'd turn out like that."

8

Four days later a young man stood beside Judy Wace as she turned the key in the lock of her flat. The woman who lived in the flat on the other side of the landing chanced to be coming out at that moment, and the sight astounded her. The grip of her shopping-basket slid from her fingers, and she stood there gaping for a full minute. The door had closed behind the couple before she had recovered her breath and turned towards the lift. And only in that moment the further awareness came to her that the human being with the *Ausländerin* was not only a human being, but young and a male. She stood and marvelled for another minute. " She is flesh and blood, after all ! " she muttered to herself. " Though there is little indeed of both ! " So muttering and shaking her head, she let herself down in the lift.

The door closed behind Judy and her companion. " Put your hat and coat here, on this table ! " murmured Judy. " This way ! " There

was a door immediately opposite them. " I'll knock," whispered Judy, " though he's sure to have heard us." She knocked gently. There was no reply. She knocked again, more loudly. There was still no reply. Her heart fluttered with fright. Had anything happened to him ? Had his nerve failed him at this last moment ?

She opened the door. Her father sat in his usual place, in the shadowed corner of the room, to the right of the window. " Oh, there you are, daddy ! " she said. " Here's John ! "

Her father did not rise. His eyes shone queerly across the room's curtained twilight. She turned to the young man. " Here's my father, John ! Come in ! "

But he still stood on the further side of the threshold. He stood there swaying slightly. The whole room swayed towards him and dipped back again. The blood pulsed in his eyeballs. It seemed that his finger-nails extended from the tips of his fingers till they were long and sharp as a beast's claws. The fingers stuck out rigidly before him, towards the throat of his abomination, seen at last, within reach of the lusting fingers at last, after such vast journeys and such consummate patience.

He moved one foot across the threshold. Had she said no word then and not come closer to him, he would one moment later have been sped upon

his victim like a stone from a catapult. But her image arose between his eyes and the eyes of the hunched evil in the chair, an image of such fortitude and sadness, that the tense fingers fell limply towards the palms of his hands, the red glare went out of the room.

He came forward. He found it possible even to take the dank hand that came diffidently towards him out of the shadow.

" Poor Mr. Smith," he murmured. " It must have been frightful for you. You can rely on **me.**"

CHAPTER XVIII

i

THE ARRANGEMENT was that the young man should come in for an hour or two a day, and sometimes longer, in the afternoon or evening. It was understood that he did his studies in the museum in the morning, and now and again went to classes or lectures. He brought his notebooks with him. He could quite easily work up his notes, while Judy was getting on with things in the kitchen or doing her shopping. He and Wace often played chess. Wace was happy that he had somebody besides himself to play chess with. Judy had tried to learn, but she had never made much of a job of it.

But it seemed that the young man had come too late. Judy did not gather strength from his presence. Because someone was there to share the tension with her, she herself sagged and fell to pieces. From day to day she grew visibly frailer. Her cheeks fell in, her eyes smouldered with forlorn fires. A tiny dry cough awoke and wandered about in her chest and throat like a blind man who cannot find his way out from a maze of passages.

It was the young man who insisted she must go to see a doctor. The old man had become deaf and blind to any ill condition not his own. She long resisted his importunacy, for she knew what a doctor would say. But when he threatened he would bring the doctor there, if she did not go to him, her father added his nervous entreaties, and she went.

The doctor was extremely grave. He doubted whether even now there was anything she might do to prevent a sudden conflagration. One thing was certain. She was doomed if she stayed in Berlin, as surely doomed as any murderer in a death-cell. If she went southward to the mountains, it was possible she might recover.

She declared that the pronouncement must be hidden from her father, for it was quite clearly impossible she should leave him. He pointed out wryly that when she died, they would not ask her whether she wanted to stay or go. He himself that evening told the old man what the doctor had said. Wace was furious. "It's nonsense!" he cried. "The fellow's a quack! He doesn't know what he's talking about! She ought to go and see a decent doctor!"

She went to another doctor, whose verdict was at least as grave. "You will leave for the mountains in two days," the young man said quietly. "You've learned how to move off

from one place to another in less time than that."

She was awed and silent. She realised how futile it was to stand up and beat with such feeble fists at the strong doom that stood over her. "How will I be able to get him away?" was all she asked. "Do you think they'll let him stay somewhere near me?"

"You won't need to get him away," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I'll take over from you."

"What? But it's impossible! You can't! You don't know what it's like! You can't do it!"

"I think I can manage."

"But why—why?"

"For your sake, Mary."

"John, I tell you you've no idea——"

"Hush, Mary, you mustn't excite yourself. Pd already made up my mind, days and days ago. The very first moment I set eyes on him."

"Oh, John, I won't mind dying now! Pll be thinking of you and it won't matter at all!"

"You mustn't talk like that!" he said sternly. "You mustn't think like that! Do you hear? Promise me!"

She sobbed quietly for minute upon minute. He could get no promise from her.

2

The office that looked after the flats was informed that a young countryman of the recent tenant had taken over the flat from her. The neighbours on the other side of the landing were aware of no more than that one solitary had taken the place of another. The young woman was very sick. Clearly it was not likely she would come back again.

He fulfilled the duty he had undertaken with scrupulous loyalty. He abandoned his pretence of frequenting the museums and lecture-classes, for the care of old Wace became more and more exacting. At first they played a great deal of chess, but that fell out, for the old man's wits became more unsteady as the months went on. He was hardly aware of it, even when the young man switched the wireless music on ; he seemed to sink deeper and deeper into his own thoughts. Now and again, however, he seemed to regain some measure of intelligence. He would sit contemplating his daughter's lover with an almost ironic detachment.

" What are you doing this for, John ? It's more than any human being can ask from another."

" Even a father from his daughter ? " the other asked gently.

" I don't know, I don't know." The old man

shook his head dubiously. " But you haven't answered me, John. What are you doing this for ? "

" Because Mary would have died in this room if I hadn't done it."

" Is it fair to yourself? "

" I'm quite happy."

" Are you ? " Wace looked up oddly from under his pale eyelids.

" Yes, I'm quite happy."

3

The temptation that had come to him the moment he had first set eyes on the old man, came to him only once again. That was when he came back from the station where he had put Judy on the south-going train. They were alone, completely alone. The temptation came and went. Steadily and dispassionately he regarded the issue. Here and now he might consummate the pursuit, or he might postpone the consummation from month to delicious month. He was, in fact, happy, infinitely happier than the bemused old man had any idea of. He decided he would wait.

The months did not drag for him. The exquisiteness of the punishment he was perpetuating

suspended them in a void of crystal hallucination. The old man was dying. It became the young man's devotion and delight to seek to postpone the release until Death would be denied not a moment longer.

The day and the hour came at length. The young man sat by the old man's bedside, leaning forward towards him, his lips slightly parted. The old man was propped on his pillow, with the shadow about him. The evening light fell full on the young man's face.

No word had been spoken for an hour or more. The old man had not the strength to speak. The young man's heart brimmed with the happiness that transcends speech. A smile came to his lips.

They looked into each other's eyes thus for some time, the young man blissful in his triumph, the old man troubled by a dim speculation.

," have seen that smile before. Where have I seen lips like those smiling that smile before ?

Long ago. Long ago. There was a small boy running down a street in Doomington. There was another small boy running after him. There was a smile on the pursuer's face.

The smile of the small boy and the young man are the same smile. The small boy and the young

man are both the pursuer. He has caught up to me at length.

Has he caught up to me ? Is it he, or Death, that has caught up to me ? Is the triumph to Death or to him ?

The clairvoyance of Death was on the old man. He spoke, with an access of strength drawn from some unsuspectable reserve. The other did not speak in answer. He smiled. The unchanging smile was answer enough.

" You are his son ? "

Yes.

" Surely I did something worse than kill him that you hounded me so ? "

res.

" What then ? I blinded him ? "

res.

" And for that reason I was to lose not only my eyes, but my touch, my hearing, all my senses in the tomb where you chained me ? "

The smile was like the smile on the lips of a bronze image, sardonic and amused and delicate.

" Does he wish to send his love to me ? "

res.

" Tell him I would not have his love even at the end. Will you ? "

res.

The head of the old man fell to one side. He was dead.

The young man rose from his chair by the bedside. , " *must go to the mountains soon. Perhaps it will not be too late.*

THE END

