THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

SEPTEMBER, 1955!

ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE

STORIES BY

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AND OTHERS

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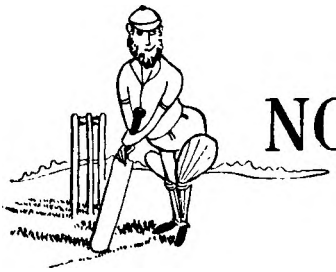


NOT QUITE CRICKET

Shall I never storm or swear
Just because the umpire's fair?
Or from expletives forbear,
'Cause he gives me out with care?
Be he fairer, more upright,
Than Carpenter or Lillywhite,
If he will not favour me,
What care I how fair he be?

E. B. V. CHRISTIAN,
At the Sign of the Wicket, 1894

How's That?

Next day Alfie provided himself with a copy of *Wisden* and took it to the Manor. " I think I can 'tice him," he said with a grin, explaining that in his belief laws and rules and regulations would always prove irresistible to political chaps if dangled before them like carrots in front of a donkey. This is what he proceeded to do. He opened *Wisden* at Rule 22 and, remarking casually, " There's a fair puzzle here," began to read:

" *Note (f): The striker is out if the ball is hugged to the body of the catcher even though he has not touched it with his hands. Should the ball lodge in the fieldsman's clothing, or in the top of the wicketkeeper's pads, this will amount to its being hugged to the body of the catcher.*

" Funny thing, that," said Alfie with an expression of wide-eyed innocence, " for if a ball sticks in a wicketkeeper's pads how can you say he's hugging it? "

" I think," said Halliday, " that it is one of those cases where a common phrase is given a wide interpretation to cover a large number of possible eventualities. But it's an interesting clause, certainly."

Alfie continued to dangle his carrot.

" Rule 44, note (c)," he said. " It always makes me laugh. *The umpire is not a boundary*. Just that."

" *What?* " said Halliday. " Let me have a look at the book."

" Would you like to borrow it for a few days? " said Alfie.

" That's very kind of you. Let me see. *The umpire is not a boundary*. Very odd. But I suppose if you scored four runs every time you hit me—I mean the umpire—it would be a very strong temptation, wouldn't it? "

Alfie, who had not failed to notice that " me," returned in triumph to the Horse and Harrow. " I 'ticed him," he said. " Now the next thing is to get him trained."

JOHN MOORE, *The Umpire*

Caught Out

I ran for a catch
With the sun in my eyes, Sir;
Being sure at a " snatch,"
I ran for a catch . . .
Now I wear a black patch,
And a nose such *a size, Sir!*
I ran for a catch,
With the sun in my eyes, Sir.

COULSON KERNAHAN

QUEER FISH

BY KEM BENNETT

AT five-thirty the buzzer went and Albert Pascoe stopped shovelling china clay in the hold of the Danish freighter *Langeland.* At five-thirty-five, in company with fifty other dockers, and with a quarter-litre of smuggled aquavit in a tomato-ketchup bottle in his pocket, Albert walked past the policeman on duty at the dock gates. Then, and then only, did he permit himself to let go a breath of gusty relief which shifted a cloud of white dust from the hairs of his stubby moustache.

The ferry was waiting. Albert went aboard, a short, stiff man in middle age, filled with good nature, argument, and Cornish independence. When they were halfway across the estuary, Harry Sims, the ferryman, came up. " Evening, Albert."

" Evening, Harry."

" They'm running, boy."

Albert blinked at the ferryman. " They be? " He went to the side and stared down into the clear water, thinking of great silver fish. A moment later he thought of his fine net, hanging in the woodshed behind his cottage, and of his boat, moored half a mile upstream. Then, sourly, he remembered Herbert Whiteway, the water-bailiff, and spat his disgust overboard.

The law said that the salmon had to be left in peace to finish their journey to the spawning-grounds at the head of the Fowey River. The law enforced its opinion with the threat of a fifty-pound fine. Albert winced; then spat again, in disgust and for the more practical reason that he needed to rid his throat of a layer of china clay.

The ferry came to a stop at the slip below Pendennick, whose single street plunged like a madman's ski-jump. Albert paid his fare—a penny—and started to clump slowly up the hill to the top, where lay his cottage and where the rolling Cornish farmland started, with its fat cattle, gull-dotted ploughland, and sleek

" Let 'em run," she said—
" You leave your net be, d'you hear? "

hawks sitting on the telegraph posts. Presently he pushed open the door of his whitewashed cottage. Children fluttered into movement like a flock of starlings and he patted heads absent-mindedly. At the stove, Alice turned from frying chipped potatoes. She looked down at him. " You're back then."

" Arrh," Albert said, smiling sheepishly. For fifteen years his beloved wife had been making him feel sheepish. He no longer minded, for it had become a habit, like having children, drinking beer, smuggling aquavit, poaching salmon, and keeping his nose clean. " What's for tea? " he asked.

" Nice bit of pollack and chips."

He nodded, without vast enthusiasm. " Salmon are running."

Alice turned. Six feet two. Built like an oak tree. " Let 'em run," she said. " You leave your net be, d'you hear? "

" Yes, my dear," Albert said, then added with grievance in his voice, " Who said aught about the net? Never crossed my mind."

Alice grunted. " Go and get washed. Tea's nearly ready."

Shortly after seven that evening, Albert shut the door of his cottage behind him and started downhill towards The Lugger. As he walked he leaned slightly backwards to compensate for the gradient and brought his best drinking-boots down hard, so that the nails would bite. He had the ketchup bottle in his pocket and at the back of his mouth there lingered the regurgitant sweetness of well-fried potatoes. He was content.

There were six other customers in the public bar of The Lugger—three regulars, two strangers, and Herbert Whiteway, the water-bailiff. Albert ignored Whiteway; he was not yet in the mood to start pulling his leg, which was all the man was good for. Instead, from his favourite seat on a high-backed oak settle by the fire, he surveyed the strangers. There had been a fat new car outside, he remembered. They must belong to it.

They had white faces and soft hands and their clothes were uncomfortably new. They were restless and when they spoke they did so in undertones. They were drinking brandy, which was unheard of in The Lugger, and they didn't even look as if they were enjoying it. City fellows. No concern of his—not until April, anyway. In April Albert would cease to be a docker and become a boatman instead. Then strangers would have

some interest for him, if they wished to go out fishing or take a trip to Polperro or Mevagissey; now they had none.

He dismissed the two men from his thoughts as if they had already returned to London, or Mars, or wherever it was that they followed their mysterious livelihood.

Presently he took the ketchup bottle out of his pocket and stared at it. Unscrewed the top. Sniffed. He put the neck to his lips and tilted his head back. A fire started behind his uvula. Albert happily let it burn for a few seconds, then reached for the pint of bitter beer on the table in front of him. He quenched the fire. Vapours wreathed round the back of his palate. Arrh!

From across the room, Herbert Whiteway was watching, envy in his small eyes. Albert beamed at him. " Physic," he said. " Doctor give it me for me guts. Proper tasty, 'tis."

The bar shook with laughter. Only Herbert Whiteway did not laugh. Even the strangers smiled palely. Albert took out his pipe. He took a rope of twist from a tin in his pocket and cut slivers from it which he started to roll between the palms of his small, hard hands. Then he said conversationally, " Harry Sims told me they was running, Herbert."

Whiteway said, " So they may be."

" 'Tis early for they." No reply. Albert took a pull at his beer and lit his pipe. " If you ask me," he said blandly, " they'm not Cornish fish at all, boy."

The bar was suddenly silent. It was the old joke; the good joke; the joke that never failed.

Whiteway fell for it, as usual. " Gerraway! " he said. " Talk sense, man."

" They'm Canadian steelheads." Albert's voice was pontifical, the voice of a man pronouncing dogma. " They'm Canadians driven over by the porps, and as such they can be fished."

Whiteway said nastily, " If I catch you fishing them before February month I'll have you up before the Bench, all the same. Fifty pound or three months it'll cost you—unless you can get the fish to show a Canadian passport, ha ha! "

Nobody laughed. Albert stared at the bailiff, saying nothing. He let the poor joke fall, flatten, fail, and by its very failure recoil upon its originator. Then, at last, he said smugly, " You didn't ought to make threats like that, boy. You'm a public servant. 'Tis up to you to keep a civil tongue in your head, now."

There was a pause, loaded with hatred. Whiteway drained the half-pint of rough cider called " scrumpy " that was all his parsimony would permit him to drink, and rose to his feet, a long-faced, stooping, miserable man.

" You're a poaching, sneering, smuggling good-for-nothing,

Pascoe," he said thickly. " One day it'll be my turn to laugh, and I don't mind how soon it comes, so I'm warning you! "

The door slammed shut behind him. Albert stared at it sorrowfully. Always the same trouble; the man'd never stay to have his leg pulled proper.

" Arrh! " he said, " the ——! " and the word he used was libellous. He tilted his ketchup bottle, wiped his lips on the back of his hand and glanced round the bar. " Who's for a game of darts? "

At ten o'clock, time was called. The strangers had gone long ago. Only the regulars remained. They drained their glasses slowly, taking their time because beer tasted all the better after hours. Eventually they drifted towards the door.

Somebody said, " Going upalong, Albert? "

Albert stood in the open door. The night was clear and soft and the stars were out. He was not drunk—half the contents of the ketchup bottle remained, scrupulously saved for another occasion—but he was warm with drink. He shook his head.

" Not yet awhile, Charlie," he said. " I got to fetch something from the boat. G'night, all."

She was called the *Alice*, and she lay at her winter moorings half a mile up-river from Pendennick. She was the pride of Albert's life, a twenty-three-foot fishing-boat converted to a day cruiser with a small, stuffy cabin forward, a glassed-in shelter for the steersman, and a well aft from which the seats were removable when the space was needed for fishing. She had an old-fashioned main engine and a smaller, more modern wing engine. With both going the *Alice* could plough herself through the water at eight knots, but at that speed she was inclined to be smelly and she shook and chattered like a cement-mixer.

The tide was falling. Albert left the road and trudged across shingle to sit on a rock at the water's edge. He had lied when he said he needed to fetch something from the boat; in fact he had just wanted to look at her, to plan the things he would do to her when the time for refitting came, and to dream about Easter. At Easter the tourists started coming, which, for Albert, meant money in the pocket and, better still, liberation from the detestable necessity of working as a docker.

His pipe had gone out. Dreamily, Albert reached in his pocket for matches. Then, without warning, a voice in the darkness behind him said, " Don't move, please."

Albert did move. He jumped uncontrollably.

A man appeared at his side. Albert looked up, his eyes wide with astonishment. It was one of the strangers who had been

in The Lugger. The stranger had a pistol in his right hand.

Slowly, Albert put his unlit pipe in his mouth.

" Is that your boat? " the stranger asked. " If so, my friend and I would like to hire her."

" I'll not talk to 'ee till that pistol's put away," Albert said grimly.

" Yes, you will." The stranger's voice, in which there was a trace of foreign intonation, was harsh and cold. " Be sensible. We can take the boat if we want to. We're giving you the chance to make a little money, my friend, and to keep your boat into the bargain. Is she seaworthy? "

" She be," Albert said, with sullen pride in his voice.

" Would she take us to France? "

The pipe came out of Albert's mouth. " To France! You'm reckoning to go to France—now, in my *Alice*? "

" Yes."

" Arrh! talk sense, mister."

" Will she get us there? "

Albert shrugged. He looked lovingly at the *Alice*, and pride stirred his tongue again. " She would," he said, " but she aren't going to."

" Why not? "

" Because, for one thing, 'tis agin the law."

The man beside him smiled with one side of his mouth. " We were in the inn tonight," he said. " From what we heard it did not seem that you were a man to take the law too seriously."

Albert said nothing.

" If you'll take us to France we'll give you fifty pounds," the stranger continued. " If not, I shall have to shoot you before we leave because we cannot afford to let you raise the alarm."

There was a long silence. Albert looked at the *Alice* and at the pistol in the man's hand. He scratched his nose with the stem of his pipe. An inward voice was telling him that this cool-tongued, white-faced stranger did not make empty threats. He would shoot, if necessary. And then Alice and the kids would be alone and he, Albert Pascoe, would be floating, face downwards, in cold, green water with the salmon flashing by on their way to spawn.

Sweat stood on his forehead. He made a sudden, violent gesture with his hand. " You'm barmy! France! in the middle of the night with no charts! " He pointed his pipe at the *Alice*. " She'm a day cruiser, mister. She don't belong to do this kind of thing." A new thought struck him and he added flatly, " Anyway, there's no more than a gallon of petrol in her tanks, so that's that."

The stranger said quietly, " We have petrol—fifty gallons in cans in the back of the car. The need for it had occurred to us."

The silence returned. Albert shifted on his rock, restless, glancing at the pistol—and at the *Alice*, as if she might be able to tell him what he should do.

The stranger said impatiently, " Well? "

Albert shrugged. " Seems I shall have to take 'ee, mister," he said sullenly. " But 'tis agin the law and good sense, and you'll maybe not see tomorrow if the weather blows up."

The stranger smiled. " We shall be happy to take the risk," he said. " Now give my companion some help with the petrol."

Fifteen minutes later the *Alice* had full tanks and a reserve of six four-gallon jerry-cans aboard.

While Albert made preparations to start the cold engines, the stranger with the gun stood over him. The other man drove the car away and came back on foot.

Albert said, " She'm ready to go now if you'm still set on it."

" We are," the stranger said. " Do you know the French coast? "

" I been there."

" Do you know of a place where you could put us ashore secretly? "

" I reckon I might find a place on the Brittany coast," Albert said unwillingly. " 'Tis a risky business, though."

" How long will it take? "

" 'Bout fifteen hours, if the weather holds."

There was a silence. Then the man with the gun snarled, " Fifteen hours! You're lying! It should not take so long as that."

Albert looked at him. " I'm not lying," he said quietly. " If you reckon you'm able to get her there quickerer, you'm welcome to try."

The back of the stranger's hand came slashing out of the darkness. It caught Albert on the cheek, knocking his head back and making his ears ring painfully. He made a noise in his throat and moved forwards, his hands reaching out. The black eye of the pistol stared at him. He dropped his hands.

" That was for insolence and to show you that we can be harsh if necessary," the stranger said. " Now let us go, and if I think you are trying any tricks I shall shoot you. Understand? "

Albert said nothing. He stooped to swing the handle of the main engine. It fired. He set the throttle and turned to the wheel. The second stranger cast off.

As the *Alice* pulled away from her mooring and turned down the estuary towards the sea, Albert was staring fixedly into the

darkness ahead, the set of his lips making his moustache jut angrily forwards.

Two men saw the *Alice* creep out of Fowey harbour. One was the coastguard on duty on the hill above the harbour mouth, who noted down that she had left but took no other action. The second was Herbert Whiteway. Having a one-track mind, Whiteway instantly jumped to the conclusion that Albert was out after salmon.

With excitement gleaming in his pale eyes the water-bailiff wrapped himself in many coats, got out his dinghy and rowed quietly across the estuary to take up a position of concealment under the lee of the jetties opposite Pendennick. There he stayed, nursing the conviction that Albert was merely waiting for the tide to be right before he started netting.

In the early hours of the morning the south-westerly wind which prevails in Cornish waters sprang up and quickly freshened until it was blowing half a gale. When Herbert Whiteway got home he was a sadder and wetter, if not wiser, man.

However, at breakfast time there was something to cheer him up. He opened his morning paper to see headlines blacker than usual across the front page—CABINET MINISTER'S SUICIDE. BLACKMAIL SUSPECTED. And beneath the headlines two photographs, under which the text read: *The two men above are wanted for questioning and may be carrying vital state secrets. They were prevented from leaving the country at Southampton yesterday, but broke custody, and escaped in a stolen car.*

A few minutes later, in the Fowey police-station, Whiteway leaned eagerly over the counter. "Them two men," he panted. "I seen them in The Lugger last night."

The policeman behind the counter was infuriatingly calm. He nodded.

"Yes, mate. So did the landlord. You'm a bit late."

Whiteway scowled. "Albert Pascoe took the *Alice* out last night," he said with angry malice. "She's not back yet. I reckon he took them two fellows with him."

At half past two in the afternoon Albert cut the *Alice*'s wing engine and throttled down the main. It was blowing hard. The sky was leaden with racing cloud through which there were no gaps for the sun to shine.

A hundred yards away, waves with wind-broken crests crashed into foam against black needles of rock with cliffs behind them. But between the rocks there was a channel and beyond the channel fairly calm water and a cove with a gently sloping beach.

Albert went to the cabin door. " We'm there," he said. " If you'm willing to risk it, I'll try to put you ashore."

The two strangers were half sitting, half lying in a huddle of sick agony amid the litter of the cabin. The leader, the one with the pistol, looked up, swallowed bile frantically and lurched to his feet. When he was outside, Albert pointed. The stranger stared at the tumult of the waves and shut his eyes. " France? " he whispered.

" That's right," Albert said.

" Can you get the boat in . . . in there? "

" I reckon."

The stranger nodded, gripping the side of the wheelhouse so hard that his knuckles were as white as chalk. Albert swung the *Alice*'s bows towards the little beach. White water broke over her. She staggered and yawed and swooped like a storm-tossed seagull, but she missed the rocks. Gently, gently, Albert nosed her into the beach. The strangers were ready.

Albert put his hand out. " Fifty pound," he said.

A sodden envelope came out of a coat-pocket and was pressed into his hand. In their waterlogged city clothes the two men clambered over the bows and lurched up the beach.

Albert shouted, " Gimme a shove off! " but they ignored him. He spat. Then smiled a grimly happy smile. At least he was shut of them. That was good.

The *Alice*'s engines throbbed. Water boiled at her stern. Albert hopped over the side, heaved, hopped back in again, soaked to the skin. The *Alice* slid slowly backwards, her keel grating on the sand. Helm hard over. She came round. A tooth of rock reached out for her but she seemed somehow to dodge. She was in open water.

Albert rubbed the salt out of his eyes. He spared a glance over his shoulder and saw the two strangers searching for a way up the cliffs. He grinned again.

Then he opened the envelope he had been given. It was full of wet newspaper.

The police found the strangers' car hidden among bushes close to the place where the *Alice* had been moored. That was at nine o'clock in the morning. By ten o'clock messages had gone to London, and from London to Paris and Paris to Brittany. Watchers on the bleak Brittany coastline saw nothing of the *Alice*, nor of the wanted men.

The R.A.F. were asked to fly sorties in an attempt to locate the boat. They did, but the weather defeated them and they saw nothing.

Alice Pascoe spent the day in the coastguard's hut above Fowey harbour, having left her children in the care of a neighbour.

By half past six in the evening Albert was very tired. He had tied a loop of cord round his wrist and fastened the other end to one of the spokes of the *Alice*'s wheel, so that the tugging of the wheel would awaken him if he chanced to sleep.

The wind had lessened. The waves no longer showed white caps. The *Alice* rode the swell with a neat, swooping motion that would have unravelled the stomach of a landsman but which Albert found soothing. In spite of his tiredness he was glad—glad to be going home, glad to be alive, even glad, in a way that he did not fully understand, that the strangers had robbed him of his promised fifty pounds.

He up-ended his ketchup bottle for the last time at six-thirty-five, stared regretfully at its utter emptiness and pitched it over the side.

Dusk was coming down as he sighted the landmark of the Gribbin, a peak of black and yellow cliff two or three miles west of Fowey. He left the wheel for a moment then, and went to stoop in the cabin entrance in order to light his pipe. It was when he straightened, puffing hard, that he saw the first porpoises.

Three of their black backs wheeled a few yards away, the triangular dorsal fins cutting up, over, and down again into the water in a movement of slow poetry.

And ahead of the gliding porpoises a great salmon leaped. More porpoises wheeled. Another salmon broke the surface; then a third and a fourth—and the fourth was so close to the *Alice* that it almost jumped inboard.

Like a man in a dream, Albert flipped the throttles down and went to the cabin. After rummaging for a few seconds, he found the thing he was looking for, a rusty old gaff on the end of a six-foot pole. He went to the side of the boat and leaned over, staring fixedly down into the water. Porpoises and salmon showed nearby but he did not raise his head.

Then there came a gleam of silver and a splash right under the lee of the almost stationary boat. Albert struck, his hands as skilled with the gaff as the hands of a pianist on the keyboard. He felt the gaff bite, and he gave a great heave, staggering backwards into the well of the boat.

He stared down with happy incredulity at the full-grown, twenty-pound cock salmon that he had snatched from the beaks of the porpoises.

Then alarm struck at him. Herbert Whiteway. Fifty pound or three months. He glanced about him. The sea was deserted. Arrh, who could have seen?

On his knees he touched the salmon. " You'm a beauty, my dear. You'm a real beauty! "

They were waiting for him at the Town Quay—Alice, Herbert Whiteway, ten reporters, most of the inhabitants of Fowey, four dogs, and an Inspector of Police. Albert brought the *Alice* in smartly, hugging the splendid guilty knowledge of the salmon to himself. He cut the engines, flicked a rope's end round a bollard and made her fast. He stumped soggily up the steps and kissed Alice. Cameras clicked.

" I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to come with me, Mr. Pascoe."

Albert looked up into the face of the Police Inspector. He nodded. " Now? "

" Yes."

In the police car the Inspector said, " You took two men in your boat last night . . ."

" I had to," Albert said gruffly. " They forced me with a pistol, like."

" Did you land them? " The policeman's voice was urgent.

" Arrh."

" Do you know exactly where? "

" Surely," Albert said. " I put they ashore in a cove, not far from St. Levan."

The Inspector peered down at a map on his knees, his forefinger following a coastline. Albert watched him. He coughed " Excuse me."

" Yes? "

" You got the wrong chart, sir. St. Levan, I said. 'Tis not far from Land's End."

The Police Inspector's head came up and the map of Brittany slid off his lap on to the floor of the car. His eyes were wide with astonishment. " In Cornwall! "

Albert grinned. " 'Twas when I last saw it," he said, then added, " I reckoned they two had no business to be asking to go to France in the middle of the night. I reckoned they was bad ones, so I went out to sea for an hour or two and then, when the weather worsened, I come round in a big circle.

" There was no sun to say I was changing course, and anyway they was proper seasick by then. Didn't ask no questions. I told they it was France and they went ashore. Glad to be on dry land, I reckon."

He chuckled. " If you'm after those two, sir, they'll be there still unless they swum for it. To my knowledge there's no way up the cliffs from that cove at all."

As an honoured guest, Albert was driven back to the Town Quay after his visit to the police-station. With the Inspector's friendly hand on his shoulder he walked proudly through the still-waiting crowd.

But when he caught sight of Herbert Whiteway, he stopped in his tracks. The water-bailiff was standing in the *Alice*, his face gleeful with triumph and malice. Albert's salmon lay on a piece of sacking at his feet.

Albert swallowed. Dismay hit him, self-disgust, anger, and a sense of bitter unfairness. Alice was there, her face glum with disaster. He looked at her for a moment and then lowered his eyes.

Before he could say anything, the Police Inspector's surprisingly soft voice sounded, " Something wrong, Mr. Whiteway? "

" Nothing wrong, sir," Whiteway said creamily. " I was watching Pascoe come in through my glasses and I saw him gaff a fish. I found this salmon hidden under tarpaulins in the cabin of his boat."

There was a silence. Albert looked up. He took a deep breath and was about to launch himself into a futile defence on the grounds that the salmon was a Canadian fish when the Inspector said softly, " Salmon? That doesn't look like a salmon to me, Mr. Whiteway. I'd say it was a fine big bass."

The water-bailiff stared. He lowered his eyes, glanced for a moment at the salmon at his feet, and looked up again. " A bass! " he said squeakily. " You mean . . ."

" I mean that as far as the police are concerned that is a *bass*, Mr. Whiteway. I'm sorry to disappoint you. Good afternoon."

Albert swallowed again. He looked at the Inspector, at Herbert Whiteway, whose mouth was hanging open, and at the salmon. For once he could think of nothing to say.

Alice stepped into the breach. " I'll thank you to put that fish back where you found it, Mr. Whiteway, and step out of our boat," she said in a loud voice.

Then, as a roar of delighted laughter rose from the crowded quay, she went down the steps like a duchess, with Albert behind her, smiling.

★ ★ ★

GOING TO EXTREMES

Shake and shake
The ketchup bottle.
None will come,
And then a lot'll

RICHARD ARMOUR

Star over Frisco

BY WILLARD MARSH

STEPHANIE must have thought Dr. Abernathy was insane. You could see it close up in her eyes, the way she rolled them above the gag. In the background, the brain-exchanger crackled with static electricity. Then just as the doctor's hand gripped the switch, a hand gripped the arm of Humphrey's seat.

He turned to watch the girl beside him. He seldom noticed other film-goers, but this girl was taking it pretty hard. Identification, they called it in psychology. Humphrey didn't blame her, it was a tense moment. He decided to reassure her, even though some people practically got insulting when you did.

" It's O.K.," he whispered, " she gets away."

" I know," the girl whispered back, but she still kept straining forward.

Humphrey turned back to the screen to see the laboratory window shatter, and the arrow pinning Dr. Abernathy's hand to the control panel. Then Stephanie's fiancé vaulted inside, dropped his bow, and began untying her.

The lights came on, the screen went blank, and through the brisk organ music babies began awakening noisily. Humphrey and the girl stood waiting for their aisle to clear, blinking at each other with that drained, far-away look.

" I kept thinking Grant would *never* get there," she said.

" It was a close thing."

They caught each other in a smile, aware that they had both been talking out loud.

" I like to see a picture through twice, if it's a good one." She grinned defiantly. " I like to get my money's worth. Do you ever? "

Humphrey hesitated, not wanting to admit it.

" Anyway, if you leave early, then what's there left to do? " she said. " You know, especially on Saturday night."

He knew, all right. But already the crowd was shouldering them into the lobby, separating them before he even got a chance

to remember what she looked like. He could see her head, the dull brown tight curls, bobbing on away.

" The reason I see it through twice," he called, " is because you can be more critical the second time." She turned and hung back for him to catch up. Politely squeezing between an elderly couple, Humphrey reached her side. " I'm a great student of human nature," he explained.

She wasn't exactly as pretty as he'd thought, close up, but she had a kind of softness when she smiled, not sceptical like most girls. The fact that she was short enough to have to look up to him gave her a dependent quality, psychologically speaking. It made him feel protective and at the same time self-conscious.

" Besides," Humphrey said, " it isn't really a question of getting your money's worth with me. I get free passes. I'm a radio announcer," he heard himself saying.

They stood in the darkened outer lobby, letting the crowd branch past them towards the car park, the cabs, and the waddling street-cars of Market Street. On a step-ladder overhead an usher was lettering Sunday's announcements across the front of the cinema. The girl had a look on her face for Humphrey that pushed his pulse rate up a notch.

" What's your name? " she breathed.

He remembered his bar-tender friend Ace telling him never to give a girl your right name, but he couldn't help it. He told her.

" Mine's Pearl," she said, " Pearl Rembrandt—you know, like the painter. Only, I'm not any relation."

Then they walked back up Market Street, to the first coffee-shop they came to with tables at the back. While Pearl talked Humphrey only half heard, studying the little things—her sidelong way of glancing, the powdered rash on her cheek, her breathy voice—that made her unique. She'd come to San Francisco to be a telephone operator, not that they didn't have telephones or anything in Petaluma, but the city sounded more fun.

" I'm in Long Distance," she said, " it's nice, you get to talk to people more. You know, when you have to put through their calls. Just about every day I communicate with Salt Lake City, for instance, or Memphis—any place you ever heard of." She sipped at her coffee wistfully. " It's funny, I talk to people all day but I never get to know them. I guess you don't have that problem though, probably being so well acquainted in your profession."

Humphrey slid the sugar-bowl back and forth. " I'm not really a radio announcer," he said. " I'm like you, I left Salinas because I wanted to make something of myself. I took a course

in radio announcing a while ago, but now I'm studying movies this year. Maybe I can get to be a director some day." When he looked up, Pearl wasn't disappointed, just surprised. " I'm a sandwich man at Owl's," he said.

" Oh," she said bravely. " Well, anyway, I'll bet you could be a radio announcer if you really wanted. You have a very distinguished voice."

" Good sandwich men are hard to find," he said defensively. " It isn't everybody can keep up at rush-hour, not getting the customers mixed up who want mayonnaise instead of thousand island— "

" Oh, *sandwich* man! " Pearl smiled. " I thought you meant those men who march up and down all day with boards on, saying where to eat at."

" Oh no, I'm not in the publicity end. In fact, I hardly ever get a chance to contact people in person. Like you in Long Distance," he said, " I'm back in the pantry practically all day."

She reached over to squeeze his hand in understanding. Encouraged, he said, " There's all kinds of tricks in the trade— you know, little things that give you a lead on the other fellow. Like how to stretch the tuna salad when it's getting low . . . "

" How do you ? "

Humphrey shifted uncomfortably.

" Oh, if it's a trade secret I guess I shouldn't ask."

He smiled gratefully, then suddenly realized what was wrong with his sandwich. He eagerly opened it, or what was left of it.

" Now, take this ham salad special here," he said, " it's spread nice, and it's trimmed O.K. But it's got the wrong kind of pickles. He's using vinegar. It should have been sweet pickles, to bring out the flavour of the ham."

" Gee . . . I'd never spot a thing like that in a million years."

Humphrey shrugged modestly.

When they left and had been walking for a little way, he suddenly said, " You add some potato salad."

" What? " Pearl said dreamily.

" You know, what you asked. To stretch the tuna salad."

Now they turned up Stockton Street, where late lamps leaned over them like benevolent moons. The tunnel swallowed them, magnifying their linked footbeats; emitted them into the sudden alleys of Chinatown. Mysterious shadows moved around them, masking the pad of sandalled feet, the flickering of distant braziers. There were spices in the air, and shrimp and duck blood.

Pearl pressed closer, Humphrey walked taller. And then, in that old way no man can unravel, halfway between the Fook

Chong Hong Friendly Society headquarters and Sam Yup's Fish Market, they fell in love. They stood at the corner of Clay Street, looking up at the stars.

" Aren't they gorgeous? " Pearl said. " How many are there altogether, do you suppose? "

And because the stars and everything they surveyed indeed were gorgeous, and because she so believed in him, the knowledge came automatically to Humphrey.

" A couple of hundred anyway," he said. " At least."

" What keeps them up there? I mean, why aren't there more shooting stars? "

" Gravity and things. It's pretty complicated to explain."

" Oh, look, darling, there's one now! " They watched the falling star, dropping in the direction of Portsmouth Square. " Quick, make a wish before it's gone."

They just had time to, before it vanished below the horizon. They loafed down Clay Street in its wake.

" What'd you wish, darling? " Then Humphrey remembered he wasn't supposed to ask.

Pearl hesitated. " It looked so pretty," she said shyly, " I wished we could have it all to ourselves. You? "

" I guess I only wished that whatever you wished for, I'd be in it."

They came down into the leaf-locked slope of Portsmouth Square, opposite the Hall of Justice where no one should have been behind bars, no misery should have been abroad when love, their love, was proof enough against all chaos.

And then Humphrey tripped over the star.

At first they didn't recognize it. It lay, small and deceptive, in a cushion of grass. They knelt above it, jointly lifting it to the wayward light. It was cool to the palm, and blurrily orange-coloured. It had five points that seemed to shift and twinkle, depending on how you looked at them.

" I thought they'd be bigger, somehow," Pearl said.

" They're all different sizes," Humphrey said, with a casualness he had to force. It was a beauty, all right, no getting around it. " Sort of makes a nice souvenir, doesn't it? To round the evening off."

Humphrey weighed the star experimentally. " Maybe we could have it dipped in bronze or something to preserve it. You know, like baby-shoes."

He didn't realize the psychological implication of the remark till Pearl giggled in embarrassment.

Arm-in-arm, they floated back up Clay Street, down Stockton Street, through the tunnel again, with the star lighting a vague

cool path before them like a bottled firefly. But when they came out into the thoroughfares it seemed a little conspicuous, so Humphrey slipped it in his pocket.

At the door of her boarding-house they lingered as if parting were for ever.

"When?"

"Tomorrow night?"

"I can't wait till then."

"Neither can I."

"Here, you keep the star, darling."

"No, you. You found it."

"No, you, because it matches your eyes."

"All right, just till tomorrow night."

Humphrey traded her the star for a kiss, and considered himself shrewder than the characters who got Manhattan for a hatful of beads.

Sunday was practically always taken up with bettering yourself, looking over the week's mistakes with a view to constructive criticism. But today Humphrey woke with a delicious languor that he couldn't recognize, till last night came back.

It brought him out of bed with a buoyed-up feeling and the name Pearl Rembrandt armouring him like a password or a charm. Too restless for his morning exercises with the dumb-bells, he took the lift down to the hall, and over a chicken salad sandwich and a cup of coffee in the cafeteria wondered how to kill the long day till tonight.

On the bus out to Golden Gate Park, he carefully followed the conversation in the seat behind him. Little things like that would help him figure out his customers whenever he got to be a counterman. It was a pair of women talking, and Humphrey studied them casually from the corner of his eye. But they must have noticed because they began making obvious cracks. He haughtily ignored them all the rest of the way.

Dropping off the bus at the bandstand, Humphrey cut through the grove of decapitated trees and passed between the pink, priest-headed lions of the De Young Museum. Inside, he kept pretty much to the least crowded exhibits, examining the suits of old armour and imagining himself in them, the personal effects of famous historical personages.

After a while he passed a room with glass cases filled with rocks and things. Humphrey didn't ordinarily specialize in just plain fossils unless they had a historical factor to them. But the one in the centre was interesting enough to have a closer look. It was about the size of your fist or so, pitted and black so that it

didn't look like anything. But according to the card it was full of all kinds of valuable minerals: gold, silver, nickel—even uranium. No wonder they had a uniformed attendant around.

Humphrey remembered planning to be a uranium prospector, just before taking up radio announcing, in view of the large government reward connected with it. But who ever would think a rock like this could be so valuable? And they hadn't even dug it up anywhere because the card said: *Fallen, Alameda County, 5th March* 1922. In sudden excitement Humphrey remembered the star he and Pearl had found.

He strolled over to the guard nonchalantly. " I notice this—er—exhibit says *fallen*," he said. " Is that fallen like a star? "

" I beg your pardon, sir? "

" You know, like a star. An astronomy star."

" Oh, I catch your drift." Humphrey noticed that the attendant wasn't calling him " sir " any more. " I suppose you could think of it as resembling a star, if that makes it easier for you. However, it happens to be a meteorite."

Come on, stop stalling, Humphrey thought. But he controlled himself to ask, " The point is, is it better or worse than a star? "

" Better or worse than a star," the man said thoughtfully. At the same time he looked a little nervous. " In what way do you mean, sir? "

" For instance, you haven't got any actual stars on exhibit here? "

" No, sir. Not in *this* museum." He began edging away from Humphrey.

" But if you knew where you could get one," Humphrey called, " I guess it would be worth a lot more than this old meteorite? "

" I'm sure it would be a highly novel exhibit, sir. And now if you'll excuse me? " Probably didn't like the way Humphrey was dressed or something. Put a uniform on some people and right away they get above themselves.

On the bus back to town he started thinking how it would be if he and Pearl gave the star to the museum. They could have their names on a plaque as donors.

Then he decided that, after all, civic enterprise was one thing and money was another, and if the star was really that valuable, maybe it would be better to take it to a smeltery. It took a lot of thinking out, there were a lot of angles, so Humphrey decided to drop in on Ace; he would know. Besides, he felt like a beer.

" How's things with you, kid? What'll it be, the usual? " Ace had already drawn a mug of beer and scraped the head off it, skidding it down the bar to Humphrey. " You look like you've just struck lucky. What is it, love or prosperity? "

" I guess a little of both, in a manner of speaking."

" Then how about letting a pal in on it? Or at least giving him a phone number." Humphrey laughed weakly.

" She's a nice girl, Ace. You wouldn't be interested."

" Believe me, I'm always interested in nice girls. Especially if they're prosperous."

Ace was a great kidder, a great student of psychology. You'd never judge by looking at him, but he used to be a professional prize-fighter. In fact, while he never said so in so many words, he could have probably been the world's champion welterweight today if it hadn't been for ringside politics.

" No, it's nothing like that." Humphrey chose his words carefully. " We just found this—er—sort of property that looks like it'll turn out to be worth something."

He set his mouth stubbornly, prepared to resist all Ace's efforts to to learn more. After all, it was a personal thing of his and Pearl's, practically a sacred bond.

But Ace only nodded casually. " She got any idea how much this property's worth? "

" Oh no, it'll be a wonderful surprise for her."

" I'll bet. How do you know it's the genuine goods? "

" I did some research," Humphrey said evasively.

" Got any idea where she is right now, this girl of yours? "

" You mean right this minute? Home, I guess."

" You guess. She wouldn't be out doing some research on her own—like, say, if this was maybe a piece of jewellery, getting it valued? "

" Oh no, Ace—not Pearl! not even if the thought occurred to her."

Ace smiled wearily. " You'd be surprised some of the thoughts that occur to dames when there's a little loose change involved. Well, you don't need my advice on something so elementary. Lemme get you another beer, kid. On the house."

Ace strolled down to the tap, whistling between his teeth. Humphrey just sat there, shaken at the possibilities that crowded in on him. Had she suspected all along the star was potentially liable to be valuable?

He tried to reconstruct her exact words, those sidelong little smiles of hers, but in the cold light of day memory gave them a mocking quality. She'd suggested that he keep the star and all that, but maybe it was only to throw off his suspicions. What would have happened if he'd really taken her up on it? It would have been a good test, he should have thought of it.

And why, if she was supposed to be so much in love with him, why didn't she want him to come round until tonight? He

would have phoned her, but then he realized she hadn't given him her number. And maybe that just wasn't just an oversight.

Ace set the beer before him and stood waiting. Humphrey looked up bewilderedly. "What do you think I should do?"

He approached the boarding-house from the blind side, so that she couldn't spot him from her window. There was a car drawn up out in front, maybe only one of the other boarders, maybe someone who could take her to better places than a sandwich man could. Through the day's last light Humphrey climbed the stairs to her room, knocked lightly.

"Who is it?" Pearl called. He knocked again.

This time the door opened, and there was no chance of her slamming it because he had his foot on the sill.

"Why, Humphrey—oh darling, you're so *early*." She was upset, all right, but at the same time she managed to look pleased to see him. "I'm not even half ready. Can't you come back in just a little while? I'm a perfect mess."

At least that was no lie. With her shapeless housecoat and the grease on her face and her hair in curlers, he felt downright deceived by the picture he'd been carrying around in his mind.

"I don't care." He half pushed on inside. "I mean, now that I'm here it'll only take a minute."

"But, Humphrey, really, I have to press a dress, there's still the rest of my undies to wash out—"

Swinging the door shut behind him, he gave her a winning smile. "You don't look so bad. Honest."

"Oh? That's very nice to know, I'm sure." She gave him a frosty look that matched her tone of voice. "I don't want to turn your stomach or anything."

"What're you talking about? I *said* you look O.K. Is that an insult, do you have to get all huffy?"

"I'm sorry, I guess I'm just a little flustered."

"That's all right, I'm sorry too," Humphrey said automatically, looking round the room. There was a jewellery box half open on her bureau, with a diamond necklace spilling out. "Nice place you got here," he said, edging over to it casually.

"Humphrey, *will* you come to the point and then please let me finish up?" Pearl said. "What is it you keep looking for?"

"What makes you think I'm looking for anything?" he said craftily. He backed to rest with his elbow on the bureau, facing her. "That is, unless you got anything to hide."

Pearl stared at him. "Have you been drinking? You have, you smell like a brewery. Just what are you up to, anyway?"

That was the psychological clue: projection.

" Don't worry about what *I'm* up to," he said significantly.

She was beginning to get nervous. He kept watching her, playing it cool the way Ace said, waiting for her to reveal where she'd hidden it. Ace still hadn't learnt exactly what it was, but he knew a pawnbroker who could get them the best price for anything in the precious-minerals line, regardless.

" I don't like you like this," Pearl said sullenly. " If you can't act right, go away till you can come back sober."

" Sorry, baby, it won't work." Now Humphrey turned to look directly in the jewel box. It wasn't there, of course, she wouldn't leave it lying in the open. He lifted the diamond necklace free, dangling it from a negligent finger. " Is that how you got this? Throwing over some poor sucker once you got it from him? "

" Take your hands off my things and get out! " Pearl's face was so hard and old he wondered how he ever could have seen it differently. Humphrey dropped the necklace in his pocket.

" Want to trade? Your necklace for my star? "

" The *star*? You can have your dirty old star back any time, you Indian giver! " She started for the cupboard, then turned with a malicious smile. " On second thoughts," she said, " you can keep the necklace. It's as phony as you are. I think I'll just hang onto the star. I'm kind of sentimental about presents I don't know the price of."

It was dusk now, but there was a dull red, sourceless light in the room. Through it he could see her face, twisted and sweaty. He was beginning to sweat, too, the hot dry air drawing it out of him. He moved towards her, backing her against the cupboard. She spread her arms in a barrier.

" It's mine," Humphrey said thickly. " Who was it found it? "

Pearl laughed in contempt. " Who's got it? "

" Ask me that in just about ten seconds— "

He wrenched her aside and she raked at him with her nails, but that wasn't why he cried out.

When he yanked at the cupboard door the knob came away, burning his hand. It was red-hot. Even as he dropped it the door began caving in. And now through the swirling ashes they could see the star, glowing like a furnace as it filled the room with a furious white rush.

★ ★ ★

Exercise is bunk. If you are healthy you don't need it; if you are sick you shouldn't take it.

HENRY FORD

SUMMER IN SALANDAR

A blazing tropical sun, an almost-deserted island, a lonely young man and a girl—alluring—enigmatic—irresistible . . . It sounds like an enchanted idyll, but with H. E. Bates to spin the plot, there is mystery too, and perhaps something even darker.

By H. E. BATES

MANSON lifted one corner of the green gauze window-blind of the shipping office and watched, for an indifferent moment or two, the swift cortège of a late funeral racing up the hill. It flashed along the water-front like a train of cellulose beetles, black and glittering, each of the thirty cars a reflection of the glare of sun on sea.

He wondered, as the cars leapt away up the avenue of jade and carmine villas, eyeless in the bright evening under closed white shades, why funerals in Salandar were always such races, unpompous and frenzied, as if they were really chasing the dead. He wondered too why he never saw them coming back again. They dashed in black undignified weeping haste to somewhere along the sea-coast, where blue and yellow *espada* boats beat with high moon-like prows under rocks ashen with burnt seaweed, and then vanished for ever.

He let the blind fall into place again, leaning spare brown elbows on the mahogany lid of his desk. He was thinking that that evening a ship would be in. It could not matter which ship—he was pretty sure it was the *Alacantra*—since nobody in their senses ever came to Salandar in the summer. There would in any case be no English passengers and he would meet it out of pure routine.

After that he would go home to his small hotel and eat the flabby oil-soaked *espada* that had as much taste in it as a bath sponge and drink export beer and read the English papers of a week last Wednesday. In the street outside, men would sit on dark doorsteps and spit golden melon seeds into the gutters. The flash of an open-air cinema down the street would drench the plum-black air above the surrounding courtyards with continuous gentle fountains of

light, with little explosions of applause and laughter. In one of the old houses behind the hotel a woman would lull her baby to sleep with a prolonged soft song that was probably as old as the moon-curve of the fishing-boats that lined the shore.

The stars would be infinite. The red beacons on the radio masts would flame like big impossible planets above the mass of the fortress that obscured, with its vast and receding walls, nearly half the sky. And that would be his evening: a lonely and not surprising conclusion to a tiring day when nothing had happened, simply because nothing ever happened in summer in Salandar.

From across the quayside, out on the landing-pier, he suddenly heard the sound of more voices than he thought was customary. He got up and parted the slats of the window-shade. The pier was massed with emigrants, emigrant baggage, emigrant noises, the messy struggle of emigrant farewells. He remembered then that the *Alacantra* was not coming in. It was the *Santa Maria*, coming precisely the other way.

That sort of trick of memory always overtook him at the height of summer, two months after the tourist season had died. It was the delayed shock of seasonal weariness. He was as unprepared for it as he was unprepared for the sight of the *Santa Maria* herself, a ship of pale green hull with funnels of darker green, suddenly coming round the westerly red-black cliffs of the bay. It made him less annoyed to think that he had to meet her.

He did not like to hurry. There was no need to hurry. There was nothing to hurry for. He was not going anywhere. He was not meeting anyone. The point of his meeting a ship on which he had no passenger was purely one of duty. Like most of the rest of his life on Salandar, it was a bore.

Was there a passenger? With the precision of habit he turned up a black ledger of passenger names that gave him nothing in answer. It was nice to be assured, anyway, that he was not mistaken.

A moment later he called to the only clerk to tell the porter that he wanted the launch in five minutes. His voice was dry from the summer catarrh that came from living low down, at sea level, in the rainless months, in the sandy dust of the port. He cleared his throat several times as he went out into the street and the sun struck him below the eyebrows with pain.

On the corner of the pavement he stood and closed his eyes briefly before he crossed to the water-front, and as he opened them again, the last black beetle of the funeral cortège flashed past him, expensively glittering, hooting dangerously, chasing the dead: a car filled with weeping men.

On the ship the air seemed absorbent. It sucked up the life of the fanless purser's cabin on the middle deck.

" She got on at Lisbon, Mr. Manson," the purser said. " She said she called you from there."

A small quantity of pearl-grey luggage, splashed with varnished scarlet labels, among them the letter V, stood by the purser's door. Staring down at it, Manson tried to remember back through a long drowsy day to some point where a cable might have blown in, rushed past him and, like the cortège of racing mourners, have disappeared.

He could not recall any cable, and the purser said, " I had better take her luggage up. I promised to look after her." He began to pick up suitcases, tucking the smallest under his arms. " She seems to like being looked after. Perhaps you will bring the last one, Mr. Manson?—Thank you."

No one else had come aboard except a harbour policeman in flabby grey ducks, so thin that he seemed impossibly weighed down by black bayonet and revolver; and a customs officer in crumpled washed-out sienna gaberdine.

These two stood sweating at the head of the companion-way, the policeman with thumbs in his drooping belt. There was not even the usual collection of hotel porters' caps on the ship because every hotel was closed.

" Where is she staying? " Manson called. " There isn't a single hotel open."

" I told her that. She said she did not mind. I told her you would see all about it."

" She's nothing to do with me."

" She's English. I told her you would do it—"

" Do what? I'm not a sightseeing guide for anybody who comes and dumps themselves down here in the middle of summer."

He felt his hands grow sweaty on the high-polished fabric of the suitcase handle. He knew, he thought, all that English women could be. Ill-clad in worsted, horribly surpliced in porridge-coloured shantung, they arrived sometimes as if expecting the island to yield the horse-drawn charm of 1890, when everything could be had or done by the clapping of hands.

" Anyway, I had no warning," he said. " What warning had I? "

He thought he saw the customs officer grin at this, and it annoyed him further.

" She said she called you herself, Mr. Manson," the purser said.

" I've seen no sign of a call," he said. " And, anyway, cable or no cable—"

" It was awfully good of you to meet me," a voice said.

When he turned, abruptly, at the same time as the sweat-bright faces of the policeman, the customs officer, and the purser, he saw her standing behind him, a tall, black-haired girl, with an amazing combination of large pure blue eyes and black lashes, her hair striped across the front with a leonine streak of tawny blonde.

He found himself at once resenting and resisting this paler streak of hair.

" It was really very good of you," she said. " My name is Vane."

He checked an impulse to say, " Spelt in which way? " and she held out a hand covered with a long yellow glove. This glove, reaching to her elbow, matched a dress of yellow linen that had no sleeves.

" I know you think I've come at the wrong time of year," she said.

" Not at all."

" No? " she said. " I thought I heard you say so."

He was so irritated that he was not really conscious of helping her down the gangway. He felt instead that the gangway had begun to float on air. It was nothing but a shaky ladder of cotton-reels swaying above the calm sea. It seemed almost perpendicular, pitching him forward as he went down first and waited to help her into the launch below.

The red triangular pennant of the company drooped above the burnished deck-house and she said, staring beyond it, " Everybody told me it was so brilliant. So much flashing colour. But the rocks are black. It looks burnt out, somehow."

" That's just the summer," he said.

Out of politeness he stared with her at the shore. He thought there was a great deal of colour. It was simply that it was split into a fractional mosaic of blacks and browns, of bleached pinks, and the dull ruby reds of house-tops half smothered by green. A tower of pale yellow, the new school, was raised like a fresh sugar-stick above the black sand of the shore, at the end of which an astonishing summer residence of blue tiles, polished as a kitchen stove, was wedged into the cliff.

Two or three rowing-boats, piled with white baskets, with curtains of island embroideries in scarlet and green, were motionless on the oily bay, where in the high season a hundred of them clamoured about liners like fighting-junks, manned by brown shivering men diving for silver. Lines of high-prowed fishing-boats, upcurved like horns, striped in green and blue and ochre, were pulled up along the water-front, and far away and high above them he could see the water-splash of a spouting *levada*, poised like gathered spittle in a fissure of rock and eucalyptus forest, pure white in blinding sun.

He suddenly felt himself defending all he saw. He wanted to say that there was plenty of colour. Only the sun, burning ferociously, created an illusion of something cindery, melting dully away. " It's just a question of—"

" Oh! my bag," she said.

She stood on the lowest rung of the gangway, lifting helpless arms, imploring him with a smile. " In my cabin—so sorry—twenty-three—you'll see it. Probably on the bed."

As he mounted the ladder quickly, more insecure than when he had come down, he remembered that cabin twenty-three was one of four on the boat deck and he walked straight for it, before the purser could speak or stop him.

He found her handbag on the bed. Unstripped, the bed was disorderly, and the bag, which was why she had forgotten it, was partly covered by her pillow. Its clasp sprang open as he picked it up. Its white jaws spilt lipstick and handkerchief, a few letters, a mirror, a little diary in black morocco.

He felt intensely curious and wanted to open the diary. The bag gave out a perfume that floated about him for a moment, arousing in him a startling sensation of intimacy.

Then he felt nervous and shut the bag quickly and rushed out of the cabin, only to find the purser coming to meet him on the deck, saying, " What was it, Mr. Manson? Was it something you could not find? "

He went on without answering, slipping hastily once again on the insecure mahogany cotton-reels of the gangway, down to a sea on which the launch's scarlet pennant and the yellow dress were the only things that did not melt and sway.

" You were very quick," she said. " It was very kind of you."

The sea was so calm that it was possible for himself and the girl to stand motionless on the launch all the way from ship to shore. She stood erectly looking about her, searching the bay, the shore, and the abrupt hills above the town for colour.

" It surprises me," she said. " I'd expected something more exotic."

" It's exotic in winter," he said. " It's all colour then. You should have come in winter. That's when everybody comes."

It suddenly struck him that, after all, she was really not looking at the approaching shore. Something about her eyes made them seem glazed with preoccupation.

" I'm afraid it was my fault about the cable," she said. " It should have been sent. But I was in a dreadful hurry. I made up my mind all of a sudden and then somehow—"

" I don't know what you had in mind about hotels."

" I suppose they're all shut," she said.

" All the recognized ones."

" Where do you live? In one not recognized? "

" I wouldn't recommend it," he said.

Forgetfulness about the cable, forgetfulness about the bag—he stood pondering uncertainly, staring at the approaching harbour pier, wondering where to take her.

" I do apologize about the cable," she said. " I'm afraid you're peeved."

" I was trying to think of a possible solution to the hotel problem."

" It's no problem," she said. " I'm not particular. I shall find something. I always do."

" Had you any idea of how long you were staying? " he said.

" As long as I like it."

" It isn't always possible to leave when you think you will," he said. " Ships are very irregular here. They don't just happen when you think they're going to."

" Does anything? " she said.

The launch began to make its curve to the landing-pier, the change of course uplifting the scarlet pennant very slightly. Above steps of baked white concrete a line of idle taxis stretched out, with a few ox-carts, in the shade of flowerless jacarandas. A smell of oil and hot bullock-dung and rotting seaweed seethed in the air and he said: " I'm afraid you'll find anything down here in the port very hot."

As the launch came into the jetty he leapt out. On the steps he held out his hand to her and she lifted the long yellow glove.

" The man will bring the bags up to the top," he said.

At the top of the jetty he realized with concern that she was hatless. Heat struck down on concrete and then back again as if pitilessly forced down through a tube, dangerously compressed under the high enclosure of hills.

" I hope you're all right? " he said. " I mean, the heat—the air is terribly clear and you don't always realize—"

" I don't feel it," she said. " I never feel it." She touched her hair, running her fingers through it. The paler streak of it, uplifted, exposed the mass of pure black hair below, and he realized how thick and strong and wiry it was. Its heavy sweep, shot with the curious blonde streak, aroused in him the same odd sensation of uneasy intimacy he had experienced in the cabin, smelling the perfume of the handbag, by the unstripped bed.

For a moment longer she stood engrossed by the sight of him staring at her hair, and he did not realize how absorbed and uncomfortable it had made him feel until she said, " Where do we go from here? Where can I get a taxi? "

" I was thinking you could come to the office and leave your things—"

" I'd rather get a hotel," she said. " What's the name of yours? "

" Malfalda," he said. " It's terribly small and they don't really cater—"

" It doesn't matter if it's reasonable and the beds are clean. Are the beds clean? "

" Quite clean."

She looked at him without any kind of disturbance, the clear, rather too large blue eyes fixing him with exacting softness, and said, " I think any beds that are clean enough for you ought to be clean enough for me."

" You can always try it temporarily," he said.

From the hot taxi she leaned her long body forward and looked at the mounting hillside. Above it successive folds of rock, exposed in crags that seemed sun-blackened, submerged under incrustations of blue-green forests of pine and eucalyptus, fascinated the large blue eyes into a larger stare.

" What's up there? " she said. " I mean the other side of the mountain? "

" Not much," he said. " More rock and forest and so on. Not many people. Over the other side there's a power-station. It's lonely. There are places you can't get to."

She smiled and sat back beside him on the seat, wrapping the surprisingly cool yellow gloves deftly one over the other.

" That's where I'd like to go," she said.

Then, without attaching importance to what she said, without really giving it another thought, he was inspired to remark with sudden cheerfulness that there would probably be, at the hotel, a cup of tea.

There were mice in the upper ceilings of the old hotel and he lay listening to them half the night, turning over in his mind what seemed to him the vexing problem of her being there, in that highly unsuitable, dark, cheap hotel, where no English visitor ever came except for a temporary night, in sheer high-season desperation.

He had carefully warned her a number of times that the food would not be English. " It will be oily and all that," he said. " It's something it takes a long time to get used to."

When she reminded him that he at any rate appeared to survive it, he did not dare tell her that it was simply because he could not afford anything else. He had just had to get used to it; and now he did not ask for anything better and in his limited way he was perfectly happy. At least, he supposed he was.

But something troubled him much more than this. He was perplexed and worried by a phrase she had used.

" What are you going to do with yourself? " he asked her. " It can be terribly exhausting at this time of year—"

" I'm going to poke about," she said. " I want things to do. I want to see things."

He grew increasingly uneasy about this as the evening went on. It was not a good thing to poke your nose into things in Salandar. It was a place, in the right season, in the delicious winter flowery days, of infinite surface charm. Bougainvillaeas covered with steep massive curtains of purple and sienna-rose, all the dry ravines coming down from the hills; starry scarlet poinsettias lined the potato patches; a gentle honey odour of incense trees always hung over the old street at night-time. If underneath all this there were people who had not enough to eat, who were afraid of something or somebody, who were tubercular or illiterate or superfluous or broken, that was no concern of visitors.

" Don't you ever poke about and find out how things really are? " she said.

" No."

" Have you been here long? " she said. " How many years have you been here? "

" I came here nearly three and a half years ago. Nearly four."

It was getting so long ago now he could hardly remember exactly. His time there had gradually become, in the Salandar fashion, a succession of dull tomorrows.

" How long is it since you went over to the other side of the island? " she said.

" I'm afraid I've never been over to the other side."

" By the way you spoke I thought you'd been there often," she said.

" No," he said, " I've never been there."

" Haven't you any inclination at all to see what it's like? " she said.

" Not particularly."

It seemed to him that she did not speak her questions so much as impose them on him with the too large, too brilliant, uneasy eyes.

" What about Santo Carlo? " she said. " They say that's very interesting. Have you been there? "

No, he had not been to Santo Carlo either.

He found, presently, what seemed to him a happy solution to her restlessness, to the problem of what she should do with herself. It was also a tremendous relief to be able at last to change an uncomfortable subject.

" You could join the club," he said. " I don't know why I didn't think of it before."

" Do you belong? "

" Not now," he said. " I gave it up."

In the winter the club was crowded with visitors he did not know; in summer there was no one there. After six months of it he had not considered it worth while to renew the subscription. He decided he would save the money. He had to think of the future.

" What happens there? "

" People play bridge and tennis and that sort of thing and there's a small golf course," he said. " It's rather beautiful," and then he added, as if it was an extra thought to impress her, " you can get tea."

She did not say anything and he went on, " You can get a temporary subscription—I think for even a week. I can find out for you—but then if you don't know how long you're going to stay—"

" That was something I was going to talk to you about," she said.

In speaking of the times of ships he felt more certain of himself. That at least was his job.

" It depends where you want to go from here," he said. " If you'll give me some idea of times and places I'll have—"

" When is the next ship in? "

" There'll be nothing in this week. Not until after the weekend," he said. " Then the *Alacantra* is due. She's pleasant."

" It would be nice just to have the sailing-times of what's likely to be coming in," she said. " Could you? It would be very sweet of you."

She had asked him so many questions that this final, acutely personal one, delivered more softly, in a lowered voice, made him more uneasy than he had been before. He did not grasp even then that the conversation had been largely about himself. He felt only another rush of feeling about her, a repetition of the sensation he had had in the cabin, over the handbag and the disorderly

bed, and from the way she had run her fingers through her thick black hair.

" You look tired," she said to him at last. " It's time you got into that good clean bed."

In the morning he woke to an air that had in it the breath of ashes. It sprang at his already catarrhal throat with windy choking heat. He grasped then the reason for his lethargy of the previous day, his soporific irritations as he met the boat that he had not expected. The *leste* was blowing, the wind from the north-east that burnt with pure incineration off the mainland sand.

This had not prevented Miss Vane from getting up at five o'clock and watching the night-boats, like slowly extinguishing fireflies, bringing in their fish across the bay. " They looked wonderful," she said. " Haven't you ever seen them come in? "

" No."

" I talked to some of them—the men, I mean. There were two brothers from Santo Carlo—"

" You should be very careful how you talk to these people," he said.

At breakfast, which they had together in the already shuttered little dining-room, in a queer kind of morning twilight through which even her large and exceptionally blue eyes looked almost white in their diffusion, he warned her about the intolerable burning wind.

" It will probably last for two days," he said. " Perhaps three. I'm afraid you'll find it very exhausting."

In a white dress of low cut, with a transparent organdie insertion across the breast, she looked remarkably cool and she said, " Isn't it a good chance to get up into the hills? Couldn't you take a day off and come with me? "

He rested easily on the firm ground of his local knowledge. " That's the curious thing about the *leste*," he said. " It's even hotter in the hills. You'd hardly believe it, but the coast is going to be the cooler place."

" I might go myself," she said.

" Oh no," he said, " don't think of doing that."

" Why not? "

" Oh, in the first place—well, it's hardly the thing. You see, you can drive only so far. After that it's a question of mule-track. You need several days—"

" I have plenty of days," she said.

" Yes, but not while the *leste* is on," he said. " Really not. It can be absolutely ghastly up there when the *leste* is on."

" How would you know? " she said. " You've never been."

His coffee, which should have been cool after so much conversation, sprang down his already anguished throat like acid. He felt physically unable to speak for some moments, and at last she said, " I think you look awfully tired. Don't you ever want to get away from here? "

" Not particularly. I suppose eventually—"

" Not when the ships come in? Don't you ever suddenly feel, hell, for God's sake let me get away—don't you ever feel like that? "

" I can't say I do."

" I think it might do you good to get away."

For a second he was touched, and then bewildered, by her concern. He was disturbed too because she had, as he now noticed, no coffee to drink. " Didn't you have any coffee? "

" I had orange instead," she said. " It's cooler."

" I suppose I ought to have done that," he said. " But I always have coffee. I can't get out of the habit of it somehow—"

" Would you come on this trip to the hills? " she said.

" I honestly don't know."

" I shall go," she said. " I'll fix it up. I like fixing things. Would you come if I fixed it? "

" It's awfully difficult for me to say," he said. " You see, everybody's on leave. Charlton, my chief, is on leave. The only really good local clerk has gone to Lisbon for a week. It's very doubtful if I could leave the office in any case—"

" You've got the weekend."

" I know, but—" He found himself being helplessly absorbed, as his breath had been absorbed in the stifling purser's cabin on the ship, by her enlarged diffused eyes, almost pure white, their true colour extinguished until they gave out a curious impression of nakedness in the dark morning shadow. " And apart from anything else there's the *leste*—"

" If we wait till the *leste* is over? " she said. " If it blows for two or three days it ought to be over by the weekend, oughtn't it? "

" Well, you can't tell—"

" Shall we chance it? " she said. " Shall I fix it up? "

" Will it do if I decide this evening? " he said.

" I'm going to fix it during the day," she said. " If the *Alacantra* comes next week I haven't much time."

" All right," he said. " I'll come."

As she got up from the table she smiled and touched his arm, telling him to drink his coffee. Her body was held forward to him, the partially transparent inset of her dress exposing her breast. He was aware of the falling discoloured band of yellow in her intense black hair and it disturbed him again more than anything she had done or said, and as he stared at it she smiled.

" Do I look so awful? " she said. " I haven't combed my hair since I went down to the harbour. I must go and do it now."

He called after her to ask what she was going to do with herself all day. " You must take it easy. Don't go and exhaust yourself."

" I'll probably swim," she called back from the stairs.

" Be careful of the swell," he said. " It's terribly deceptive. It can sometimes be twenty or thirty feet even on the calmest days." After all, he had a certain responsibility for her now. " Don't go out too far."

The road to the central ridge of mountains wound up through

gorges of grey volcanic rock, under steep declivities of pine and eucalyptus, intensively planted as saplings against the erosion of a sparse burnt soil, red and cindrous, veined yellow here and there by long-dried watercourses. The car crept upward very slowly, beetle-wise, on black setts of blistered rock that gave way, beyond the last windowless white houses, to a track of pot-holes sunk in grey and crimson sand.

" It was a stroke of genius of yours to bring the cook," she said.

He did not feel that this was flattery. It really was, he thought, rather a stroke of genius on his part to think of the cook—because from the idea of the cook sprang his recollection that, at the top of the mule-pass, there was also a rest-house. For practically nothing you could put up there, cook meals, and do the thing in comfort. He was very pleased about that. It saved a lot of trouble. He didn't think he could have come all the way up that hot dreary track otherwise.

The *leste*, after all, had died. The air in the mountains was still hot, but height began to give it, as the car climbed slowly, a thinness that was fresh and crystalline. Objects began to appear so vivid that they stuck out, projected by strong blue lines that were pulsations rather than shadow. In a curious way everything was enlarged by scintillation.

Perhaps it was this that made Manson, sitting at the back of the car with Miss Vane, fix his eyes, as if hypnotized, on the black hair of the cook, in front with the driver.

The head of the cook was like an ebony bowl, polished to a sheen of greasy magnificence by brushings of olive oil. Below it the shoulders were flat and square, the erectness of them giving power to a body that was otherwise quite short and stiff, except when it bent in sudden bows of politeness to Miss Vane.

Sometimes the car jolted violently in and out of pot-holes and Manson and Miss Vane were pitched helplessly upward and against each other, taken unawares.

But the shoulders of Manuel, the cook, were never disturbed by more than a quiver and sometimes it seemed to Manson that they gave a shrug.

This hypnosis about the cook lasted until the car-road ended and the mule-track began, winding away into a thick scrub of wild bay trees and stunted, blue-needled pines. At the foot of the track the mules were waiting, four flickering skeletons brought up by a barefoot peasant wearing trousers of striped blue shirt material and a black trilby hat.

Manuel loaded two osier baskets of provisions, Manson's rucksack, and one of Miss Vane's scarlet-labelled, too neat suitcases onto one of the mules, and the peasant began to lead the mule up the hill.

When Manuel had shouted after him the peasant came back. The peasant looked downtrodden in protestation and Manuel, standing over him, square and erect, looked more assertive than before.

" What is it, Manuel? " Miss Vane said. " Is something the matter? "

" No, madame." He pronounced fully and correctly, elongating the final syllable.

" What is it then? "

" He wants to go with us, madame."

" That was the idea, wasn't it? " Manson said.

" It's not necessary, sir. I can manage without him."

" You know the way? " she said.

" Yes, madame," he said. " I've done it before."

After that the taxi-driver drove away and the peasant disappeared up the hill. Manuel took the first and second mules, Miss Vane the third, and Manson the fourth. Manson had never been on a mule before and his legs seemed so much too long that he felt gawkily ridiculous. But looking ahead, beyond Miss Vane and the provision mule to the leading figure of Manuel, he was relieved to see that Manuel looked, as he thought, still more stupid.

His preoccupation with the back of Manuel's neck had been so absorbed that he had not really noticed that Manuel was wearing the black suit of a waiter. And as Manuel turned to look back at the column, Manson saw that he was wearing the tie, the shirt-front, and the collar too.

It took three hours to climb through paths among bay tree and pine and tree-heath and an occasional eucalyptus stunted by height to the size of a currant bush, to the rest-house. As the mules marched slowly upward, jerky and rhythmical, the mountains seemed to march rapidly forward, shutting in the heat and shutting out much of the sky. And as the heat developed oppressively Manson called once to Miss Vane, " You'd hardly think there would be snow up here, would you? "

" There is no snow up here, sir."

" I thought there was always snow. After all, it's six thousand—"

" Not on this side, sir. You're thinking of the Santo Carlo side. There is never snow just here."

Manson did not speak again and it was half an hour before he noticed, glinting in the sun, what he thought were the iron sheds of the power-station framed in a gap ahead.

" I rather think that's the new power-station," he called to Miss Vane. " They had great difficulty in getting the pipes up there—"

" That's not the power-station, sir. That's the old pumping-station for the *levadas*. They don't use it now."

" Where is the power-station? " Miss Vane said.

" It's over the other side, madame. You won't be able to see it from this direction."

" And where is the place you can see the two coasts from? " she said. " You know—the sea both sides? "

" You will be able to go there from the rest-house, madame," he said. " It isn't far. You'll be able to climb up there."

Manson stretched out his hand and snatched at the leaves of a eucalyptus tree, crushing a leaf sharply with his fingers and then

lifting it to his nose. The harsh oily odour of eucalyptus was unpleasant and irritated him. It reminded him of times when, as a child, his chest had been very bad and he had coughed a lot and he had not been able to get his breath.

He unconsciously kept the leaf in his hand until, at the suggestion of Manuel, they stopped to rest. " We are halfway now, madame," Manuel said.

Manuel poured glasses of export beer for Manson and Miss Vane and served them with stiff politeness and then retired to a respectful distance among the mules. From above them masses of rock, studded with pale flat cacti that were like blown roses of delicate green, dripped water in large slow drops, like summery thundery rain.

" Well, this is marvellous," Miss Vane said and lifted her glass to him, smiling with huge blue eyes in which Manson felt he could see all the summery wateriness and the great scintillation of mountain sky.

He lifted his glass to her in return, re-experiencing a sudden rush of the intimacy he had felt over her dishevelled bed and her handbag and whenever he looked at the yellow streak in her hair. He felt himself melt uneasily and had a wild idea that presently, at the rest-house, they might be alone together. They were very nearly alone together now—

" There's an awful smell of eucalyptus," Miss Vane said.

He flushed, pounding with anger at himself, and said, " I'm afraid it's me. I crushed a leaf. Don't you like it?—"

" I loathe it," she said. " I can't bear it near me. I hate it. You'll have to go and wash your hands."

He went away in silence and washed his hands among the cacti, under a spilling cleavage of rock. The water was icy in the brilliant, burning air. He washed his hands carefully and then smelt them and it seemed that the smell of eucalyptus remained. Then he washed them again with a sort of slow, rejected, clinical care.

It was not until the rest-house came in sight that he emerged from a painful and articulate silence during which he had done nothing but stare at the sweat oozing slowly and darkly down the mule's neck. He was pleasantly startled by hearing Miss Vane call back, " Hullo there! Asleep? " Her voice was tender and friendly once more and was accompanied by a sidelong dazzling smile. " You can see the rest-house. We're nearly there."

" I think it was the beer," he said. " Made me drowsy—"

" Look at it," she said. " It's exciting, isn't it? I'm excited."

" Oh yes! It's bigger than I thought—"

" Aren't you excited? " she said. " This is really something. This is what I wanted."

The track had widened. She reined the mule and waited for him. Then as she turned the mule half-face to him he noticed the shape of her body, pressed heavily across the dark animal flanks. She had ridden up in a sleeveless thin white dress, the skirt of which was drawn up beyond her knees.

He had never been able to make up his mind how old she was and now, excited, her skirt drawn up above bare smooth legs, her eyes enormously shining, he thought she seemed much younger than she had done down in the scorching, withering period of the *leste*, in the town. She seemed to have left behind her restlessness.

" Oh! it's marvellous, and it really wasn't far, was it? " she said. " It didn't seem an hour. It was easy after all."

He said he didn't think it had been far either and he was aware suddenly that Manuel had gone ahead. The impossible waiter-suit, mule-mounted, was almost at the verandah steps. A hundred yards separated him from Manson and Miss Vane, and again an overpowering sense of intimacy came over Manson, so that he felt tremulously stupid and could not speak to her.

" Now aren't you glad I made you come? " she said.

" Yes," he said.

" Back there I thought you were mad with me."

" Oh no! "

" Not the smallest piece? "

He shook his head. " Not a little bit," he said.

The smile went temporarily out of her face. The mule jerked nervously ahead. " I really thought you were mad," she said, and it did not occur to him until long afterwards that she might have hoped he had been.

From Manuel, during the rest of that day and the succeeding day, came an almost constant sound of whistling that jarred and irritated Manson like the scrape of a file. The rest-house, neat and clean, with something not unlike a chapel about its bare white-washed coolness, was divided into three parts.

In the large central room Manson and Miss Vane ate, at a long mahogany table, the meals that Manuel prepared in a kitchen that ran along the north side like a large bird-cage made of gauze. In this cage Manuel kept up the whistling that continued to infuriate Manson even at night-time, as he tried to sleep in the third part, composed of his own bedroom and Miss Vane's on the western side.

Miss Vane was a woman who hated trousers.

" I was born a woman and I'll dress like one," she said. So she had ridden astride the mule in a loose cool white dress instead of the slacks Manson thought would have been more suitable, even though he disliked them. And all that day and most of the next, Sunday, she lay in front of the rest-house in a sun-suit of vivid green, boned so tight to the shape of her body that it was like an extra, gleaming skin.

As she lay in the sun Manson was aware of two sorts of feeling about her. When she lay on her back he saw the Miss Vane he had met on the ship; the Miss Vane of the hotel and the town, of the advancing, blistering *leste*; the Miss Vane incorrigibly and restlessly prodding him into coming to the mountains. She was the Miss Vane with the startling, discomforting tongue of yellow

across her black hair. She was uneasy and he could not get near to her.

When she turned over and lay on her face he could not see the yellow streak in her hair. Her head was one gentle mass of pure black, undisrupted by that one peroxide streak that always set him quivering inside. The black-haired Miss Vane did not startle him. She seemed quiet and untroubled. He wanted to thrust his face down into the plain unsullied mass of her thick black hair and let himself speak with tenderness of all sorts of things.

Always, at the point when he felt he could do this, she turned over on her back, lifting the front of her body straight and taut in the sun. The peroxide streak flared up. The eyes, too blue and too brilliant, flashed with exactly the same sort of unreality, as if she had dyed them too.

"Tomorrow we must do something," she said. "We can't lie here for ever."

"It's very pleasant lying here."

"We must go up to the place where you can see the two coasts. We'll start early and take all day," she said. "By the way, I've been meaning to ask you. You must have come out here very young. How old are you?"

"Twenty-seven," he said.

"I beat you by a year," she said. "It's old, isn't it? We're creeping on. Don't you sometimes feel it's old—all of it slipping away from you? life and that sort of thing?"

He could hear Manuel whistling in the distance, in the bird-cage, and he could see the paler streak in Miss Vane's hair as she turned and stared at the sky.

"I must say I thought you were older," she said.

He was listening to the inexhaustibly dry, infuriating whistle of Manuel.

"You don't look older," she said, "but I think you act older. But then men of your age often do."

She lifted one hand to shade her eyes from the glare of sun.

"The sun gets terrific power by midday," she said. "I think I ought to have my glasses. Would you fetch them?—do you mind?" He got up and began to walk away and she called after him, "In the bedroom. Probably with my dress. I left them there when I changed."

In the bedroom he remembered the cabin on the ship. He remembered how she liked things to be done for her. But now the bed, neatly made by Manuel, was not dishevelled. It was only her clothes that lay untidily about where she had undressed and thrown them down. He could not find the sun-glasses. They were not with her dress. He picked up her clothes several times and finally laid them in a chair. The glasses were not in her handbag and they were not on the bed.

His inability to find the glasses startled him into nervousness. He approached the bed with trembling hands. He pulled back the coverlet and put his hands under the pillow and let them rest

there. He wanted all of a sudden to lie down on the bed. He was caught up in an illusion of lying there with her.

He went quickly out into the sun. From the ledge of short grass, walled by rock, where Miss Vane was lying, he heard voices. As he came closer he saw Miss Vane was wearing her sun-glasses.

" It's all right—Manuel found them. I'd left them in the dining-room."

Manuel, in shirt-sleeves, without the black waiter's coat, stood stiffly erect, holding a bunch of two or three roses in his hands.

" Don't you think that's amazing? " Miss Vane said. " He even finds roses up here."

" Where on earth do you get roses? " Manson said.

" In the garden, sir. At the back."

" He says there was a wonderful garden here once. An Englishman made it. He used to come here for the summer. He was a sugar-planter or something. Wasn't that it, Manuel? "

Manuel's eyes rested thinly and dryly on some point across the valley. " Yes, madame. He was sugar. He was sugar, wine, sugar-brandy, coal, sardines, water, anything." He spoke slowly. " He took the water from the people and sold it back again."

" You mean he developed the country," Manson said.

" That's so, sir."

Manuel walked away and Manson looked after him. He detected, for the first time, an oddity in Manuel's walk. The right foot, swinging outward, stubbed the ground as it came back again. And this weakness, not quite a deformity, suddenly deprived the stocky shoulders of their power.

" Are you looking at his leg? " Miss Vane said. " He was in an accident or something. With his brother. He was telling me before breakfast. Before you came down. Did he tell you? "

" No."

" I feel rather sorry for him," she said.

He sat down in the sun, his mind searching for a change of subject. He stared across the valley, remembering with what thin, dry abstraction Manuel had looked there.

" Oh! I just remembered," he said. " After the *Alacantra* on Wednesday there isn't another decent boat for three weeks."

" No wonder you get a feeling of isolation here."

" Well, anyway, I thought you ought to know. It's a long time."

" Would you find it long? "

He wanted to say, " It depends." He wanted to qualify, somehow, the statement he had already made. He knew that what he had to say and feel depended on Miss Vane and whether Miss Vane caught the *Alacantra*. Already he did not want her to catch it. He was afraid of her catching it. But he could not express what he felt, and he said, " That damned man is always whistling. Can you hear it? He is always whistling."

" I hadn't noticed it," she said.

When they went in to lunch Manuel stood behind her chair, holding it, pushing it gently forward as she sat down.

As he prepared to serve soup she suddenly waved her hands with impatience at herself and said: " My bag. Would you think I could be such a dim-wit? I leave it everywhere—"

" I will get it, madame," Manuel said. He hurried out of the room with dignified jerky steps.

" I could have got it for you," Manson said.

" I know you could." The large flashing blue eyes disarmed him. " But he likes doing things. He would be hurt if we didn't let him. That's what he's here for."

Manuel came and put Miss Vane's bag on the lunch-table. " Thank you, Manuel," she said.

Manuel served soup from a wicker trolley.

" By the way," she said, " we would like to do the climb to the top. How long will it take us? "

" It isn't a climb, madame," Manuel said. " It's just a walk. It takes half an hour."

" You and your inaccessible places," she said to Manson. " Everything is too easy for words."

" What about the Serra? " Manson said. " That isn't easy, is it? "

" I do not know about the Serra, sir."

" What is the Serra? " she said.

" It's the high plateau," Manson said. " The really high one. The really lonely one. Isn't that so, Manuel?—it's lonely. People don't like it, do they? "

" No, sir," Manuel said. " People don't like it."

" Why not? " she said.

" I can't say, madame," he said. " I think it's because there's nothing there. People like to have company. They don't like places where there is nothing."

" I think that's where we should go," Manson said. " That would be something worth while."

" I don't think so, sir."

" Oh, I most certainly think so," Manson said. " After all, that's what we came up here for—the high places and the view and that sort of thing."

" If the view is no better," Miss Vane said, " there's hardly any point in going, is there? Is the view any better? "

" I don't think you can see so far, madame," Manuel said.

" Well, there you are," she said.

With irritation Manson said, " I thought you were the adventurous one. I thought you liked it the difficult way."

" Oh, I do," she said. " But if there's no point—I mean if Manuel doesn't think the thing worth while . . ."

Manson waited for Manuel to clear the soup dishes and take them away through the gauze doors that separated the dining-room from his cage at the back. " I fail to see what Manuel has to do with it. We can go alone. Manuel isn't obliged to come."

" What is there about this place? " she said.

" He's afraid of it. They're all afraid of it. They're superstitious about it."

" Is there anything to be superstitious about? "

" Not a thing."

" Then why do you suppose they're superstitious? "

" They hate being alone," he said.

" Don't you? " she said.

" Not a bit," he said. " I rather like it—" Abruptly he realized what he had said and he felt his confidence, which had been mounting and strengthening, suddenly recede. Confusedly he tried to retrieve it and said, " I didn't mean it quite like that—I meant I liked being alone in the sense that I wasn't frightened of it—"

" Oh, it doesn't matter," she said. " Here comes the food. It looks like some sort of pie—is it, Manuel? is it a pie? "

" Yes, madame," he said. " It is steak and kidney. Made in the English way." After lunch, as they had coffee outside, under a tree he kept telling her was an arbutus, though he was not sure and it was only a way of getting his confidence back, she said, " About this place. Would you like to go? "

" I'd love to," he said.

Her eyes, always so large and incorrigibly assertive and apparently forceful, seemed suddenly uncertain. She ran her hand across the streak of paler hair and said, " It isn't one of those evil places, is it? You know—nothing to do with the dead? "

" It's just high and lonely," he said. " It's the crowning point of the island. That's all." She stared across the valley, to a far glitter of sun on harsh iron rock, and Manson remembered how Manuel had stared across the valley too.

" You'd really like to go, wouldn't you? " she said. " We'd have to go alone, I suppose? Manuel wouldn't come."

He felt an ascendant rush of triumph at the thought of being alone with her.

" I don't think it need bother us," he said. " It isn't that far." For a moment she did not answer.

She had slipped off the dress she had put on to cover her sun-suit during lunch and once again he found himself thinking how taut and mature her body looked, emerging naked and smooth pale brown from the costume of vivid green. If only he could have rubbed out, somehow, the disturbing streak of paler hair.

" You really think it's not one of those evil places? " she said. " Nothing to do with the dead? "

" No more than anywhere else has."

They arranged to start next morning at nine; but when Manson came out of his bedroom and went out onto the verandah he discovered Miss Vane and Manuel talking at the foot of the steps. Manuel had rigged up a pole on which, at each end, he had hooked a basket for luncheon. As he saw Manson coming he hoisted the pole to his shoulder, balancing the basket on its smooth curve.

With vexation Manson said, " I thought Manuel wasn't coming."

" He's coming as far as lunch," Miss Vane said. " Then if we want to go on any farther—"

" Of course we want to go farther, don't we? " he said. " We want to do the whole thing."

" He says that's up to us."

" It's amazing how people fold up when it comes to it," Manson said. " Good God, you might think it was Everest or something."

" It's probably as well he is coming," she said. " We'd only have to carry the lunch-baskets and it's going to be awfully hot."

Manuel, who had not spoken, began to walk on ahead. Miss Vane followed him and Manson walked some paces behind her. The sunlight behind him was already so crystalline in its sub-alpine transparence that it shone in Miss Vane's hair with a remarkable effect of edging it with minute thorns of tawny gold.

Presently, across the steep short valley, he could see the high edge of the central plateau. It surprised him, in that first moment, by having something domestic about it. It emerged as a vast and domestic piece of pumice-stone abandoned between two vaster shoulders of hungry rock. In the strong sunlight he could have sworn that these rocks, perpendicular and iron-grey and treeless to the foot, shot off a spark or two that flashed like signals across the lower valley.

" That's where we're going," he said. " See? Up there."

" It looks farther off than I thought," she said.

" We've got all day," he said. " After all it's only Monday—you don't have to catch the *Alacantra* today."

As he spoke of the *Alacantra* he remembered the town: Monday morning, the drawn sun-shutters of the office, the spiritless flat dustiness of rooms shut up for the weekend, the horrible Monday lassitude.

A signal from the opposing rocks across the valley shot off with a trick of winking semaphore and expressed his astonished joy at being no longer part of that awful office, watching the cabs on the water-front, the listless boot-blacks rocking on the pavements, the funerals racing away up the hill. He realized, with a remarkable surge of confidence, that he was free.

" By the way, are you going to catch the *Alacantra*? Have you made up your mind? "

" Not quite."

" I know her captain," he said. " I'd come aboard with you and see that he knew who you were."

She turned and held out her hand suddenly and said, " There's room for you to walk on the track with me. Come on. I hate walking alone." A fragment of his hesitation came back.

" Come on," she said. " Come and walk with me. I hate the feeling of someone being just behind me."

She reached out and caught his hand and they walked abreast. " That's better," she said. " Now I feel you're with me."

Sometimes the swaying coolie-like scales of Manuel's baskets disappeared beyond dark shoulders of rock. Manson felt then that Manuel was not part of himself and Miss Vane. He looked up at the enlarging plateau, assuring himself of its unexciting

domesticity, feeling contemptuous of people like Manuel who saw it as a formidable and fearsome thing.

At the same time the feeling grew on him also that Miss Vane was slightly afraid. That was why she wanted him to walk with her; that was why she would ask him now and then if he still wanted to go to the top. He had the increasing impression too that she had something on her mind. Perhaps that was why she was continually so forgetful of things like her handbag.

Halfway through the morning one of his shoe-laces came undone. He had not brought with him very suitable shoes for walking and the best he could find that day was a pair of old canvas sandals with rubber soles. As he stooped to tie the shoe-lace Miss Vane stopped to wait for him. He had some difficulty with the shoe-lace and was afraid of breaking it. When he looked up again Manuel had disappeared and Miss Vane was alone, staring at something far down a long spoon-shaped gorge of rock.

His feelings at seeing her there alone gave him a sort of buoyancy. His shoes were soft on the path. He had nothing to do but creep up to her and put his hands on her hair and turn her face to him and kiss her.

Before he could do anything she turned and pointed down the gorge and said, " There's something down there. Do you see? Right down. A house or something—two or three houses."

" Yes. They're houses," he said.

" I didn't think there were villages up here."

" It's a longish way away," he said. " Probably two or three hours by path."

" We must ask Manuel about it," she said.

His illusion of buoyancy died, and when they walked on again he automatically fell into the way of walking behind her until she reminded him about it and held out her hand.

Before lunch, which Manuel laid in a small clearing of pines, in one of those places where water dripped like summery rain from fissures of cacti-studded rock, Manuel asked her stiffly, " Would you like something to drink before you eat, madame? "

" I would," she said. " What is there? "

" There's beer, madame," he said. " And gin."

" What gin is it? " Manson said.

" The best, sir." Manuel held up the bottle and Manson said, " Good. We don't want any local muck. I'll have gin too."

He drank the gin rather quickly and, looking out over the enlarging, stoppering view of high rock, with its sliced-out gorges streamless far below, he used exactly the words Miss Vane had used on the journey up with the mules.

" Well, this is marvellous," he said. The village of obscure white houses seemed of paltry insignificance, far away. " It's absolutely marvellous, I think. Don't you? "

" It's lovely."

" I think it's stunning. How far to the top, Manuel? "

" This is as far as the track goes, sir," Manuel said.

" I don't get that," Manson said. " You can see a path going up there as plain as daylight. I've been watching it. You can see it going most of the way."

" It's probably made by goats, sir."

The remark seemed to have in it the slightest touch of oblique insolence, and he asked abruptly for another gin. He was very glad that Miss Vane decided to have one too.

But the lunch was good. He awarded absolutely top marks to Manuel for the lunch. A slight breeze blew off the upper mountain and cooled the glare of sun. He took another gin and was aware again of the semaphore spark of signals ignited over the black of distant rocks, and he remarked several times, munching on big open sandwiches of red beef and peeled eggs and ham, that food always tasted so magnificent in the open air.

" What is the village, Manuel? " Miss Vane said.

" That's the village of Santa Anna, madame."

" How far away is it? "

Manson said: " Three hours. All of three hours I should say."

" It would take more than half a day to get there," Manuel said. " Sometimes there are bad mists, too. Then it takes more."

With another gin, in which he was glad Miss Vane joined him, Manson felt all the flare of antagonism against Manuel come back. The man was a damn know-all. Too smooth by half. Too smooth. Too knowing. Worst of all, too damned right.

" Good God, look—there's an eagle," he said.

A large bird, equidistant between the two shoulders of mountain, seemed to hold for a moment the entire sky in its claws.

" That's a buzzard, sir," Manuel said. " There are no eagles here." Manson stared at the bird that seemed, with motionless deceit, to hold the sky in its claws.

" I'd like another gin," he said. " Would you? "

" I will if you will," she said.

" Good," he said. " That'll get us steamed up for the top."

During lunch Miss Vane took off her shoes and for some moments after lunch, when she appeared to have some difficulty in getting them on again, Manson felt impatient and disappointed.

" Oh, it's nothing. It's only that my feet ache a bit." He saw her look up at the plateau of rock that spanned and blocked, exactly like the barrier of a dam, the entire western reach of valley.

" It looks awfully far," she said.

" Don't you want to go? "

" It isn't that. I was only wondering about time," she said.

" I thought you were the one with plenty of time," he said. " We ought to have brought the hammock. Then we could have carried you."

He said the words rather brassily, with a smile.

" You think we can make it? " she said. " I mean in the time? Perhaps we ought to ask Manuel? "

" Oh, damn Manuel," he said.

Manuel was washing the lunch things under water that broke from a small fissure in the perpendicular rock above the path.

" Manuel—how far is it to the top? " she said. " How long should it take us? "

" You should give two hours, madame."

" There and back? or just there? "

" There and back," he said.

" Oh, that's nothing," Manson said. " That's no time."

The sight of Manuel deferentially wiping a plate with a tea-cloth, in his shirt-sleeves, so like a waiter who had lost his way, made him feel suddenly superior again.

" You're coming, Manuel, aren't you? " she said.

" No, madame, I'm not coming. I shall wait here for you."

A moment of strained silence seemed to be pinned, suspended, ready to drop, in the immense space of hot noon sky. With irritation Manson heard her break it by saying, " We've got all afternoon. Won't you change your mind? "

" No, thank you, madame."

" Oh, if the fellow doesn't want to come, he doesn't want to come. That's that."

" I was simply asking," she said.

A moment later, fired by something between annoyance and exhilaration, he was ready to start. " If you get tired of waiting," he said to Manuel, " you can go back. We know the way."

The path made a series of regular spiral ascents with growing sharpness, narrowing to a single-line track on which Manson and Miss Vane could well walk together. Disturbed by their feet, a rock fell, flattish, skimming like a slate from a house-roof, pitching down, crashing with gun-shot echoes into a cauldron of steamy, sunlit haze.

" It's hot, isn't it? " she said. " You don't really want to go to the top, do you? "

" Of course I do. That's what we came for, didn't we? "

She did not answer, and he said, " I don't wonder the English perfected mountaineering. None of these other chaps seem to have the slightest guts for it."

The buzzard reappeared in the sky like a growing speck of dust on glass, but this time below and not above him. He stood for a moment in intent exhilaration, watching the descending bird that was really a hundred feet or so below him now. He was amused to think that he had climbed higher than a bird in the sky, higher than Manuel, higher perhaps than anything but a goat or a goat-herd had ever climbed on the island before.

" You know what—? " he began to say.

Another rock fell noisily. Its skimming, sliding fall, in clean curvature into hazy space, had the breathless beauty of a ball well thrown. He heard its crash on other rocks below. He listened for some time to its long double-repeated echoes across the valley. Then he realized suddenly that to his half-finished remark there had been no answer.

He turned and saw Miss Vane already fifty feet above him. She was walking steadily. Before he could call, she turned and stared back, eyeless in her black sun-glasses, and waved her hand.

" I thought you were the big mountaineer."

" Oh, wait, wait! " he said. " We must keep together."

She seemed to laugh at him before going on. He scrambled after her. And although she was not really hurrying, it was several minutes before he reached her. By that time he was glad she was sitting down.

" My God, it's getting hot," he said.

" You were the one who wanted to do this."

" I know. I'm all right. We mustn't rush it, that's all. It's like everything else—easy if you keep to a system."

" My system is to lie down at frequent intervals and stop there," she said. As she lay down on the ledge of short dry grass, she took off her sun-glasses. The glare of sun, too harsh for her, made her suddenly turn and lie on her face, spreading out her arms. Instantly the sunlight, as it had done earlier in the day, shone on the back of her hair with the brilliant effect of edging it with minute thorns of tawny gold.

Suddenly the sensation of uneasy intimacy he had first experienced in the cabin on the ship, above the dishevelled bed, came rushing back. It became one with the intoxicating experience of having climbed higher than the buzzard on the mountain.

He turned her face and began kissing her. He remembered thinking that that was something he had not bargained for in any system—would not have bargained for if he had planned it for a thousand years.

She moved her lips in a series of small fluttering pulsations that might have been protest or acceptance—he could not tell. The impression was that she was about to let him go and then that she could not bear to let him go. The effect was to rock him gently, in warm blindness, on the edge of the gorge.

He was still in a world of spinning blood and sunlight and tilting rock when he sat up again. Her eyes were intensely blue under lowered lids in the sun. In a flash she shut them against the glare, parting her mouth at the same time.

" That was easy," she said.

" Easy? "

" I mean, I didn't expect you to do it like that," she said. " I meant, I thought it would be different with you."

He heard the snapped cry of a bird, like the flap of linen, the only sound in a vast and burning chasm of silence, somewhere above the extreme edge of stunted heath and pine.

" Again," she said. " It made me feel better."

Long before the end of that second kiss he was perfectly sure that she belonged to him. He was so sure that he found himself thinking of the rest-house, the dark cover of evening, the way they would be together long after the infuriating whistling of Manuel had died away behind the cage. He felt his pride in his

confidence leap up through his body in thrusting, stabbing bursts.

" That made me feel better still," she said.

" Better? "

" Happier—that's what I mean."

Suddenly, clearly, and for the first time he found himself wondering why she had bothered to come there at the height of summer.

" Happier?—weren't you happy before? "

" We ought to have found some shadier spot," she said. " I'm melting. Can you see my bag? where's my bag? "

He did not bother to look for the bag. " Were you? "

" No. I wasn't," she said.

" Was that why you came here? "

" Partly."

Her eyes were shut again. In contrast he felt he saw the shape of her breasts, painfully clear under the thin white dress, stir, wake, and look wonderfully up at him.

" Only partly? "

" You remember the day I came and I said there wasn't any colour? "

He remembered that. It seemed a thousand years away.

" It was colour I was looking for," she said.

A bird-cry, another break of silence, another suspicion of a whispered echo far away between sunburnt roofs of rock were enough to make him uneasy again.

" I don't quite understand," he said. " Colour? "

" Where's my bag? " she said, " can't you see my bag? "

For God's sake, he thought, the bag. Why the bag? why did she always forget the bag?

" No, it's not here. You can't have brought it," he said.

" Oh, didn't I? " She sat up, groping in the sun. Her eyes were wide open; he saw them, blue and wet, enormous with trouble. Ineffectually he searched for the bag, too, knowing it wasn't there. He knew, too, what she was going to ask, and while he was still groping about the grass, she said, " Would you go back and get it? would you be a dear? "

He knew suddenly that he was a fool. He was a fool and he would go down and get the bag. He was a fool and he would climb up again. In time she would lose the bag again and he would be a fool and find it once more.

" Must you have it? do you need it to kiss with? "

" Don't talk like that. I'm lost without it, that's all. You can kiss me anyway."

As she sat upright he kissed her again holding his hands under her breasts. He felt her give a great start of excitement, as if all the blood were leaping to the front of her body. Then she broke away and said, " The bag. Couldn't you get the bag?—would you, please? "

" What trouble are you in? "

" No trouble."

" Tell me what it is."

" I'm in no trouble—honest, I'm not in any trouble."

" What, then? "

" I don't know—a sort of hell," she said. " Get the bag and I'll tell you about it. You made me feel better about it already."

Suddenly where her body had been there was a space. Some trick of refraction, a twist in the glare of sun on whiteness, suppressed his power of sight. Instead of her shining body there was a naked gap on the path.

As he walked down it to fetch her bag he found he could not see very well. He was aware of groping again, his canvas shoes slithering on scalding dark platters of rock, waking loose stones to curve out on flights of vicious perfection to the steaming haze below.

The infuriating whistle of Manuel brought him back to himself. " Have you seen Miss Vane's bag? " he shouted.

" Yes, sir. Here it is, sir, with the lunch things."

Manson grasped the white bag and turned back up the path.

" Aren't you going to the top, sir? "

" Mind your own business! " he said. He stopped. " Oh—another thing. I think we'll be starting back tomorrow. You'd better get back and start packing."

" Very well, sir," Manuel said.

High above the mountainside the sombre hypnotic buzzard had risen again to hold the sky in its claws. It woke in Manson a sudden hatred for the place. The sky of summer seemed to reflect, in a curious harsh and lifeless glare, the depressing slate-like glaze of the high naked edge of plateau. Below, the trees were fired and lost in smouldering ashen dust. From far away a glint of steel in minute winks shot from the mass of pines with the effect of blue glass-paper.

A moment or two later he heard once again that curious sound that was like the dry flap of shaken linen, startling in the thin air. He heard it at the moment of turning the last of the spirals in the path before reaching Miss Vane. And as he heard it and turned his head, he lost his sense of focus again, and a rock fell.

It fell this time from under his feet. It seemed to cross, a second later, a shadow that might have been caused by the buzzard suddenly whipping earthwards to kill. Instead he saw that it was another rock. It fell with bewildering swiftness from under his too smooth canvas shoes, taking with it a black and slaty shower.

This shower was the entire corner of the path. As it fell it seemed to suck him down. For a second or two he was aware of a conscious effort to save himself. Then, clutching with ferocity at Miss Vane's white bag, he fell too.

His impression of death was sharp and instantaneous. It was a flame leaping up to meet him like the uprising ball of sun. Its inescapable extinction was like the extinction of Miss Vane's white body on the path. It was there one moment and then, in a final trick of refraction, was black and void.

He half picked himself up in a shower of slate and slate-dust,

at the foot of a pine no taller than a man. His left foot was jammed by rock. His fall had ended in a kind of football tackle, not badly aimed at the feet, the roots of the pine. He struggled to free his foot, and the tree-roots, under his weight, cracked under the rock and began to come out like slow-drawn teeth in gristly pain.

He thought he was laughing. Then he knew that he was really sucking air, enormous gasps of it, gorging on it, fighting for it in pure fright with his terrified mouth and tongue.

The last of the tree-roots were sucked out and the tree fell over, letting him down. His foot too was free. He laughed and shouted something. He did not know what it was but the very feeling of coherent air across his tongue gave him enormous hope. He felt suddenly as calm and poised as the buzzard above the valley.

He climbed slowly up on his hands and knees, aware of a slight drag in his left leg. It was not important, he thought, and when he reached the path, he sat down with his back against rock and kept saying, " I'm all right. I'm perfectly all right. I'm absolutely and perfectly all right."

" Oh, my God, I'm sick," she said. " Oh, I'm so sick."

" I'll hold you. Lie against the rock," he said.

But he found that he could not hold her. He lay against the rock too, trembling all over. The valley swam below him. Whole waves of dust-bright haze washed over him, drowning him in sweat, leaving him cold. " I knew I was gone," he said. " I know what the end is like now."

" Let's go down," she said.

His eyes were shut. His sweating face seemed to be fixed against a cool bone of projecting rock.

The rock moved and touched him. He discovered then that it was her own face, terribly and dryly cool. His sweat was drying too and he shuddered. Then he felt the sun burning his eyeballs through lids that were like dry thin tissue and he knew that if he did not get up and walk at once he would slide in weakness, like a dislodged stone, off the edge of the gorge.

They were far down on the path, at the place where they had lunched, before she said, " I never liked heights. I could never bear them. I hate that awful vertigo."

He was glad to see that Manuel had taken him at his word and had started back. He was glad too that the path was at last doubly wide, so that the two of them could walk together.

The idea that something was very wrong with his left foot came to him slowly. The drag of it was heavy and finally the drag of it woke into pain.

He found himself at last sitting on the path, staring into a shoe half full of blood.

" It was all my fault," she said. " I wanted to go up there."

He poured blood onto the dust of the path and struggled to put on his wet, blackening shoe. Somehow he could not get it back.

Nothing of the kind, he thought. He felt tired and sick. Staring at the bloodstained shoe, he remembered clearly how she had not

wanted to go. He recalled his own exultation of rising above Manuel and the bird in the sky. It seemed so ridiculous now that he could only say, " I didn't want to go either. I hate the damn place."

He sat there for a long time, trying to put on his shoe. He could smell the old corrupt dark smell of blood as it dried. The shoe would not go back and there was something crushed and twisted about the swollen shape of his foot. Long before he gave up trying with the shoe, he knew somehow that the foot was not going to take him home.

But now, trying to be bright about things, he said, " They say it's an ill wind. Now you'll probably get an extra day to catch the *Alacantra*." She did not answer.

" You are going to catch it, aren't you? "

" Yes."

Then he wished that something more spectacular had happened back on the path. There was nothing very dramatic, after all, in cutting a slice or two out of your foot.

" I know her captain," he said. " I'll see that you get fixed up."

" I can understand if you're bitter about me," she said.

" I'm not bitter."

" You sound bitter."

" Perhaps because you kissed me up there."

Strength seemed to drain out of his body and it seemed a long time afterwards before she said, " Kissing isn't always the start of something. In this case it was the end."

" The end of what? " he said. " Probably me."

" I've been running away from something. That's all. When you kissed me it was the end of running."

He wanted to say something like " Glad to have been of service, Miss Vane." A withering breath of burning rock blew into his face. His foot pained him violently, stabbing in great throbs, and he did not answer.

" You've been so sweet to me," she said. " Doing what I wanted."

" Husband or what? " he said.

" Husband."

" You must give him the love of a decaying shipping clerk when you get back," he said.

" He may not be there when I get back," she said. " That's the point. But I've got to try."

Savagely the heat blew into his face again, and the raw weeping soreness of his foot made him sick.

" I'll bet he's a damn louse," he said.

" You might call him that," she said. " But then that's sometimes how it is. They're lousy and they get under your skin. You know they're lousy and you can't help it. You can't fight them."

" Not even on mountaintops. Not even in Salandar."

He knew it was no use. It was no good, that way of talking. His foot seemed to enlarge and burst like a bloated blister, bringing

his head up with a sharp breath of pain. Above him the sky swung and quivered. A speck that might have been dust or a buzzard or just the shadow of something fell swiftly from it and cut across his sweat-locked eyes.

She saw his pain and said, " I'll get Manuel. I'll get you back."

" Oh God, no! I can make it."

" I'll get Manuel. It's better."

He tried to watch her figure going down the path. He tried to call out to her to come back. Then he was alone and it was no use. He was a darkening, dribbling figure, undramatic and strengthless, slipping down from the rock.

The worst of it, some long time later, was the sight of Manuel, coming to take him away. The correct, oiled, subservient figure. The slight bow. The glance at the foot, the shoe that was black with blood. The cool eyes, the mouth that was so well-shaped, so poised, that it might have ejected at any moment that maddening whistle. " I told you so."

It was morning, about ten o'clock, when Manuel carried him out to the waiting mules. The crushed arch of his foot might have been made of cactus thorns, each thorn a nerve beating nakedly up and down to the thump of blood. His head, like the foot, seemed to have swollen and he felt the great thudding pulse of it rocking outwards, rolling and striking the sides of the valley.

" I'm going to tie you onto the mule, sir. Just to be safe. In case you feel dizzy."

" Absolutely all right," he said. " Where's Miss Vane? "

" She's just getting her things. She's going to ride with you."

" She's got to catch the *Alacantra*. What about the car? "

" I'm going on to telephone for it, sir. Then I'll send the hammock back from the top of the road."

" Hammock? For heaven's sake, what hammock? "

" You'll be better in the hammock, sir."

He found himself shaking and swaying with sickness, impotent behind the fluttering ears of the mule, the entire valley projected before him in those strong high blue lines that were pulsations rather than shadow.

" Much better if you let Miss Vane push on. I can manage."

Presently he was aware of a slow transition of scene: rock and pine looming up, starry walls of cactus leaf dripping past, bright green under springs, sunlight firing pine-needles to masses of glass-paper, ashy blue under a sickening sky.

Heat lay on the back of his neck, in spite of the towel Manuel had put there, like a burning stone. He wondered why there had been no attempt to escape the heat by starting earlier. Then he remembered not being able to sleep. Great rocks in the valley grating against each other. A far continuous thunder, a power-house noise, from across the plateau. Water, a stream somewhere, drowning him, dragging him under. He remembered falling down. He had walked out to the verandah, seeing Miss Vane there, in an

attempt to show her that there was nothing wrong with his foot. He vividly remembered the band of paler hair across the black front of her head as she turned. He said, " Hullo," and she screamed, and out of the sky at the head of the valley a wing of blackness smothered him.

" The point is that the *Alacantra* is sometimes half a day earlier," he said. She was riding twenty or thirty paces in front of him. Her hair was a mass of pure black, with no other colour but the outer minute sparkle of tawny fire. It was part of his sickness that his eye saw the fires of each hair with remarkable clearness, so that he felt he could touch them with his hands.

He did in fact lift his hands from the saddle. As he did so the valley swayed. He was no longer part of it. The saddle was not there to grasp, nor the quivering head of the mule, nor Miss Vane.

He was lost in emptiness and found himself crying out like a child. His mouth slobbered as he groped in air. Then the saddle was there, and the mule, and the head of Miss Vane, far off, black and unaware.

" It's like everything else," he said. " Never know where you are. A boat can be two days late. Or half a day early. You never really know."

If she was listening she showed no sign. For some moments he was under the impression that she had galloped far down the valley and had disappeared. He shouted something. Masses of tree-heather, growing taller now as the valley descended, broke apart and revealed her, waiting, only a yard or two away.

" Did you say anything? " she said.

" No. All right. Perfectly all right."

" Say when you don't want to go on."

He could not check his mule. He seemed to be pitching forward, head first, down the track.

" Did you hear what I said about the *Alacantra*? "

" You mustn't worry about that."

" She may be early. She goes out on Wednesday. You never know—she might be in at midnight tonight. She sometimes is."

" Today is Friday," she said.

He knew that he could not have heard her correctly. He knew that it was only yesterday that he had fallen off the track. It was only an hour or two since he had emptied out his shoe, with its old sour smell of blood, like a dirty beaker. " You probably won't get a passage for two or three weeks," he said.

She was too far away to answer, a dissolving fragment, under high sun, of pure white and pure black, like a distant road-sign that was the warning of a bend.

" That's the way with this island. It's easy to get here but it's hell's own job to get away."

Some time later he was aware of the undergrowth of pine giving up a pair of stunted figures in black trilby hats. He saw the canopy of a hammock, red-flowered like an old bed coverlet between the poles. He was saying, " Let me alone. Let me walk," and then

he was being lifted in. It was rather difficult lifting him in because of his leg and because only one end of the pole could be held up. The other was in the ground, leaving one man free to lift him and set him down.

It was stupid about the leg. As they took him down from the mule he could not feel it at all. Its pain had become self-numbed like the pain of a tooth at a dentist's threshold. All his pain was between his eyes, brightening his vision; the little flowers of the hammock pattern sprang at him, dancing pink and blue with fire.

"What about you?" he said. "You push on. You've got to go. Anyway, the plane is on Saturdays."

"That can wait," she said. "The important thing is to get you down. We ought to have done it before."

"You'd got it all so clear," he said.

The pole straightened. He was lying parallel with the sky. She wiped his face several times with a handkerchief.

"How now?" she said. "Do you feel fit to go?"

"Fit," he said. "Absolutely." And then in a moment of brightness, "Don't forget the handbag."

"I very nearly would have done." His impression was that she was crying. He was not sure. She kissed him gently on the mouth and said, "Take it easy. Easy does it."

"Easy," he said. "That's what you said before."

A few moments later the trilby hats began to carry him slowly, in the hammock, down the path. Easy, he thought, that was it. How easy it had been. A ship, a handbag on a bed, a hotel, a *leste* burning through the town, a rest-house, a track to the top of the sky. Easy: that was her word.

"How do you feel?" she said. "Do you want them to go slower?"

"No," he said. "Aren't you really going now?"

"No," she said. "Not yet. Not now."

Half in delirium, a moment of joy shot through him in an upward arc that burst like a splintering rocket through the top of his head. It exploded a moment later in stars of pain. There was a smell of camphor from the hammock sheet, anaesthetic, making him gasp for breath, and then, unexpectedly, he was aware of a strange impression. He stared up at the sky. In the centre of it he could have sworn that he saw a shadow, huge and descending, in the shape of the buzzard, holding the sky in its claws.

"Easy," she said, and "Easy," his mind echoed, remembering the shape of her mouth in the sun.

The next moment he began fighting. "I won't go!" he said. "I won't go! I won't let it happen to me!" But she did not hear him. The trilby hats did not hear him either, and with calm slowness they carried him forward through the valley, down under the scorning brilliance of noon, towards the sea.

★ ★ ★

The plural of spouse is spice.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

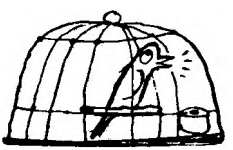
ANIMAL CRACKERS

And the little dog laughed, Ha ha!

Ah! you should keep dogs—fine animals—sagacious creatures —dog of my own once—Pointer—surprising instinct—out shooting one day—entering enclosure—whistled—dog stopped—whistled again—Ponto—no go; stock still—called him—Ponto, Ponto—wouldn't move—dog transfixed—staring at a board—looked up; saw an inscription—" Gamekeeper has orders to shoot all dogs found in this enclosure "—wouldn't pass it—wonderful dog—valuable dog that—very.

Mr. Jingle, in CHARLES DICKENS'
Pickwick Papers

The Canary



The song of canaries
Never varies,
And when they're moulting
They're pretty revolting.

OGDEN NASH

The Chameleon

This was the most unsatisfactory pet I have ever encountered barring poisonous snakes and other dangerous animals. A chameleon is blessed with two separate brains, each of which controls one eye, which can swivel independently like a searchlight, and also the two legs on the same side . . . It is true that both brains co-ordinated at the sight of food, and it was a master at picking off flies with its tongue up to a range of six inches; but apart from this feat which was connected with its tummy, co-ordination was non-existent.

It is poor fun keeping a pet which takes thirty minutes to decide if a step forward is necessary to its life, and then has to switch over to another brain for the next one. As for changing colour, frogs, fish, and a host of other animals can do as well as a chameleon, but they receive no credit for their gifts . . .

We squandered our all on a variety of coloured cushions for our chameleon, and as we switched it from one to another it remained its usual nondescript stone colour. It is true that it

would assume a different shade if placed for hours on either white or black, but ordinary colour changes meant nothing to it. The infuriating animal just rolled each eye separately and continued to ponder on the soul-searing problem of whether the other leg should be moved forward or not. The time-worn joke of a chameleon bursting when placed on a bit of tartan is a romance.

C. J. LAMBERT, *Together We Wandered*

Gnatty

On the wing
Gnats sing
Gnotes that match
G natch.
When I feel they're sharp,
I gnock 'em flat.
You can tune a harp,
But gnot a gnat.

DAVID MCCORD, *Odds Without Ends*

Word of—

I beleeve you must be carefull of your Ostridge this returne of cold wether . . .

SIR THOMAS BROWNE, *in a letter to his son*, 1681

—Warning

oh deride not
the camel
if grief should
make him die
his ghost will come
to haunt you
with tears
in either eye
and the spirit of
a camel
in the midnight gloom
can be so very
cheerless
as it wanders
round the room

DON MARQUIS, *archy and mehitabel*

From Here to Maternity

My objection to kittens
Is simple in essence:
They have such a brief childhood,
And no adolescence.

PHILENE HAMMER

Homing Birds

We sold four geese to an Admiral who wanted them for keeping down grass on a Fleet Air Arm aerodrome . . .

If you live in the country you should keep geese as policemen. They give notice of a projected burglary. They cackle loudly, in the approved technique of Ancient Rome, if the attack on your property is pending. Like the Navy, they never sleep. At night they post a sentry. Often have I heard our geese talking over the night's " roster " of duties in low musical tones. " Two hours on and four hours off " is the goose's motto.

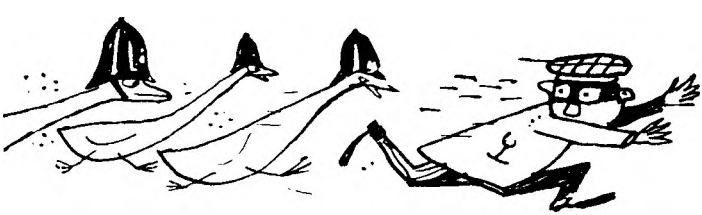
This routine drill is observed as righteously by geese as it is by the Royal Marines in a battleship. The moment the first sentry is posted, the remainder of the flock tuck their heads under their wings and go to sleep.

If the night is quiet and there are no foxes about, the geese sleep peacefully, except for a short murmur during which sentries are changed. At dawn they all wake up, stretch their wings, and greet the sun (if any) . . .

The Admiral who bought my geese . . . wanted to buy some more, because they were doing his aerodrome a lot of good. He said he couldn't understand the term " silly geese! "

Silly? Our geese were clever! The day I banked the cheque I got for them, they left the aerodrome and flew straight home.

T. A. LOWE,
Fruit Farm in England



Brandy for the Colonel

by Paul Gallico

OUT of the shadows of the starlit night, from the oleander-scented banks of the River Cher at the bottom of Colonel Bobet's garden, came the sound of a young girl's weeping, followed by her despairing voice saying, " Ah Michel, I love you. I am the unhappiest girl in the world . . . I shall die."

Seated on a bench in the darkness by the grape arbour where he used to go to sip his post-prandial cognac, but now as dry not only as a bone but as an entire ossuary, Colonel François Louis (Papa) Bobet recognized the voice as that of little Julie Trouet, the orphan who some years ago had been taken into their home as household servant and drudge.

A masculine voice now replied to this pitiful lament with commendable masculine fervour, " Julie, little flower, do not weep. You know that I love only you. A pest upon the dowry. We will manage somehow. If necessary, I shall give up the idea of going to Paris." But this declaration of devotion to the point of sacrifice only provoked a fresh outburst of grief from the girl, whose white dress could now be seen glimmering faintly through the caverns created by the bending willow branches.

" No, no, Michel. I would rather perish than become a millstone around your neck. You will be a great artist if only you have your chance to go to Paris. Without the dowry it is impossible . . ."

Papa Bobet, still a stalwart, upright military figure in spite of his accumulation of seventy-four more-or-less troubled years, clasped his hands over his cane in the shadows and thought to himself, " Ah, ah! Julie is right. Who would have believed the little one was possessed of so much sentiment and at the same time so much sense? I wonder who the fellow is? I did not know we had any budding Renoirs in Aurance-sur-Cher."

As if in answer to his query, the two came up the garden path together from the river, and Papa Bobet recognized the personable

face and figure of Michel Bavasc, the house-painter. The unpleasant twinge this gave him was only momentary, for it reminded him of his wife's eternal badgering because the large, old villa in which they lived on the outskirts of Aurance-sur-Cher, in the cognac district, just at the foot of the hill where the road from Paris descended into the village, had not had a coat of paint since the war and now stood, a grey and dilapidated monument to the poverty of one trying to live upon the pension of a retired Colonel.

" Julie, my angel . . ." Michel murmured, as they approached the arbour where Papa Bobet sat concealed.

" Michel, I release you," Julie sobbed. " You will marry Céleste, the fat daughter of the wealthy miller, and I shall die."

Colonel Bobet rose and stepped before them. " Now, now, my children. These are indeed extreme measures. Surely there must be a way to solve your problem. For do you not know that in life everything can be arranged? "

The two knew him at once, if not by his voice, then by the aphorism, for this was Colonel Bobet's widely known catchword, *Dans la vie on peut tout arranger.*

They paused before him; Michel, a handsome enough fellow with dark hair, flashing eyes, and fine teeth; Julie, as always, unearthly in her nightly transformation from bonne à tout faire to delicate young girl.

For whereas, during the day, the child was about the place in slatternly shoes, shapeless garments, hair falling over her eyes, face red with exertion and moist with sweat, after dark, when her work in the house was done, she came forth in a freshly ironed gown, tied at the waist, and with her light tresses bound back from her face to reveal the clear and touching area of her forehead and temples.

Sometimes the perfume of her body and garments, stirred by the cool evening breeze, would be wafted back to Colonel Bobet sitting lonely and cognac-less in the garden, and at such times he would close his eyes and breathe deeply of the enthralling fragrance and permit himself to be enveloped in an agreeable mist of memories.

For, believe it or not, his wife, Héloïse, the grim-visaged, stern Madame Bobet, now half-blind with myopia, had once been like this, too. A fragrance used to linger about her hair and clothes, her breath was sweet, and her eyelids under the touch of the lips of young Lieutenant Bobet had been as smooth and soft as the petals of a damask rose. But that, of course, had been a long time ago.

The Colonel cleared his throat and said, " Well, now, my children . . ." His reputation for kindness, plus his round,

friendly face with white moustaches and tufted eyebrows, made people automatically wish to confide in him.

The story, much of which was already known to him, came pouring forth. Madame Bobet, as guardian, had the right to withhold the dowry of one hundred thousand francs, Julie's inheritance from her late mother, a seamstress from a neighbouring village, until the girl, now nineteen, was twenty-five. Michel, the house-painter, wished to decorate canvases and not barns . . . For, although the French do not desecrate their highways with billboards, they are far from deaf to the golden voice of advertising, as you will have noticed in your travels, and have devised other means of calling attention to the virtues of apéritifs, car batteries, beer, and brandy.

This work supported Michel Bavasc and a widowed mother, but stifled his artistic soul. A year or two of study in Paris would put him on the road to success as an artist.

" But without my dowry, this is impossible," Julie concluded, " and Madame Bobet refuses to give it to me." Thereupon the girl fell upon her knees, clasped the hands of Papa Bobet, and prayed, " Oh, please, please help me! I cannot live without Michel."

The old man raised her up and said, " There, now. Surely a way may be found. Have I not often told you that in this life all may be satisfactorily arranged? "

" Ah yes," Julie cried, " but how? "

The Colonel did not reply to this, for the truth was that at that moment he did not know.

Then the silence, which was beginning to grow somewhat embarrassing, was broken by a harsh voice like that of a crow calling from the house.

" Julie! It is your bedtime. Come at once, else you won't be able to get up and do your work in the morning. François, what are you up to? You have not laid your hands on some cognac again, have you? "

With a little sob, Julie ran off to the back door while Michel sighed and went away.

Under the cover of darkness, Colonel Bobet smiled, but without either rancour or bitterness. Get his hands on some cognac, indeed! At long last, Madame Bobet had succeeded in drying up every source. For with the help of a malevolent cousin in the War Office, she had recently succeeded in having the Colonel's monthly pension paid directly to her. Thus she was able to get her hands on the entire sum before Papa Bobet could make his customary deductions for tobacco and his beloved cognac.

In fact, there were quite a number of villagers who were of the opinion that for a gentleman whose motto it was that there was nothing in life that could not be arranged, Colonel Bobet had not managed to organize the declining years of his life very well.

Héloïse, his wife, was known as a prohibitionist, a termagant, a scold, an iron, embittered woman, whose temper was not improved by her near-sightedness which was such that she was barely able to get about in spite of the thick lenses she wore.

She was anti-drink, anti-tobacco, anti-love—in fact, anti-everything that was pleasant, stimulating, or relaxing. But her greatest energies and virulence were marshalled in combating the evils of drink.

Her chief battle-ground was the person of her husband, the prop of whose remaining days was his bottle of Aurac, the Cognac of Aristocrats, product of the locality and manufactured by the Marquis d'Aurac whose country-seat was located on the hill overlooking Aurance-sur-Cher.

The Colonel was a beloved and popular figure in the whole community.

Indeed, he was something of a legend, for, unable to command in World War II on account of an old wound, he had played a redoubtable part in the Resistance under the name of Mystère, aided by a companion whose real identity was still not revealed in the district and who had been known only as Pantoufle. Between them, they had led the Boche a fine dance.

But now the war was over, the old fellow's time was nearly up, and his only solace was getting mellow nightly on Cognac Aurac. For by the third beaker of the golden liquid, he was able to forget the pain caused by the fact that he had lived on into an age where there were Frenchmen who, blithely betraying their country to the Nazis, had collaborated to the hilt . . .

But if the Colonel was a popular figure, you may well imagine that his wife was just the opposite, in a town which not only raised, distilled, and sold Cognac Aurac, but also drank it exclusively for two reasons, the first being, as Colonel Bobet put it, " No finer liquor ever emerged from a charred cask," and the second, that the powerful Marquis who produced it would brook no competition either in dispensing or advertising, and in particular, not that of the neighbouring Cognac Renier, the Brandy of the Marshals of Napoleon, and one of the best known in all France. Indeed, Dubois, the advertising manager of Cognac Renier, had long tried to invade the Aurance district, but up to now without success.

Auberges, bistros, and estaminets that attempted to sell or

advertise any brand but Aurac soon felt the displeasure of the Marquis who, naturally, was the biggest property-owner and landlord in the village. However, there was no tendency to double-deal. The stomachs of the villagers and Colonel Bobet, weaned on the stuff, were one-hundred-per-cent-loyal to Aurac. The Colonel would as soon sell out his regiment as permit another brand to cross his lips.

Yet this was all regrettably a thing of the past as far as the Colonel was concerned, for in her effort to shut off every source in order to amass the money needed to pay for the much-needed repainting job on the exterior of the big villa, which was her inheritance from her father, Héloïse had initiated a stormy visit to shopkeepers in Aurance-sur-Cher and warned them that if she caught them advancing so much as a sou to Colonel Bobet on any household articles, or even his medals or personal possessions, steps would be taken.

It appeared, alas, as though the poor Colonel was routed on all fronts. There was no question of being stood a drink, for even had the honest villagers forsaken their usual habits of caution and thrift and donated Colonel Bobet's so greatly needed post-prandial tot of Aurac, his fierce pride would not have permitted him to accept gifts or hospitality that he was not able to return.

There were many who held that, in view of the inestimable services Colonel Bobet had rendered the district and the country as Mystère in the Resistance, it would not have hurt the Marquis d'Aurac to have sent the old fellow a bottle or two from his cellars or distillery occasionally. However, since the Marquis was known to be close-fisted and mean-spirited—indeed, even more than that was sometimes whispered against him—this was not likely to happen.

And, to conclude this portrait of a man better than most of us, if Colonel Bobet had any complaints about the character of his wife, he kept them to himself. He had chosen her when she was young, beautiful, kind, and good-tempered. If age and disappointment in what life had brought her had now curdled these attributes, it was not her fault, he reasoned. Even a life in which much can be arranged can play shabby tricks, such as the old wound that cost him his brigade and perhaps the marshal's baton. And besides, every man was born to bear trials, and she was his.

One thing is certain; at the moment that this narrative intrudes itself into the quiet community of Aurance-sur-Cher, things were genuinely in a state of crisis in the household of Colonel Bobet.

Little Julie's heart was breaking; the dilapidated, unpainted villa was indeed a disgrace to one of Héloïse's self-importance in the community, though he himself rather liked the soft, weather-worn dove-grey of the bare shingles, and she was making his life a hell, nagging him to secure the money somewhere for a restoration. And then there was the fact that he hadn't had a nip in six weeks and had been stone-cold sober for longer than he could remember.

It was perhaps this condition that was responsible for the shock he received one night a week later when, walking in the village—it being too cool to sit in the garden unfortified by Aurac—he encountered Michel Bavasc, the house-painter, out promenading with Céleste, the wealthy miller's stout and somewhat hirsute daughter, whose dowry would no doubt exceed the hundred thousand francs of Julie.

The painter, as he passed and raised his hat, had the grace to blush, but more, he threw the Colonel a look of mingled despair and misery; a look that implored his understanding as a man and, abetted by an almost imperceptible shrug of a shoulder, seemed to ask what the Colonel would have done in similar circumstances.

Nor was the Colonel inclined to blame him. Life was inexorable in grinding out its quota of winners and losers. He himself had not been able to produce anything tangible to aid them. Julie was both wise and loving in not wishing to ruin Michel's career which indeed she would do if she forced him to remain as house-painter in Aurance. Michel was pursuing a sensible course, and Céleste would no doubt make him a good and thrifty wife who would keep his socks mended and his accounts in order.

But in the clarity of a brain now unfogged by fumes of Aurac the Colonel had a sudden vision or, rather, a recollection of Julie weeping alone down by the river a few nights before, her soft sobs mingling with the chirping of the peeper frogs and the sighing of the wind in the willow trees.

He saw her young figure bent in the agony of lost love, the light hair falling over the face buried in her hands; he remembered the delicate contours of the young figure and smelt again the sweetness of the perfume that emanated from her. And he knew that he could not bear that this child, who in the years she had worked for them had become dear to his heart, should suffer pain.

And at that precise moment, the idea smote him, an idea compounded of so many elements that he did not know where they all came from, each dovetailing with the other like the most precise and harmonious military movements, and yet at the same time utterly traitorous to something which for so long he had held

sacred that this new proposition was unthinkable, and he hastily put it from his mind.

In the house, Julie passed him on her way to bed and she looked as though her soul had drained away through her eyes. The idea forthwith returned.

But the Colonel said to himself—It is impossible that I, a native of Aurance-sur-Cher, an officer and gentleman of France should do this—at least not until I have explored every other avenue.

He then steeled himself to set about this exploration.

His first approach he made directly to Héloïse the next morning.

" My dear," he said to her, for he had never left off the excellent habit of addressing her affectionately, " I wish to speak to you about Julie. Her heart is breaking for Michel Bavasc, the house-painter, an excellent fellow but ambitious, who is willing to marry her—provided of course her dowry is available—so that he may pursue his studies in Paris and become a famous artist. Do you not think it would be a kindness on your part to release these funds, over which you have kept such a scrupulous watch, so that . . ."

" François," his wife interrupted with a loud sniff, " don't be a fool. And do not meddle with matters that are no concern of yours." She fixed him with eyes which, due no doubt to the thickness of the lenses through which she peered, had narrowed down to mean and gimlet size, giving her a most forbidding air.

" Where else will you find someone to work without pay, if Julie leaves to marry? Do you expect me perchance to live here with my own house falling down about my ears and do the drudgery as well—I, the daughter of a General? Pheu! She shall have her money when she is twenty-five and not a minute sooner."

She sniffed again and then added spitefully, " By then she will be on her way to becoming an old maid and content to remain with us."

Colonel Bobet thought that long before that time little Julie might well choose to become the bride of the placidly flowing river Cher at the end of the garden, but he did not say this to his wife. Recognizing that Héloïse was not to be budged in the matter and, on the contrary, had no scruples about ruining the child's life for her own selfish ends, he did not pursue the subject. Instead, he prepared to make the second call that was necessary before he should for ever stain his honour with the blackest apostasy of which a man in his circumstances was capable.

Pocketing his pride, he forthwith paid a visit to Monsieur le Marquis d'Aurac, for, like all the rest of Aurance-sur-Cher, he

was aware that the rumours connecting the Marquis with Julie's late mother might be not entirely without foundation. A hundred thousand francs was a considerable sum for an impoverished seamstress to leave her child.

The Marquis d'Aurac, who did not look at all the way you might expect a Marquis to look, but more like a butcher or, perhaps, one who conducted autopsies, was lecturing Colonel Bobet on the difficulties and uses of charity. They were in his study in the Château Aurac, frowning from the hill overlooking Aurance—and, incidentally, also the Villa Bobet, that dilapidated and paint-shy mansion on its outskirts where the main road from Paris came winding through.

"Ah, hum," he was saying, "naturally, I am interested in every one of my—that is to say, in everyone in my village. But if one were expected to shell out a hundred thousand francs for every lovesick drudge who wished to get married, there would never be any end to it, would there, now, my dear Colonel? Besides, it would only encourage people to marry above their station, which, as you know, is what is the matter with the country."

And having thus disposed of the affair, he turned to another subject with what was meant to be an expression of lightness and amusement passing over his gross, heavy countenance.

"I hear to my regret that Cognac Aurac has lost a good customer in you, my dear fellow," he remarked. "That Madame Héloïse of yours has an iron will and determination. Too bad for us, but I guess the company will be able to survive, eh, old chap?" And he laughed a singularly unpleasant laugh, and clapped the Colonel resoundingly on the shoulder.

He should not have done this. He should not have laughed, but above all he should not have laid the hand of familiarity upon Colonel Bobet. The Colonel only bowed courteously, took his departure, and marched down the hill to the village.

There was then nothing for it but to do what he had thought. And while every soldier of character and honour quails before the aspect of a betrayal such as he contemplated, he consoled himself with the reflection that when humanity and higher loyalties conflict with lower ones, a man has really not too much choice in the matter.

Arrived at home, he sat down and indited a long letter in his precise and neat handwriting, stole the necessary stamps from his wife's *écritoire*, and took it himself to the post office with the injunction to the postmaster to see that it went express.

A few days later, a tall and distinguished-looking gentleman, likewise wearing the rosette of the Legion of Honour in his

lapel, arrived at Aurance-sur-Cher, inquired his way to the Villa Bobet, and proceeded thither where, eventually, he was accepted as a guest.

Accepted is perhaps not exactly the word, for when Colonel Bobet introduced the elderly gentleman to his wife as none other than Pantoufle, the comrade of Resistance days, who had assisted him in their underground operations against the Boche, she quickly drew her husband aside and read him a tirade on strangers taking up her spare bedroom, another mouth to feed, and needless expense when she was trying to save every sou so that they might eventually live in a respectable-looking house. Besides which, she did not like the man's looks.

Bobet reassured her: " No, no, my dear. Pantoufle is a capital fellow and will remain here only a day or so. As a matter of fact, he was treasurer of our Resistance group and owes me a considerable sum of money. He has only recently located me and has come here to open negotiations with a possible view to repayment."

At this, Madame Bobet ceased to remonstrate. The fact that this Pantoufle might be going to part with some cash made him not only tolerable but almost attractive, and Héloïse spent her time speculating first upon how much, and second how she was going to get her hands on it.

Later that day, Colonel Bobet and his friend walked along the banks of the Cher, where the smooth surface was turned to copper and gold by the rays of the setting sun—and where, likewise, their conversation could not be overheard.

When he was certain they were out of earshot, Colonel Bobet came to the point. " Pantoufle, old fellow," he said, " how much would you pay for the privilege of placing the Marquis d'Aurac in the potage and at the same time doing yourself some good? You remember during the days of the Resistance we had more than a little reason to suspect the swine was collaborating."

Pantoufle replied: " What is on your mind, dear Mystère "—the name by which Bobet had been known in the Maquis—" and how much would you require? "

The Colonel told him.

The visitor threw back his head and roared with laughter when Bobet had finished. " Oh, my dear boy," he said, " but that is very naughty. Yes, yes, most naughty, but at the same time delicious and satisfying. I assure you my people will co-operate. But about Madame Bobet—are you certain . . . ? "

" Blind as a bat, poor thing, my dear Pantoufle, unless, of course someone were to tell her."

" From what you say of the feeling in the village, there is not

much chance of that. Well, it is worth your little orphan's dowry to me, dear Mystère."

" And you will pay for the painting job as well? Julie's fiancé is really an excellent fellow and more than usually clever with his brush. He is merely using house-painting as a stepping-stone to something better."

Pantoufle's business sense intruded into this idyll for a moment. " Ah, ah, that will surely be more expensive then. Heaven protect me from house-painters with ambitions to be Monets or Utrillos."

" Yes, but in the extraordinary nature of this job . . ."

" Quite right, my dear fellow. I had forgotten. I can see your point. And now that everyone else has been taken care of, what about you? "

" No, no. Nothing further is necessary."

" Nonsense. I had no idea of the situation or I should have taken steps sooner. Let us say every week, perhaps . . ."

" If you insist then. One bottle would suffice."

" Three, my dear fellow, three by all means. It is worth it to us."

" But they must be delivered to me personally, or else . . ."

" A boy on a bicycle arriving some time after dusk? "

" Perfect! "

" My dear friend, Mystère! "

" My old comrade, Pantoufle!"

The two men embraced with emotion by the river bank.

The next day Pantoufle departed as swiftly and mysteriously as he had come and Colonel Bobet said to his wife, " My dear, I have been so fortunate as to be able to effect a compromise with our late visitor, and the payment will enable me to carry out a work which, as you know, has been close to my heart for a long while.

" I have had a word with Michel Bavasc the house-painter, and the amount in hand is sufficient to enable him to paint our house immediately in the best style, not in one, but in several colours of your choice, red and blue, for instance, though he himself recommends yellow and white."

" Red and blue," Madame Bobet said immediately. " I do not need the advice of anyone inferior to me." And then, suddenly overcome by the news and the realization that her husband was actually prepared to sacrifice the interests of his thirst in order to make possible her desire, she added, " Oh, François, this is indeed good of you! "

And she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, causing Colonel Bobet momentarily to entertain a very strange and uncomfortable feeling in the pit of his conscience.

And that is practically all there is to the story of the heinous treachery of Colonel Bobet beyond reporting that the happy ending took place a week later and temporarily provided the village with the greatest mystery since the war.

It announced itself when Julie, who had been to the post office, came flying up the path to the villa hand in hand with Michel Bavasc, crying, "Papa Bobet, Papa Bobet! Come at once. A miracle has happened! See what I have received!" And she showed him a cheque and a brief note.

The cheque was for one hundred thousand francs, payable upon demand to Julie Trouet. The note merely said: "*Good Luck! From a Friend of your Father's.*"

Colonel Bobet managed to suppress a smile at the manner in which Pantoufle had chosen to sign himself, as Julie cried, "Now Michel and I may be married at once! And he has also a commission to paint your house for ten thousand francs."

"You understand, of course, mon colonel," Michel said, "that I was prepared to wed Julie without . . ."

"Yes, yes," assented the Colonel, without batting an eye, "quite so. Well, the girl loves you with all her heart, and you will make her a good husband. Take one another."

Acting upon this instruction, without more ado, Michel and Julie went into a long and ardent embrace while the Colonel gazed at them fondly.

It was at this felicitous moment that Madame Bobet chose to appear upon the porch.

But there was still another unsolved mystery to intrigue the gossips of Aurance-sur-Cher. This was the weekly appearance of a boy on a bicycle at dusk, who encountered Colonel Bobet on the path leading to the Cher and there handed him, and continued to do so for the rest of his life, three bottles of cognac, bearing a strange and, I regret to say, disgraceful label.

As I am merely the chronicler of these events, the facts of which have only recently come into my possession, it is not my place to comment upon the perfidy of the human species or upon the lengths to which one of its members will go to achieve his aims; such as, for instance, Colonel Bobet's introducing into his home, under the guise of Pantoufle, one Dubois, the advertising manager of the rival and hated firm of the internationally acclaimed Cognac Renier.

It is true that Monsieur Dubois actually *was* Pantoufle, and the two old chaps *had* been comrades in arms in the Resistance. Nevertheless, for a citizen of Aurance-sur-Cher who, up to that time, had never permitted a drop of anything but Cognac Aurac

to give the countersign at the outpost of his tonsils, this was trafficking with the enemy in the most shameless manner.

But this is not even the whole of the perfidy, and it is no part of my duty either to expatiate upon the reprehensible behaviour of the villagers who, to a man, woman, and child, conspired to withhold from Madame Bobet the best-kept secret in the world, she being the only one who was not privy to it.

It was, namely, that when you stood upon the hill a little removed from Aurance and gazed down into the valley, say at the distance of Monsieur le Marquis d'Aurac when looking out of the study window of his château, or where the heavy north-south traffic from Paris breasts the rise before descending to the picturesque river, the new, gay red and blue colours on the Villa Bobet somehow, by the skill or magic of painter Bavasc, rearrange themselves into huge letters and form words distinguishable at a distance of a kilometre.

The legend on the sloping roof advises you to:

BUVEZ COGNAC RENIER

or *Drink Renier Brandy*, while the words on the large square side of the villa announce, *Le Cognac des Maréchals de Napoléon !*—with, as a final impudence, the dot of the exclamation-mark being provided by the window of the *cabinet* of Madame Bobet.

I can only exclaim in closing, with Colonel Bobet, " C'est vraiment possible to tout arranger dans la vie."

ELIXIR OF LOVE

BY C. S. FORESTER

SO MANY odd stories are going about regarding the Jones wedding—and they are going to be made to appear even odder by the forthcoming publication of Professor Macnamara's thesis—that I am publishing all I know about the facts so as to put a stop to the erroneous reports.

But I have to go a long way back if I begin the story at the beginning, as I ought to; I have to go right back to last summer, and even then I must describe Professor Macnamara first.

Angus is a dour Scot, who can on occasion be the rudest and most inconsiderate man I know, but the occasions are rare enough, and are always indications that he is too deeply involved in his work to consider other people's feelings. He came here to the University first as a biochemist, already of international renown although he was only in his early thirties. That, and the fact that he was unmarried gave him a glamour in the women's eyes, which his apparent lack of interest in anything except his work did nothing to diminish, and may even have increased, as he is handsome enough in a tall raw-boned Scottish sort of way.

During the past four years since he came, he has added much to his reputation as a biochemist, but—until recently—nothing at all to his reputation as a lady-killer. Really the only woman for whom he ever found a kind word was my wife Dorothy, who took him under her wing (as far as it could be done with that gawky lump of a man) with the kindness she displays towards any living creature.

So now we can start the story, far back last summer. Macnamara was with me in my garden, out in the evening sunshine, and I was looking over my water-lilies and feeding my goldfish who live among them. The wretched goldfish were " courting " or " chasing "—all that happened from then on is entirely the fault of them and their uninhibited behaviour. Because every now and then after the warm weather begins, the goldfish start to take thought for the next generation. They begin in a subdued sort of way, poking their noses into each others' sides, and from there they proceed to coy advances and retreats, and then

they become more and more worked up until, one and all, they rush up and down the pool with increasing excitement in a solid mass which raises ripples on the surface. They may keep it up for as long as three days before the eggs are deposited on the plant roots and fertilized. So here they were, chasing as madly as they could, as senselessly as if marriageable human beings were to band together and play seventy-two holes of golf a day for a week before holding a mass wedding.

"What are they up to?" asked Macnamara, and I explained.

"Interesting," said Macnamara, standing wide-legged on the edge of the pool, looking down at the idiotic creatures.

And then Macnamara asked the question which will, I am afraid, alter the history of the world—a very simple question and yet one which I can only compare for importance with Newton's when he asked why the apple did not fall upwards.

"What makes them do it all at the same time?" he asked.

"Don't ask me," I said.

"It's always like this?" went on Macnamara. "You don't find just one couple going off into a corner on their own?"

"No," I said. "This is the best example of the herd instinct I know. And they have no bourgeois prejudices in favour of privacy."

"That's the sort of slipshod way of thinking that I might have expected from you with your lack of scientific training," said Macnamara. "If this is herd instinct, then what's the mechanism? Why should they take it into their heads to act like this all at the same time? Is it example?"

"No," I said, "and you wouldn't suggest it if you knew as much as I do about the complete brainlessness of goldfish."

As I spoke, one of the nicest red females, lifted by the simultaneous thrust of a couple of males, rose for a glittering second on top of a purple water-lily, and flapped brilliantly before sliding off again—a pretty sight in the sunshine. But I don't think Macnamara cared about the beauty.

"It's not likely to be telepathy," he said. "The most likely mechanism would be chemical. That presupposes a secretion into the water. Would they be sensitive to anything like that?"

"Yes," I said. "If they weren't so preoccupied with their affairs at present they'd have smelt this minced crab right from the other end of the pool and they'd be gobbling it up by now."

"Interesting," said Macnamara again. "It might be worth investigating. I've a mind to get the University to provide a pool and goldfish. Then I could set my young men to discovering the active agent."

"You'd have to wait a while if you did that," I said. "Goldfish

don't like new pools and they don't like a change of scene. They wouldn't start courting again until next year, most likely."

" Umph," said Macnamara. " Well, anyway, here's your pool. Judging by the way these fish are behaving, the active agent must be present now if there is one."

So that was how it started. After that I couldn't call my water-lily pool my own. Macnamara or his young men were always demanding samples of the water, and I was called upon to telephone daily reports as to whether the fish were chasing, or had ceased to chase, or were starting to chase.

" Damned dirty water you keep in your pool," grumbled Macnamara to me, some time that summer. " We're having a lot of trouble identifying all the impurities."

" In the happy days when I could call my soul my own," I said, " I used to grow water-lilies for my own amusement, and not to further the cause of biochemistry. Water-lilies *like* dirty water—they insist on it, in fact. So do goldfish."

Later on, at lunch at the Faculty Club, Macnamara condescended to inform me regarding progress.

" We're on the track of something," he said. " We've spotted a rather queer substance present in great dilution. It's an amino-acid, apparently. But there's something strange about its composition. You say the fish are starting to chase again? "

" Yes," I said.

" Good. I'll send down and get another twenty gallons or so," said Macnamara.

" Have it your own way," I said. It would not have mattered whatever I said, not with Macnamara. To the rabid biochemist the rights of property simply do not exist.

" That amino-acid looks queerer and queerer the more we come to know about it," said Macnamara on another occasion. " It's not one we've any previous acquaintance with. There's a nitro-group in it at a point in its composition where no nitro-group has any business to be."

" You prostrate me with sympathy," I said.

" Not everyone contrives to be funny when they are facetious," said Macnamara. " But the point is that at least we are on the track of a new compound. Whether it's what we are after or not, only experiment can prove. It's volatile and unstable, and there's never more than a trace present. I'm pinning my hope on being able to synthesize it—we have plenty of clues as to its composition. Then it will only remain to try it on the goldfish."

" Without regard to the goldfish's feelings, I suppose? " I said.

Later on that summer Macnamara came to dinner. Really I

think it was my wife's doing. That a man should be both unmarried and eligible constitutes a challenge to Dorothy. She had been trying for two years to get old Macnamara married, in the face of my jeers and Macnamara's complete lack of co-operation.

On this occasion she was determined on a really powerful attack. She invited Margaret, the nicest divorcée that we know. She sent me round to fetch her before dinner.

" If she hasn't her car here, Angus'll have to take her home," said Dorothy.

" More likely it'll be me," I said. " I shan't mind."

Macnamara arrived a trifle late for dinner, which was unusual for him, and right from the start I was aware that there was a good deal unusual about him that evening. So was Dorothy; Macnamara had hardly been in the house five minutes before he slapped Dorothy on that part on which no gentleman ever slaps a lady, and Dorothy was so astonished she nearly dropped the tray of canapés that she was bending to lift.

" Angus! " said Dorothy, and Macnamara only grinned, completely unabashed.

I have a very strong suspicion that during dinner things went on under the table which would not have borne the light of day. Macnamara was quite above himself. He leered and he ogled, and I cannot believe that anything more repulsive has ever been seen than a raw-boned Scottish professor leering and ogling.

After dinner he sat on the couch beside Margaret and allowed his arm to lie along the back of it and then to slide down; all that can really be said on his behalf is that he was an obvious beginner—a high-school boy would have shown more tact than Macnamara did.

Luckily, the evening was not long-drawn-out, because the moment it was broken to Macnamara that he was destined for the job of driving Margaret home, he stood up at once and said, " Come on."

Even I was surprised by the alacrity he displayed; he hustled Margaret into her coat, and out to his car, with an eagerness that was not entirely in consonance with good manners towards his host and hostess.

" Is that love at first sight? " asked Dorothy of me when they had driven away.

" It's something revolutionary, at any rate," I said.

Next morning the telephone rang and Dorothy answered it, and I listened to her half of the conversation: " My dear, I can hardly believe it!—I would never have thought it, honestly I wouldn't! What ever *did* you do?—Did he *really*?—Did you

walk home? My dear, I'm terribly sorry—It's nice of you to say that, dear."

Eventually Dorothy hung up and turned to me. "That was Margaret," she said.

"So I gathered," I answered. "What did she say when you asked if she walked home?"

"She said, 'My dear, I *ran* home!'" said Dorothy. "What in the world can have come over Angus?"

"You suggested yourself that it was love at first sight," I said. "You've been matchmaking for years, and when the rocket goes up you're surprised."

"I don't believe it," said Dorothy.

Neither did I. I went along to lunch at the Faculty Club and sat down beside Macnamara.

"You'd had a couple before you arrived last night," I said, when the opportunity presented itself.

"I hadn't," said Macnamara.

"Don't ask me to believe that," I said. "You were as tight as a tick."

"I was not. I came along to you straight from the lab. I'd been working all day on that amino-acid."

"You didn't stop in at a bar on your way?" I asked—I was a trifle disappointed, because I had been rather enjoying the prospect of lecturing Macnamara, after all the lectures I have endured from him.

"Of course not," said Macnamara. "I washed my hands here and came straight along. I'd spent all day trying to distil off that amino-acid after the final reaction. It's volatile and a tricky thing to handle."

"Volatile?" I said, "does that mean you may have breathed some of it?"

"Oh yes, there's a chance of that," said Macnamara. "Why do you ask?"

"I thought it might account for it," I said.

"Account for what?"

"For what you did," I said. If Macnamara did not know there had been anything odd about his behaviour the night before, it was no use discussing it further.

"I behaved perfectly normally," said Macnamara, meeting my eye without hesitation.

I wanted to ask one more question; I wanted to find out whether that last reply meant that he remembered what he did and still thought it normal, or whether it meant that he had forgotten what he did and would not otherwise have thought it normal. But that question was not easy to phrase and would

have involved to a certain extent betraying Margaret's confidence, so I did not ask it. There might be another opportunity, or there might be a solution of the problem without asking that question.

So we pass to the occasion of the Jones wedding a couple of days later. Jones is a professor at the University too—Professor of Ancient Languages—and about as dry an old stick as you might guess from that title.

I don't think I care for weddings in any event, and I looked forward to this one with some distaste. I was quite sure that this would be a wedding with punch instead of with champagne, and I don't approve of punch for weddings.

And for another thing, I was not too sure that the Jones girl wanted to get married—or, at least, that she was in love with the bridegroom. I really had qualms about it—perhaps they were ill-founded qualms, though. It is hard to believe that at the present day any girl would allow herself to drift into marriage with a man she did not love, but I was inclined to believe it about the Jones girl.

I dressed for the function with an increasing feeling of distaste, which did not diminish as I went along to the church with Dorothy and from there to the Jones house. I had no sooner arrived there than some of my worst apprehensions were confirmed, for a glance into the dining-room revealed the caterer's manageress busy mixing the punch. She was pouring the contents of several bottles into the bowl—and quite half those bottles were ginger ale. I reconciled myself as well as I could to the prospect of a grisly afternoon.

But for once I was pleasantly disappointed. That wedding was quite an uproarious function. Things began to move as soon as the health of the happy pair had been drunk. Of course, the women were in tears off and on; the bride's mother naturally wept a little, but old Jones went up to her and put his arm round her and started to cheer her up quite effectively.

You would not have thought that Jones had a breath of human feeling about him, but it was quite apparent that he had; it was really touching to see him smiling down into Mrs. Jones's eyes, and to see her smiling up at him in return. My attention was distracted by an urgently whispered conversation just behind me—I was not eavesdropping, but in the babble of conversation that filled the room those urgent whispers made themselves more plainly heard to my neighbouring ear than any normal bellow. It was the bride and groom who were whispering.

"Darling, I can't wait!"

"Oh darling!"

" You don't want any more of this party, do you? "

" Oh, I'm glad you asked me, 'cause I don't."

" What say we slip out? "

" Oh darling."

" We don't want to stay any longer."

" *I* don't want to, darling."

" Let's go. We can get out by the kitchen door."

" But this dress—? "

" Oh—"

" I don't care about the dress, darling."

" The bags are in the car. Slip out through the kitchen and I'll follow you."

Well, it is not unusual for bride and groom to steal away from the wedding reception; and I suppose the attempt is made unsuccessfully even more often. In this case the attempt was quite successful. I saw them pass unobtrusively through the crowd, and vanish into the kitchen. No one else noticed them go, and it was some time before their absence was commented upon. And by then no one seemed to care.

Old Jones had his arm round Mrs. Jones's waist, and there were precious few waists that did not have arms round them. It was the most affectionate party I have attended in years, and, unlike parties where serious drinking is undertaken, it did not last very long. It seemed almost no time after the departure of the bride and groom had been commented upon before the guests began to slip away by ones and twos—by twos more than by ones.

Dorothy and I were hardly home before the telephone rang, and it was Macnamara at the other end.

" I want you to pour it into the pool tonight," he said.

" Pour what? " I asked, and I had hardly said the words before I guessed most of what he was going to say.

" The bottle of liquid that I left for you. I want to try its effect while the goldfish aren't chasing."

" I haven't seen any bottle," I said. " Where did you leave it? "

" I couldn't get any reply when I came to your house," explained Macnamara. " I guessed you were at the Jones wedding, so I went on to Jones's. I just got there as everyone was beginning to come from the church, so I gave the bottle to the waitress and ran. Didn't she give it to you? "

" I think she was too flustered to remember it," I said, with a clear recollection of the cateress mixing that punch.

" Well, can you go back and get it? I'd like to start the test tonight."

"Not much use going back, I'm afraid," I said. "But I can tell you now that's the right stuff."

So that is the whole story of the Jones wedding about which there have been so many rumours. I don't think anyone will object to the publication of the truth; the dry thesis that Macnamara publishes next week will hardly do more than confirm it. Macnamara won't mind; Margaret says that he is an excellent husband. And old Jones won't mind, either. He is going to be a grandfather next month and is inordinately proud of the fact. But he is prouder still of the fact that next month he is also going to be a father.

I feel that there is reason to rejoice that after Professor Kinsey has been so nearly successful—more so than any other man to date—in making sex unattractive, another professor in the person of old Macnamara should come along to redress the balance.

★ ★ ★

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

We invite you to sample the spécialité de la maison that we have cooked up for you—to be taken with a large pinch of salt. There are twenty-four points in all; a cordon bleu for those with scores of eighteen and over. The answers are on page 92.

1. *We can all tell a gourmet from a gourmand, but do you know the difference between: a. crêpes and croûtes b. escargots and escalopes c. fondant and fondue* (6)

2. *Who made the following observations on the subject of food:*
   a. Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are
   b. I once ate a pea
   c. There is no love sincerer than the love of food (3)

3. *Confronted with the following dishes, you would immediately recognize them as originating in which countries: a. paella b. smörgåsbord c. goulash d. polenta e. dhal f. shashlik* (6)

4. *In the English kitchen, the reputation of Mrs. Beeton is, of course, unbeaten; but what claim to fame had Mr. Beeton, apart from that of being the husband of the culinary virtuoso?* (1)

5. *The chef proposes—can you arrange this menu for your dinner-party in the right order: a. Buissons d'Ecrevisses b. Faisan bardé au Cresson c. Consommé à la Colbert d. Filet de Bœuf à la Brillat e. Omelette à la Célestine f. Dessert g. Turbot bouilli, Sauce aux Huîtres* (7)

6. *"Pass the port, please," says the guest sitting on your right at dinner. Would you comply with his request?* (1)

LAST MESSAGE

BY C. H. MILSOM

IT HAD been a long passage, and although we had had good weather for the length of it, we were all weary at the sight of so much sea. At least, we passengers were, but I cannot speak for Captain MacDonald, who seemed to grow happier as the days at sea grew longer. For him, I am sure, there was no enjoyment at the prospect of reaching port, and now I think back, I feel certain it was he, with his sailor's mind and sailor's love of superstition, who brought the conversation round from mermaids to omens and, eventually, to ghosts.

We were not in the mood to be easily scared, it was not the sort of night for telling ghost stories. The ship glided under a high full moon, and the refreshing breeze, after the heat of the day, brought scarcely a ripple to the surface of the water.

As we sipped our drinks, we found it easy to scoff at tales which, in different circumstances and a different place, would have made us stir uneasily in our chairs and look hesitatingly over our shoulders.

I think it was this feeling of well-being and security that prompted the wireless operator to say suddenly, " One expects a ghost to be something horrible. I suppose anyone meeting a ghost—if such things do exist—is automatically scared half out of his wits, without having time or reason to think that the ghost may not wish to harm him at all."

" It sounds as though there is something behind that, Sparks," the doctor put in quizzically. " Personally, if I met a ghost, I wouldn't stop to find out his intentions but take to my heels as quickly as I could."

" Yes," the operator said slowly, " but—well, I'll tell you the story and you can decide for yourselves."

He turned to the Captain. " It was on the old *Samaranda* under Captain Halloran. He may have told you the story, or you may have seen something about it in the papers at the time, even if

you have forgotten now. This incident didn't come out, though, partly because it sounded so foolish, partly because to those of us who were there, it seemed like sacrilege to have it bandied about in the newspapers."

The *Samaranda* was an old ship and not very fast. If we did eleven knots we considered ourselves lucky, and most days she did only ten. However, like most of those old ones, she was a comfortable, happy ship, and that voyage we had a particularly good crowd, so the time passed fairly quickly.

We were homeward bound at the time I'm talking about. We'd loaded a bulk cargo of copra at Macassar, and with the fuel we'd taken at Pulo Bukom we were right down to our marks when we set out to cross the Indian Ocean to Aden where we were to bunker again.

This was July and the south-west monsoon was in full swing. We felt the first effect of it as soon as we came out of the Malacca Straits, and although we went well south of Ceylon, through the One-and-a-Half Degree Channel, we soon found a heavy swell which had us rolling nearly to our beam ends.

Those old ships really knew how to roll. We used to say she'd roll on wet grass if she was given the chance, so we weren't very perturbed at her antics.

Up till then, in fact, she'd behaved herself so well, according to her previous standards, that instead of continuing parallel to the equator, at about one degree north, as far as the African coast where he would turn up to go between Cape Guardafui and Socotra, Captain Halloran decided to cut the corner and go across north of Socotra.

. . . Captain MacDonald broke in with a snort of derision which, for all that, was tinged with admiration. "That's the sort of thing Halloran would do," he said. He turned to us in explanation.

"In the sou'-west monsoon, if you use the One-and-a-Half Degree Channel, then you must keep to one and a half degrees all the way. There can be no cutting corners, for that stretch of water south-east of Socotra Island is the devil's own whirlpool at that time of the year."

The operator continued . . .

And that is exactly what we found it to be. The *Samaranda* was continually being battered on her weather side by waves driving along under a gale-force wind. She fought for every mile she made, but it was obvious that the weather would have to increase only a little and, game though she was, she'd be driven under. And it was increasing.

In the morning of that day, the seas had been lopping over the port bulwarks and splashing spray down the foredeck. By late afternoon, they were crashing down on her, burying her in tons of solid water from which she could barely lift herself before the next wave poured over her.

Captain Halloran was on the bridge all the time, pacing up and down as though he could quell the wind and sea with the force of his own personality. It was no use, though.

By the end of the last dog-watch, both our port-side lifeboats had been carried away, despite the extra lashing we'd put on them. There was nothing to do but alter onto a course to take us back to the Africa coast and the Guardafui passage. That brought the wind more on the bow, and by reducing speed to five knots, we made along without any further damage.

I'm going into all this because the fact that we were exactly where we were when it happened could have been due to a lot of things. To Captain Halloran's decision to defy the monsoon and go north of Socotra; to the fact that we couldn't make it, that we turned off when we did; that we lost our boats and therefore were more prone to slow down and so reduce any further damage. All these things are quite rational, but they still add up to the fact that we were the only ship in all that area and, by all the laws of storms, we had no right to be there.

I was on watch in the wireless-room the second evening after we altered course. The ship was rolling and pitching badly, with a sort of corkscrew movement and a shudder as she pulled herself up a wave only to flop down the other side and grind her way up the next one.

The air was quiet; Aden Radio was coming through faintly and one or two ships, when suddenly I heard someone sending out an SOS. That made me sit up, as you can imagine.

It was being sent very fast, about twenty-eight to thirty words a minute, and the regulations lay down that a distress message should be sent at sixteen, whenever possible, to ensure correct reception. This was from a five-letter call-sign, however, an aircraft, and the morse was so perfect that I had no difficulty in writing it down, although thirty words a minute is half as fast again as we normally use.

It merely gave a position and said they were being forced down. There's a code group for that, QUG, so the message only lasted a few seconds, and then there was silence again.

Naturally, I informed Captain Halloran immediately and began to call the aircraft to tell him I'd received his message and to see if he could amplify it a little.

There was no reply.

Then the Third Mate blew down the voice-pipe to say the position given was only about ten miles away from where we were, and for me to hang on to everything because we were going about and opening up to our full speed.

I called the aircraft repeatedly to tell him we were coming, but there was still no reply and I assumed he was down in the water.

We cracked along like a clipper. I think the Old Man was in his element at having a really good excuse for battling with the weather. He loved it.

I obtained his permission to send out a general call, informing all ships of the distress and that we were proceeding to assist, but although I received an acknowledgment from Aden Radio and the assurance that he would impose silence on the air, it was easily apparent that there was no one else near enough to be of any use.

I won't go into all the details of how we found the aircraft, lowered one of our remaining boats, and picked up the survivors. I'm not qualified to describe it accurately, but I know it needed very fine seamanship on the part of Captain Halloran to manœuvre the *Samaranda* to form a lee, and excellent judgment from Mr. Saville, the Mate, who took charge of the boat. Anyway, I was in the wireless-room most of the time and didn't actually see much of the rescue, although as you can imagine, we talked of little else for the rest of the way home.

However, the Old Man, who was a very decent sort, must have realized I was dying to know what was going on, for towards the end, he blew down to say the boat was just coming back alongside and for me to go up on the bridge and take a look.

All I could see of the aircraft was one wing, part of the fuselage, and the tail sticking up.

They'd evidently managed to get out one of those inflatable dinghies—it was still bobbing about—but Mr. Saville had transferred the crew and passengers to the lifeboat, and when I got to the bridge they were being helped up the pilot ladder by practically every hand in the ship. I believe the Chief Steward and the cook had been brewing cocoa and laying out blankets ever since I'd picked up the message.

One of the crew, the pilot as we assumed correctly, came straight up to the bridge to Captain Halloran.

" Thank you, Captain," he said simply. " We couldn't have lasted much longer if you hadn't happened along. Your being exactly on this course, to come right up to us like that, is a stroke of fortune I shall never forget."

" Stroke of fortune! " Captain Halloran exploded. " Fortune,

be damned! This is the position Sparks here picked up in your wireless message, so this is the position I came to."

The pilot looked at us silently for a moment. Then he said very quietly, " My wireless operator was killed trying to fix his aerial. We didn't send any message."

★ *Sailors have always known how to spin a yarn—Argosy had fresh proof of this recently when judging a short story competition, run under the auspices of the Seafarers' Education Service and College of the Sea, in which this eerie short-short won a first prize for its author, a young First Radio officer who lives in Cheshire.*

★ ★ ★

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 25

PRIZE-WINNERS OF CROSSWORD NO. 25

We are pleased to announce the five winners of Argosy's twenty-fifth Prize Crossword Competition:—

Dr. A. I. Bowie, Hunterhill Road, Paisley, Renfrewshire.

Miss M. G. Dunn, East Trinity Road, Edinburgh 5.

K. F. Logan Esq., Clyde Road, East Croydon, Surrey.

D. P. Smith Esq., Old Bath Road, Cheltenham, Glos.

Mrs. A. Thomson, West Coker, Yeovil, Somerset.

These readers who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Provender.* 6, *Attic.* 9, *Pension.* 10, *Droplet.* 11, *Robe.* 12, *Leith.* 13, *Able.* 16, *Sister.* 17, *Conveyor.* 19, *Lovelock.* 21, *Entail.* 24, *Troy.* 25, *Tutor.* 26, *List.* 30, *Ice-caps.* 31, *Edition.* 32, *Entry.* 33, *Dust-sheet.*

Down. 1, *Piper.* 2, *Omnibus.* 3, *Evil.* 4, *Dundee.* 5, *Ridottos.* 6, *Avon.* 7, *Tallboy.* 8, *Cathedral.* 14, *Seals.* 15, *Event.* 16, *Solitaire.* 18, *Accursed.* 20, *Violent.* 22, *Asinine.* 23, *Comets.* 27, *Tenet.* 28, *Navy.* 29, *Pits.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

on page 144

Across. 1, *Bow-window.* 6, *Climb.* 9, *Gleaner.* 10, *Rubicon.* 11, *Tyke.* 12, *Lethe.* 13, *Finn.* 16, *Turn-table.* 18, *Avert.* 19, *Billy.* 21, *Musk-roses.* 23, *Lazy.* 24, *Usage.* 26, *Comb.* 30, *Tonsure.* 31, *Thawing.* 32, *Dwell.* 33, *Learnedly.*

Down. 1, *Bigot.* 2, *Wrecker.* 3, *Inns.* 4, *Dirge.* 5, *Worthless.* 6, *Cube.* 7, *Incline.* 8, *Bank-notes.* 14, *Stays.* 15, *Parry.* 16, *Tabulated.* 17, *Bomb-shell.* 20, *Lozenge.* 22, *Storied.* 25, *Gotha.* 27, *Bogey.* 28, *Mull.* 29, *Main.*

BEHOLD the apples' rounded worlds:
juice-green of July rain,
the black polestar of flower, the rind
mapped with its crimson stain.

The russet, crab and cottage red
burn to the sun's hot brass,
then drop like sweat from every branch
and bubble in the grass.

They lie as wanton as they fall,
and where they fall and break,
the stallion clamps his crunching jaws,
the starling stabs his beak.

In each plump gourd the cidery bite
of boys' teeth tears the skin;
the waltzing wasp consumes his share,
the bent worm enters in.

I, with as easy hunger, take
entire my season's dole;
welcome the ripe, the sweet, the sour,
the hollow and the whole.

LAURIE LEE

Music for the Wicked Countess

by Joan Aiken

MR. BOND was a young man who had just arrived in a small village to take up the position of schoolmaster there. The village was called Castle Kerrig, but the curious thing about it was that there was no castle and never had been one. Round three-quarters of its circumference was a large wood which came almost to the door of the schoolmaster's little house, and beyond that the wild hills and bog stretched for miles.

There were only ten children needing to be taught; it hardly seemed worth having a school there at all, but without it they would have had to travel forty miles by bus every day, and a schoolmaster was far cheaper than all that petrol, so Mr. Bond was given the job.

It suited him very well, as he did not have to waste too much time in teaching and had plenty left for his collections of birds' eggs, moths, butterflies, fossils, stones, bones, lizards, and flowers, and his piano-playing.

There was a tinny old piano in the school, and when he and the children were bored by lessons, he would play tunes and songs to them for hours at a time while they listened in a dream.

One day the eldest of the children, Norah, said to him: "Faith, 'tis the way your Honour should be playing to the Countess up at the Castle for the wonder and beauty of your melodies does be out of this world entirely."

"The Castle?" said Mr. Bond curiously. "What castle is that? There's no castle near here, is there?"

"Ah, sure, 'tis the castle in the forest I mean. The Wicked Countess would weep the eyes out of her head to hear the tunes you do be playing."

"Castle in the forest?"

The schoolmaster was more and more puzzled. "But there's no castle in the forest—at least, it's not marked on the $2\frac{1}{2}$-inch ordnance survey."

" Begorrah, and doesn't your Honour know that the whole forest is stiff with enchantment, and a leprechaun peeking out of every bush in it, the way you'd be thinking it was nesting-time and they after the eggs? "

" What nonsense, my dear Norah. You really must learn not to come to me with these tales."

But all the children gathered round him, exclaiming and persuading. " Faith, and isn't it the strange thing that your Worship should not be believing in these enchantments, and you playing such beautiful music that the very ravens from the Castle and the maidens out of the forest are all climbing and fluttering over each other outside the windows to get an earful of it? "

Mr. Bond shooed them off rather crossly, saying that school was over for the day and he had no patience with such silliness.

Next day was the last day of term, and Norah was leaving. Mr. Bond asked her what she was going to do.

" Going into service up at the Castle. They're in need of a girl in the kitchen, I'm told, and mother says 'twill be good experience for me."

" But there *isn't* any castle," said Mr. Bond. Was the girl half-witted? She had always seemed bright enough in school.

" Ah, your Honour will have your bit of fun. And what else could I do, will you be telling me that? "

Mr. Bond was forced to agree that there were no other jobs to be had.

That afternoon he started out into the forest, determined to search for this mysterious castle and see if there really was some big house tucked away in the trees, but though he walked for miles and miles, and came home thirsty and exhausted long after dusk, not a thing did he see, neither castle, house, nor hut, let alone leprechauns peeking out of every bush.

He ate some bread and cheese in a bad temper and sat down to play it off at his own piano. He played several dances from Purcell's *Fairy Queen*, and had soon soothed himself into forgetfulness of the children's provoking behaviour. Little did he know that three white faces, framed in long golden hair, were gazing through the window behind his back.

When he had finished playing for the night, the maidens from the forest turned and went regretfully back to the Castle.

" Well," asked the Wicked Countess, " and does he play as well as the village talk has it? "

" He plays till the ears come down off your head and go waltzing along the road. Sure, there's none is his equal in the whole wide world, at all."

" I expect you are exaggerating," said the Countess sadly. " Still, he would be a useful replacement for Bran the Harpist, ever since the fool went and had his head chopped off at the Debatable Ford."

She looked crossly over to a corner where a headless harpist was learning to knit, for, being unable to read music, he could no longer play.

" We must entice this schoolmaster up to the Castle," said the Wicked Countess. " 'Twill cheer up our dull and lonely life to have a bit of music once again. Ah, that will be the grand day when they have the television broadcast throughout the length and breadth of the country for the entertainment and instruction of us poor warlocks. I've heard they do be having lessons in ballet and basket-making and all sorts of wonderments."

" How will you entice him up? " asked one of the maidens.

" The usual way. I'll toss out me keys and let it be known that my hand and heart is in waiting for the lucky fellow is after finding them. Then we'll give him a draught of fairy wine to lull him to sleep for seven years, and after that he's ours for ever."

So the Countess arranged for the message about the keys to be relayed through the village, and the keys themselves were left lying in a conspicuous place in the middle of the schoolmaster's garden path, visible to him but invisible to everyone else.

Quite a number of people became very excited at the thought of winning the Wicked Countess's heart and hand, and the forest was almost as crowded as Epping Forest on Bank Holiday, but the schoolmaster was very preoccupied just then with his search for the Scarlet Striped Orchis, which blooms only during the first week in May, and he hardly noticed the commotion.

He did observe the keys lying on his path, but he knew they did not belong to him, and they came into none of the categories of things that he collected, so he merely kicked them out of the way, and then forgot them in the excitement of noticing a rare orange fritillary by his garden gate.

" The man's possessed! " exclaimed the Countess in vexation. It was mortifying to have her message so completely ignored, but she did not abandon her purpose.

" We'll try the snake trick—that'll be after fetching him in, and he interested in all manner of bugs and reptiles, the way it'd be a terrible life for his wife, poor woman."

The snake trick was a very old ruse for enticing mortals. One of the maidens of the forest changed herself into a beautiful many-coloured snake with ruby eyes and lay in the path of the intended victim, who was unable to resist picking it up and taking it home. Once inside his house, it changed back into

the forest maiden's form again, and the luckless man was obliged to marry her. She became more and more exacting, asking for a coat made from rose petals, or cherries in midwinter, until her husband had to go up to the Castle and ask them to supply one of these difficult requirements. Then, of course, he was in their power.

" Indeed, why didn't we try the snake trick before," said the Countess. " 'Twould have fetched him better than any old bit of a bunch of keys."

Accordingly, when next Mr. Bond went into the forest, looking for green glass-snails and the salmon-spotted hellebore, he found this beautiful coloured snake lying temptingly displayed in a wriggle of black, scarlet, white, and lemon-yellow across his path.

" Bless my soul," said Mr. Bond, " that is something most unusual. Can it be T. vulgaris peristalsis? I must certainly take it home."

He picked up the snake, which dangled unresistingly in his hands, and rushed home with it. All the forest maidens and the ravens leaned out of the high branches, and the leprechauns pried between the stems of the bushes to watch him go by. He ran up the garden path, shoved open the front door with his shoulder, and dropped the snake into a jar of brine which was standing ready for specimens on the kitchen table.

He was unable to find a picture or description of the snake in any work of reference, and to his annoyance and disappointment, the beautiful colours faded after a couple of hours.

The Wicked Countess was also very annoyed. One of her forest maidens had been demolished, and she had been foiled again, which was galling to her pride. " Maybe we could give him a potion? " suggested one of the maidens.

" He's teetotal, the creature," said the Wicked Countess in disgust. " Will you be after telling me how you can administer a potion to a man that will touch neither drop nor dram? "

" Well, but doesn't he take in each day the grandest bottle of milk you ever laid eyes on that would make any cow in Kerry sigh with envy at the cream there is on it? "

" Very well, you can try putting the potion in the milk, but 'tis a poor way of instilling a magic draught into a man, I'm thinking, and little good will it do him."

Two enthusiastic maidens went to Mr. Bond's house at cock-crow the following morning and lay in wait for the milkman. As soon as he had left the bottle, they removed the cardboard top, tipped in the potion (which was a powder in a little envelope, like a shampoo) put back the cap, and then hurried to the Castle to report.

Unfortunately, it was the schoolmaster's turn to be unwilling host to the village tits that morning. Shortly after the maidens had left, forty blue-tits descended onto his doorstep, neatly removed the cap once more, and drank every drop of the milk. Mr. Bond was resigned to this happening every eleventh day, and took his morning tea milkless, before setting off to open up the school.

Up at the Castle the maidens had a difficult time explaining to the Wicked Countess the sudden appearance of forty blue-tits who flew in through the window and absolutely refused to be turned out.

" How are we to get this miserable man up here, will you tell me that? " demanded the Countess. " I've lost patience with him entirely."

" You could write him a civil note of invitation, the way he'd be in no case to refuse without displaying terrible bad manners in it? "

" I never thought of that," admitted the Countess, and she sat down and penned a little note in her crabbed, runic handwriting, asking the schoolmaster for the pleasure of his company to a musical evening. She entrusted the note to Norah, who was now a kitchen-maid at the Castle, and asked her to give it into Mr. Bond's own hands.

Norah skipped off, much pleased with the commission, and presented the note to Mr. Bond as he sat in morning school.

" Now isn't it herself has done you the great honour of requesting your worshipful presence at such a musical junketing and a singing and dancing you'd think it was King Solomon himself entertaining the Queen of Sheba? "

Mr. Bond scrutinized the letter carefully.

" This is very interesting; the back of this document appears to be part of a version of the Cuchulain legend written in a very early form of Gaelic. Dear me, I must write to the Royal Society about this."

He became absorbed in the legend on the back, and clean forgot to read what was on the other side.

The Countess was very affronted at this, and scolded Norah severely.

" I've no patience with the lot of you, at all. I can see I'll have to be after fetching him myself, the way otherwise we'll be having no music this side of midwinter."

It was now the middle of May, which is a very dangerous month for enchantment, the worst in the year apart from October.

The Wicked Countess sent out her spies to inform her when

Mr. Bond next took an evening walk in the forest. A few days later it was reported that he had set out with a tin of golden syrup and a paintbrush and was busy painting the trunks of the trees. The Countess hastily arrayed herself with all her enchantments and made her way to where he was working.

The whole forest hummed with interest and excitement and the leprechauns were jumping up and down in their bushes to such an extent that showers of hawthorn blossom kept falling down. Mr. Bond noticed nothing of all this, but he was just able to discern the Wicked Countess with her streaming hair and her beauty. He thought she must be the District Nurse.

" The top of the evening to you," she greeted him, " and isn't it a grand and strange thing you be doing there, anointing the bark of the trees with treacle as if they were horses and they with the knees broken on them? But perhaps 'tis a compliment you do be after paying me, and it meaning to say that the very trees in my forest are so sweet they deserve to be iced like cakes?"

" Good evening," said Mr. Bond with reserve. " I'm out after moths."

" And isn't it a wonderful thing to be pursuing those pitiful brown insects when you could be stepping up to the Castle like a civilized creature and passing a musical evening with me and my maidens, the way our hearts and voices would be singing together like a flock of starlings? "

" Are you the Countess, by any chance? I seem to have heard some vague tales about you, but I never thought that you were a real person. I hope you will forgive me if I have been guilty of any impoliteness."

" Sure, our hearts are warmer than that in this part of the world, and what's a trifle of an insult between friends? Do you be after strolling up with me this minute for a drop of something to drink and a few notes of music, for they say music can be a great healer when there's hurt feelings in the case, and it smoothing away the sore hearts and wounded spirits."

Mr. Bond gathered that he *had* in some way offended this talkative lady, and his mind went back guiltily to the note Norah had given him, which he had sent off to the Royal Society and forgotten to read.

He turned and walked with her, and was surprised to notice a grey and vine-wreathed Tower standing in a part of the forest where, he would have been ready to swear, there had been nothing before.

" Walk in this way," said the Countess, holding open a little postern. " We won't stand on ceremony between friends."

They had to climb half a hundred steps of spiral staircase, but

finally emerged in the Wicked Countess's bower, a dim, rush-strewn room full of maidens, leprechauns, and wood-smoke.

" Pray be taking a seat," said the Countess, " the while you do be getting your breath. Fetch a drink for the poor gentleman, one of you," she commanded the maidens, " he has no more breath in him than a washed sheet, and it clinging together on the line."

" Nothing stronger than tea for me, please," said the schoolmaster faintly.

" Tea, is it? We must be after brewing you a terrible strong poteen of the stuff, for how can you make music worthy the name on a draught like that? Girls, put the kettle on."

" It's all right, thank you, I'm better now. Please don't trouble."

" Do be playing us a tune, then, for since you came here the village has hummed with your praise, the way we've been after thinking 'twas a human nightingale had come to live among us."

" I will with pleasure," said Mr. Bond, " but I can't play without a piano, you know."

There was a disconcerted pause.

" Ah, sure, I'll send two of my leprechauns down to the little house for it," said the Countess, rallying. " They'll be back in ten minutes, the creatures." Two of them scuttled off, in obedience to a ferocious look.

Mr. Bond gazed round him dreamily, lulled by the atmosphere of enchantment. The arrival of the tea roused him a little; he took one look at it and shuddered, for it was as black as the pit and looked as if it had been stewed for hours. The maidens were not very expert tea-makers. The Countess was delicately sipping at a tall flagon of mead.

Fortunately, a diversion was created by the two leprechauns who came staggering back with the piano in an astonishingly short time. While they were getting it up the spiral staircase, amid cries of encouragement from the maidens, Mr. Bond tipped his tea into the treacle tin.

" What shall I play you? " he asked the Countess.

She thought for a moment. Musicians were notoriously vain, and the best way to get him into a flattered and compliant mood would be to ask for one of his own compositions—he was sure to have some.

" Best of all, we'd be after liking a tune you've made up yourself," she told him.

Mr. Bond beamed. Here was a true music-lover without a doubt—a very rare thing in this wilderness.

" I'll play you my new fantasia and fugue in the whole-tone

scale," he said happily, delighted at a chance to get away from the folk-songs and country dances which he was obliged to play for the children.

He brought his hands down on the keys in a prolonged, crashing, and discordant chord. The leprechauns shuddered from top to toe, the maidens clenched their teeth, and the Wicked Countess had to grip the arms of her chair.

Then Mr. Bond really started to play, and the noise was so awful that the whole enchanted Tower simply disintegrated, brick by brick. The Countess and her maidens vanished away moaning into the forest, the leprechauns retired grumbling into their bushes again, and when the schoolmaster finished his piece and looked round, he was astonished to find himself seated at the piano in the middle of a forest glade.

He had to ask the people from the village to help him back with the piano, and was at great pains to try and think up some explanation for its presence in the forest.

They took no notice of what he said, however.

"Ah, sure, 'tis only some whimsy of the Countess's, the creature, bless her. What would the man expect, and he wandering about the forest on a May evening?"

After that, if by any chance Mr. Bond and the Wicked Countess met each other while walking in the forest, they said nothing at all, and each pretended that the other was not there.

★ ★ ★

ANSWERS to FOOD FOR THOUGHT
on page 78

1. *a. Crêpes are pancakes, croûtes are squares of fried bread*
   b. Escargots are edible snails, escalopes are steaks of veal
   c. Fondant is a type of icing or bon-bon, fondue is a savoury of melted cheese
2. *a. Brillat-Savarin, the French gastronome*
   b. Beau Brummell, when asked if he never ate vegetables
   c. George Bernard Shaw
3. *a. Spain b. Scandinavia c. Hungary d. Italy e. India f. Russia*
4. *Mr. Beeton founded the magazine* The Queen, *and edited* The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine
5. *The correct order should be c. g. d. b. e. a. f.*
6. *No. Port should be circulated in a clockwise direction*

MEMORY OF A FIGHT

BY GERALD KERSH

YES (said the old fighter, baring a gnarled arm and showing the company the various marks with which it was tattooed) oh yes, as you may see, I have served in several armies. And here are my badges.

Look—here is the Fish, in green, pricked out when I signed on as a mercenary for Carthage. And here, again, the Two Triangles in blue that I wore when I fought for pay on the Levantine Coast. The Triple Cross, in red, I got in Nubia. Came away with a helmet full of silver pieces; and all before I was twenty.

Only one mark I hold sacred, though, and that is this one on my thigh. What they call my " birth-mark."

You know I come from Scythia; I am one of the Huns. My name was a Hunnish name, but they got to know me as Crasnius, because I had red hair—it is white now, and not much of it to boast of. Where I come from, do you know, twins are sacred. As soon as twins are born in my Province, the midwife marks them each on the thigh, with a certain mark.

The first to come out is tattooed with what, in our language, means Number One, the second, Number Two; but in such a way that the marks cannot be mistaken for the marks of any other twins. Also, they are ineradicable. The midwife does it under the direction of a *shaman*, who devises the patterns or runes, which are always, by some peculiar formula, coloured purple . . .

Oh, those old men! The secrets they know, them and the midwives—But what was I saying?

Oh yes, I was a twin, and marked with my brother as such, which made me kind of holy. But when I was only eighteen, I killed the son of a Chief in a quarrel about a girl and, since I could not pay blood-money, took to my heels and followed the wars, hiring myself here and there until I became a boxer.

That was when I was a foot-soldier in a Roman legion. There was a big Goth; we had words over wine, and he struck me in the face. In those days, as it seems to me now, nothing mattered. This big Goth, whose name I forget, went down, I assure you, like a tree; but he came up like a ball.

It was bare fist, mind! Except for one which I shall tell you of, that was the hardest fight I ever fought. Because infantrymen—swordsmen—have the habit of leading with the right hand; whereas I, a Scythian early trained as a bowman, have the habit of leading with the left hand and then following with the right.

I broke his jaw, that dog of a Goth. But I had been observed by a noble Centurion. He had sporting instincts, or whatever you call them. In two shakes, I was out of the army and into the arena, boxing with the caestus—which, as everybody knows, is a strap of heavy cow-hide, studded with brass or iron spikes and knobs.

I had a pair called " the skull-crushers." Being pretty strong in the arms and legs, I could handle half a pound of brass on each hand as if it were feathers. What is more, I had learnt my lesson—which had come to me when I fought that Goth—that while the swordsman leads with his right, the bowman leads with his left. I am a bowman, I, Crasnius!

Year after year, I fought in the Colosseum. More Roman ladies fell in love with me than would carpet this house. They called me " Invincible " and " Untouchable "—because, in boxing, I knew from within myself that he wins who keeps clear.

" Keeps *clear*? " says you, in view of my busted face.

Wait a bit: here is the story . . .

Now, when I was young, I was taught to fight in the Scythian style, with hands and feet—bare fists, bare feet. Later, when they laughed me out of being a barbarian, it was classic Greek style of boxing—ladylike stuff, no tripping, no elbows, no hitting below the belt. This cramped my style.

I felt at home in the Roman ring, with a pair of knuckle-dusters, and licence to do what I would with everything but my feet. What, does anybody question this—that with this same left hand, thrust up and out like a Scythian bowman, caestus on fist, I cracked the skull of the Greek, Kraton?

And, with my right hand, did I not batter the one they called the Syrian, so that, for the rest of his life—seven feet tall though he was—he walked in circles?

But you ask me, do you, how, in spite of my bragging, I came to get this apology for a face?

I shall tell you. It must have been, let me see, fifteen or sixteen years ago. Caesar had wagered ten thousand on me, to beat a barbarian. So we met.

In height, weight, girth, and what not, we were well matched. But, in the manner of barbarians—I was made a Roman Citizen,

you know—he had the habit of lashing himself into fighting form by stamping and chanting. You know the kind of stuff, banging his chest—the fool!—

Chornie, I, the black one!
Man-breaker, bone-breaker,
Chornie, widow-maker!
Weep, widows of Crasnius,
But yet rejoice—
Soon you shall be
The wives of Chornie . . .

The usual damned nonsense. You used to get it mainly from the Northlanders, who, as I have said, wasted their breath boasting, and their energy in wild gestures, before a fight.

Mark my words: before a fight, no bobbing and weaving—keep still! You will need, if you are evenly matched, every little bit of breath you throw away shouting.

As I was saying, the type of caestus we were wearing then was called "the skull-crusher." A heavy glove, well studded with brass spikes, and having wide straps to protect the arm as far as the elbow. The old man who was dressing me—that is to say, tying the straps—whispered to me: "Be careful of that man, master. He has already killed twenty-eight in fair fight, and crippled fifty more."

I said to him: "Shut your toothless mouth"—he was an old pugilist and therefore, naturally, had no teeth—"I am Crasnius, and the man against whom Crasnius lifts his left hand the gods forget!"

"This one, also, is a left-handed hitter," the old man mumbled.

I said to him: "Caesar has ten thousand gold pieces on me—he alone. All in all, I carry about a million in this left hand of mine. Be quiet, and tie the straps a little tighter on my right arm."

To cut the story short, I met this barbarian Chornie. And, by all the gods, for the first time in my life I was uneasy!

Old Apollodorus, in the gladiators' school, used to teach boxers—wearing a seven-pound caestus of bronze—to fight with their own shadows. Also, in front of a plate of polished metal, to spar with their own reflections. This made for a certain kind of speed and accuracy.

Well, when I came into the arena to smash that loud-mouthed barbarian, it was as if I were boxing with my own shadow, or my own reflection. Whatever I did, he did, and in the same instant . . .

And the crowd began to hoot me, calling me vile names, and throwing rotten fruit, so that I determined to make an end of it

by means of one or two of my " secret " punches—which are no secret at all to any shepherd boy in Scythia.

Here is practically the end of the story. I tried the left-right. The barbarian countered. I tried the swinging upper-cut. The barbarian parried it. At last, reduced to unconventional play, pretending to fall—oh, how the crowd roared!—I snatched a handful of sand and threw it into his eyes, while with my right hand I hit him in the liver, so that he fell.

Then, as I stood over him, our eyes met, and I saw him staring, amazed, at the tattooed birth-mark on my thigh. And so I looked down to his . . .

You have guessed? Yes, this shadow of mine, this mirror of mine, was my twin brother, born in the same hour of the same mother.

He rose. I could have cracked his skull, but I sparred a little, and so did he, for we had recognized each other, and had always loved each other.

" And how are things at home? " I asked, swinging my left hand to his head, but taking care to miss.

Driving at me with his right hand—it whizzed past my ear like an arrow—he gave me news of our sister.

Then, while the crowd roared, I said to him: " Caesar has ten thousand on me. I daren't lose. Wait for it, brother, and I'll break your arm."

He nodded, and I prepared to bring up my left. But the sand on which we stood was slippery. We had shed a good deal of blood between us. As he fell forward, instead of hitting him in the upper arm—woe is me!—my caestus went home between eye and ear. And he fell dead.

The crowd went mad. The nobility filled my hat with gold, over and above my fee. But my heart was so sore I could not even weep . . . I could not fight again after that. I took my money and bought this pleasant farm in Sicily—the ghosts of the dead cannot cross running water.

Here is the end of the story. I have a strong son whom I have named after my brother; but I am not teaching him to box—only to run and jump.

Good night.

★ ★ ★

INCOME BRACKET

SUGAR-DADDY (*sl.*) *elderly protector and source of revenue of a* (*female*) *gold-digger.*

The Concise Oxford Dictionary

BOTH WATCHES of the HANDS

by ROWAN AYERS

MICHAEL HANCOCK stood with one foot on the jetty and the other on the gently undulating deck of the *Silver Streak*, scanning the windswept front of Collsea Bay with a malignant eye.

Nothing ever seemed to work out as it should. When the tides were right, the weather drove the holiday-makers inland to cinemas and amusement arcades. When the weather was right, *Silver Streak* was generally lying uselessly and unproductively on the soft, oozy mud that remained when the tide had run half a mile out to sea.

And on the rare occasions when both were right, there was usually something wrong with the engines, and he had to spend several sickening, dirty hours bent double in the narrow engine-room space, while his rival, the *Mary Lou*, chugged mockingly about the bay, loaded to the gunwales with eager passengers.

Today, the tides were right, and the engines were working; but the temperature had dropped fifteen degrees in as many hours and a strong north-easter was screwing the waves into tight little knots of spray and driving them hard against the shore. His passengers, he noted in one quick backward glance, numbered a paltry nine.

Nine at half a crown a head made twenty-two and six; just about enough to pay for the fuel for the trip, provided he ran the engines at half-speed.

On the other wing of the jetty, he noticed, the *Mary Lou* was preparing to cast off with a comfortable twenty-five or thirty. It had been like that all the season.

"When do we go, mister?" asked a small boy who, like the rest of his passengers, had been waiting for fifteen chilly minutes.

"We're just off," said Michael irritably, and called to Leo, the bowman, who was patiently waiting by the breast-rope. "Stand by forrard."

"Is this an M.T.B.?" asked the boy, still hovering near.

" M.L.," said Michael, " converted." He was aware of his own short temper, but it couldn't be helped.

" What's M.L.? "

" Motor launch. All ready, bowman? "

" All ready, sir."

Michael looked desperately along the short jetty towards the deserted shore. Even two or three more passengers would help. But apart from the few anglers standing silently by their rods, and three naval ratings walking unsteadily along the jetty, there seemed little prospect of increasing his load.

' Let go, forrard," he called. To eastward he noted that the *Mary Lou* had already begun to move off.

" All gone, forrard," said Leo, with bored resignation.

As *Silver Streak* drifted clear of the jetty, Michael went into the wheelhouse, and revved up the engines before engaging gear. But even as he pushed the gear-lever of the port engine forward, he was checked by the sounds of loud and determined shouting from the jetty. The three naval ratings, whom he'd noticed earlier, were leaning over the chain-linked rails, waving and calling insistently.

" Hi! *Silver Streak!* Lieutenant Hancock, sir! It's us, Knocker and Brew. . ."

There was something about their voices and their faces that came groping back into his brain, shuffling up the assorted images of the past ten years like a pack of cards, and dealing out a small but familiar hand.

Knocker and Brew. Like a music-hall turn, the two names joined hands and came out from behind the curtain . . . Knocker White and Leading Seaman Brewis. They'd been two of the best ratings he'd ever had under him in Coastal Forces.

" Can we come for a trip round the flipping lighthouse? " shouted Knocker. He was a burly six-footer, with bright carroty hair and a broad, flat nose. His cap, pulled well down over his forehead in the approved " pusser " fashion, seemed several sizes too small.

" Hang on," shouted Michael, " I'll bring her back alongside."

As the *Silver Streak* edged astern to the landing-stage, the three of them jumped lightly aboard, saluting as they did so, like truant liberty-men returning to the quarter-deck after an illicit all-night leave.

Knocker led the way to the wheelhouse.

" Leading Seaman White, sir," he said, grinning hugely, " and party of two, reporting for duty."

Brewis and the third rating followed noisily. There was, Michael

noticed with amusement, something distinctly alcoholic about the atmosphere.

" Well, well, well," he said, " who'd have believed it! "

He engaged both engines and opened the throttle. To the relief of the shivering passengers, the *Silver Streak* at last moved away and headed for the open sea.

" You remember Brew, sir? " said Knocker. " Acting P.O., now."

" Certainly I do. How are you, Brew? "

" Not so bad, sir. And yourself? "

" Still ticking."

" Putting in a bit of sea-time, eh, sir? " said Knocker, winking. " Oh, you've not met Puddenead 'ere. Come 'ere, Puddenead, and meet the skipper."

The rating addressed as Puddenead came awkwardly from the corner of the wheelhouse, and shook hands.

" Pudney, 'is real name is," explained Brewis, " but 'e answers better to Puddenead."

" The lads told me about you, sir," he said, simply.

" How did you know I was here? " asked Michael, when he had swung *Silver Streak*'s bows round towards Collsea Point at the far end of the bay.

" We was on shore, like," said Knocker, " and got talking to some of the locals, down at one of them boozers on the front; and they sez as 'ow some bloke by the name o' Hancock is running one of the jolly-boats; and I sez, not Lieutenant Hancock, R.N.V.R., Lieutenant Michael Hancock, and one of 'em sez he thought as 'ow you mighta been in the Navy some time. And so I sez to Brew and Pudden, 'ere what about a look-see, like, and have a basin full of busman's 'oliday on the flipping briny. So 'ere we are."

Michael felt confused. It was ten, maybe eleven years since he had seen either of them, but they hadn't changed at all. They must feel fairly contemptuous of his humble, precarious existence, though he knew they would never show it.

" Ain't you 'ad enough of it, then? The sea, I mean," asked Brewis.

It was a difficult question to answer. He'd had enough of this side of it; of struggling through the summer on a few casually earned pounds, then groping through the winter doing odd jobs at the boat-yard, or writing fictional articles for one of the yachting papers about voyages he had only ever made in his desperate imagination. And yet, there was always something about the sea.

" I don't think you can ever have enough," he said.

" Cor! " said Knocker. " Roll on my flipping twelve, I say. Eh, Brew? I wouldn't never go to sea, not just for fun. Not even in Regent's flipping Park."

This was not the time, thought Michael, to tell them that he'd just been offered a permanent commission in the R.N., and was, at that very moment, considering the matter very seriously.

As the *Silver Streak* moved out into more open water, a little spray began to curl up over the foredeck, and spatter against the wheelhouse. The passengers, sensibly, had all congregated aft, and were sullenly looking at the boiling, foamy wake astern, all except for the small inquisitive boy, who seemed to enjoy the minor drenching he was now receiving.

Away to starboard, and well inshore, the *Mary Lou* was moving at a ponderous four or five knots, with the maddening condescension of someone who can do no wrong.

" Quite like old times, eh, sir? " said Brew, idly toying with the throttle.

" Except the skipper shouldn't be on the wheel," added Knocker, very conscious of his Queen's Rules and Admiralty Instructions.

" Like to take her? " asked Michael.

" Don't mind, sir," he said, shyly, " s'long time since I 'ad one of these . . ." He took over confidently, and pushed Puddenead roughly to one side. " Gerroutofit," he grinned, " you're only a bleedin' A.B." Puddenead moved smartly away, and peered out of the spray-speckled window.

" C'mon, then," said Knocker, " don't just stand about loafing in the middle of the forenoon. Get on with sumfing. Blimey O'Riley, you'll never go through for leadin' 'and."

Michael watched them, amused and fascinated. In those first few minutes he had spanned, easily and undeliberately, nine or ten long years. The battered old cap on his head might still have been sporting a gold badge, and on the jacket beneath his greasy duffel, there might have been two tarnished, wavy gold bands; while astern, fluttering bravely in the stiff wind, there might easily have been a dignified White Ensign instead of the frayed blue flag he'd had emblazoned with a crude, zigzagging silver streak. Their mission? Almost anything.

" Steady as she goes," he said, involuntarily, as the bow lifted on one of the larger waves and swung a little to port.

" Ay, ay, sir," said Knocker, and looking round at Puddenead and Brew, added, " Can't you find sumfing to employ the uvver 'ands on, sir? They're making the place look untidy."

" Scrubbing down, sir? " suggested Brew. " The upper deck could do with a bit of a clean."

" That's all right," said Michael, a little uncertainly. They might, he felt, very easily be taking him for one almighty ride.

But without waiting for any further advice or instruction, Brew opened the door of the wheelhouse, and pushed the unfortunate Puddenead out into the chilly air. " You 'eard what the Captain said," he muttered gruffly. " Now get yourself organized, and give 'er a bleedin' good scrub-down."

Puddenead turned once appealingly to Michael, and then, finding no salvation, took off his shoes and socks and rolled his trousers up to his knees. In the meantime, Brew had found him a bucket and squeegee, and thrust it into his hands.

" Don't know what them A.B.'s is coming to, these days, sir," said Knocker, who'd been closely watching the proceedings. " They're too flipping lazy to take a deep breaf."

The *Silver Streak* moved on towards the point, and Michael went out on deck with the intention of collecting his fares. But Puddenead made him stop dead in his tracks.

After his initial reluctance, he had settled down to his task with savage gusto, and was swilling buckets full of hissing green water along the sloping decks. On one occasion, without making any pretence of miscalculation, he emptied half a bucket over the small, snivelling boy, who had been immensely attracted by this unusual activity.

Screaming with shock and cold, the boy ran aft to his mother, a big blowzy woman, who rose up in several layers from her seat, and demanded to see the Captain. Brew, who had also seen it all happen, took over at once.

" Now then, now then," he said, walking menacingly down upon the astonished passengers like a master-at-arms who'd discovered a bottle of gin on the mess-decks. " What's all this 'ere? "

" I want to see the Captain at once. I'll have the police on him when we get back . . ."

" Calm down, lady," said Brew. " If you want to see the Captain, you'll 'ave to put in a request chit in the usual way. We don't want none of this 'ere mutinous 'abit, not aboard a naval vessel . . ."

" This is not a naval vessel," said the thin, sallow man who was standing sadly beside her, and who was patently her much-oppressed husband. It was a token protest, dictated not by any real desire to oppose the sudden startling turn of events, but from an instinctive loyalty to the woman who was his wife.

" Oh? " said Brew, turning on him, with his hands on his hips, and screwing up his sharp, pale blue eyes. " And 'oo says it's not? "

There was something about his manner and authority that quashed any further show of resistance. The little man smiled and gave a furtive wink.

" And another thing," Brew went on after a suitably impressive silence, " while you're aboard of us, you'll do as we say, and you'll fall in with the routine, just as I tell you to, and I don't want no clever arguments."

Michael ducked back into the wheelhouse, acutely embarrassed. And yet he couldn't disguise his new and sudden feeling of pride in his ship; it was as if it had become, in the past quarter of an hour, something entirely new, an efficient, well-disciplined unit of a powerful flotilla. He felt, too, some of his old authority returning.

" Leading Seaman White," he said to the helmsman, suddenly catching some of the old flavour, " tell Petty Officer Brewis that both watches of the hands will fall in in five minutes' time. On the foc'sle." This was, of course, scarcely meant to be taken seriously.

" Ay, ay, sir," said Knocker, without question, and for a moment left the wheel to pass on the message.

" Petty Officer Brewis," called Knocker, in a loud, penetrating voice, " both watches of the 'ands will get fell in in five minutes' time, on the foc'sle."

As he came back to the wheel, Knocker gave Michael a large, strictly unofficial wink. " We'll teach that crowd a fing or two," he said.

What happened in the next five minutes, Michael preferred not to know. But the outcome was astonishing.

A piercing, inhuman whistle, as from some frenzied jet engine, followed by Brew's unbelievably loud and ferocious voice, heralded another phase in this chapter of naval piracy.

" Both watches of the 'ands," came the voice above the noise of the engines and the sea, " get fell in on the foc'sle." He repeated the command, and added, as if it could ever be in dispute, " At the double! "

There was a moment of hesitation, a crescendo of grumbling resentment, and then, from somewhere aft, came the rumble of feet on iron decks. Past the wheelhouse, the nine bewildered, protesting passengers came stumbling in ragged single file.

" Look sharp there! " bawled Brewis, as the large woman tried bravely to break into a trot. Beside her, Michael noticed, the small, thin man was grinning—if a little uncertainly.

Knocker, without betraying any signs of emotion, eased back the throttles, and the *Silver Streak* began to slow down, her long foredeck returning to a slighter, more habitable angle.

The passengers huddled nervously together against the guard-rail; but not for long.

" 'Ere, you, you, you, and you," selected the irrepressible Brewis, " get fell in on the port side. You'll be the port watch from now on. And, you, Lofty," he addressed the small boy who was clinging, shivering, to his mother's voluminous skirt, " you'll be in charge of the starboard watch. O.K.? Now, sort yourselves out in two ranks, and look lively about it."

Michael watched the dreary assortment break up into two separate divisions and form up into lines on either side of the foc'sle. Puddenead, who had by now relinquished his bucket, joined up with the port watch, to make five a side. Knocker, with the stoicism of a veteran, regarded them disparagingly.

" Rough lot o' lubbers, if you arst me," was his only comment.

Brew stood majestically between the two ranks; monarch or at least acting monarch of all he surveyed.

" Now then," he boomed, " when I calls you to attention I want to see it done smart and proper, both legs together, back up straight, chest out, chin in, and no shuffling. That goes for you too, dearie," he glared at a giggling little blonde in the port watch; then, as she stopped, wiped his hand across his mouth.

" Both watches of the 'ands," he bellowed, so that even Michael felt as if something had hit him hard in the solar plexus, " both watches . . . '*shun*!" There was a slow, untidy response that could almost be interpreted as defiance. Only the man with the sallow face moved smartly, and, as a result, received a withering look of condemnation from his wife.

" As you were!" Brew screamed, and put them through it again. This time it was better, but still not good enough. At the fourth attempt, he was satisfied, and turning smartly on his heels, came aft to report to Michael.

" Both watches of the 'ands fallen in, sir," he said, saluting smartly. " All present and correct."

" Thank you, Brewis," said Michael nonchalantly, and he followed him onto the foredeck. " Stand them at ease, will you."

" Ay, ay, sir." Brewis swung on his victims again. " Ship's companee—stand at—ease."

Michael still could not believe the situation. Before him, on either side, stood ten solemn men and women, ostensibly at ease. Neither their sex nor their age seemed to intrude any more into the neat pattern of well-established naval discipline, and he felt that he had to make no concessions, even to himself.

He was the Captain, this was his ship, and these were his crew. Nothing else could now be allowed to challenge the fantastic

absurdity of the position. He hoped and prayed that Leo, his own regular bowman, who always went below for a sleep the minute the *Silver Streak* left the jetty, would not emerge through the open hatch to restore any of the reality.

" I should just like to say a few words," Michael began, and was surprised by the tone of his voice. Someone in the ranks began to mutter.

" Keep silence, there," shouted Brewis with dramatic effect.

" For some of you," continued the Captain, " this may be your first seagoing appointment." It was an opening he had used before many times. " And you may find things a little strange at first. But I want you to settle down into the routine as quickly as possible, and make this a really happy and efficient ship."

He dug his hands into the pockets of his duffel and glowered at the motley crew before him. " That can only be achieved," he said, " by teamwork, and complete co-operation, from the oldest among you, right down to the youngest boy."

For a moment he caught sight of the awe-stricken child who had been proving such a pest, and the sight nearly deflated him. " That is all I have to say," he added quickly, " except to wish you good luck, and safe landfalls."

" Hear, hear," said the reedy voice of the small man.

The young blonde in the port watch began to clap very softly, until Brewis turned on her savagely and withered her into silence with one of his special disciplinary glances. A couple in the starboard watch were gazing at Michael, wide-eyed. They too had somehow been caught up in the fantasy of the moment, and saw before them a strange new life opening out. Visions of walking the plank, keelhauling, cockroaches, whippings, and being clapped in irons hovered indistinctly about their brains.

But above all the confused images, they could see Brewis; Brewis the terrible, standing threateningly above them, goading them on to further efforts as they scrubbed at an obstinate patch of grease on the paintwork.

The small boy, with a less extensive imagination, believed he was about to be thrown to the sharks; though his mother, who was a great deal more practical, decided that the naval ratings must be drunk, and that she must study their faces carefully so as to be able to give a full and competent report to the police the moment they got back. " That's the ringleader," she whispered to her husband, indicating Brewis. " Criminal lunatic, I shouldn't wonder."

" Ship's company," screamed Brewis, as Michael returned to his sanctuary in the wheelhouse, " ship's company . . . *'shun*! Able Seaman Pudney, take the port watch and work part of ship,

cleaning duties on upper deck. You, Lofty, take the starboard watch, and put 'em on cleaning between decks."

Michael watched the parties disperse and go about their newly appointed tasks with a sort of dumb insolence. He felt a certain sympathy for them.

"Rough lot o' customers," said Knocker, opening up the throttles again.

As Michael stood silently in the wheelhouse, the first reaction began to set in. It could mean prison, or a heavy fine, or both. But he wasn't quite sure under what category the charge would be made.

It couldn't be mutiny, as it was his own ship. As far as he could see, no actual physical violence had been used, though Brew's language had at times come very near to it. Kidnapping, shanghai-ing, slavery were all words that crossed and recrossed his mind, without getting him anywhere. It would probably end up by coming under something vague like false pretences, or impersonation. But whatever happened, he knew it would be serious, and entail the loss of his licence.

He was, he now considered, prepared for anything. But the next unexpected shock left him gasping. Brewis emerged from below, and came up onto the deck, shouting, "Enemy bearing Green Eight-O. Speed four to five knots."

Michael instinctively looked out to starboard and saw the *Mary Lou*, wallowing sluggishly about a mile inshore, as she turned slowly for home.

"Enemy altering course away," commented Knocker in a quiet, businesslike voice. He had also observed the *Mary Lou*, and was anxious to confirm his watchfulness to the Captain.

"Action stations," came Brew's powerful voice, followed by another of his ear-shattering whistles. "Action stations . . . at the double, me hearties!"

Without waiting for orders, Knocker swung the wheel hard to starboard, and pushed the throttles forward to maximum. The *Silver Streak* responded instantly, and beneath her stern the water was chewed into a new, more violent pattern of gurgling, soapy foam, as she canted heavily to one side and began to sweep round.

"Steady," said Michael, more as a warning than a command.

"Steady as she goes, sir," repeated Knocker, centring the wheel. As the *Silver Streak* steadied up on course, her bow was pointing directly at the distant, all-innocent *Mary Lou*.

The frenzied call to action stations brought everyone on deck, including the somnolent Leo, who came clambering up from his

tiny cabin to investigate the noise. Brew pounced on him instantly, and armed him with a vicious-looking boat-hook. " You might need this, chum," he said, good-naturedly, " especially if you're in the boarding party."

Michael felt deliciously powerless. It was like falling over a precipice in a nightmare, and waking up to find that you are, in fact, floating peacefully but unaccountably about the room. The whole thing had gone too far already, much too far, to allow of any drawing back.

Silver Streak sped forward at nearly fourteen knots, her finely tapered bows cleaving the small, loppy waves and throwing out huge flat sheets of spray on either side of the hull. Ahead, the *Mary Lou* had fully completed her turn, and was plainly making for home. As yet, however, she could have no possible idea of the *Silver Streak*'s intention.

Neither, at that moment, had Michael. Nor for that matter, he imagined, had Knocker and Brew.

The port and starboard watches had now been shepherded onto the upper deck, and each had been given some sort of weapon.

The small boy, to his delighted astonishment, was treated to a heavy Verey pistol, that was, fortunately, unloaded. Blondie had been divested of her bucket, and, in exchange, given a fire-extinguisher that, Michael knew to his cost, was extremely simple to operate.

The small boy's mother had been armed with a thick wad of cotton waste, which she was now examining as if it were an old cabbage crawling with maggots.

Brew himself, tucking the strap of his cap firmly round his fierce, craggy chin, was, mercifully, as yet unarmed. Knocker, aware of his new responsibility as action helmsman, half closed his eyes and stared at the squatting enemy ahead.

" I don't think we'll ram," said Michael cautiously. He had already in his mind's eye seen the chaos which would follow such an action.

" No, sir. We'll bring up as close as we can, and let her have a broadside."

Brewis came crashing into the wheelhouse. " Number One Gun's crew closed up, cleared away, lined up," he reported briskly.

" Very good, Brewis. Don't open fire till I give the order."

" Ay, ay, sir."

When Michael followed him onto the deck, he could scarcely hold back his bubbling, hysterical laughter.

Lined up on the port side were Number One Gun's crew, consisting of Puddenead with the squeegee, Blondie with the

fire-extinguisher, the boy with the Verey pistol, and his mother with the cotton waste, all peering anxiously at the *Mary Lou*, by now a mere three hundred yards away, on the port bow.

The rest of the passengers, and Leo the bowman were grouped farther aft, equally prepared; ready to take over in the event of casualties.

For the first time since leaving the jetty, they all appeared to be enjoying themselves. The thin man, having separated himself from his wife, was openly excited.

Knocker aimed the *Silver Streak* relentlessly at the *Mary Lou*, and Michael knew there was now nothing he could do except stand imperiously by, and await developments.

The distance between the two boats closed rapidly. The *Silver Streak*, throbbing and vibrating under full power, surged towards the enemy. From the *Mary Lou*, all heads were now turned towards the aggressor, wondering, with interest at first, what could be bringing her in at this impressive speed; and then, as she held her course, wondering anxiously whether she was going to avoid a collision.

The owner of the *Mary Lou*, a large, surly fisherman named Thwaites, was standing up in the stern gesticulating wildly. In the circumstances, Michael considered, it was not unreasonable of him.

The gap continued to close, until Michael felt the sweat seeping into the palms of his hands. At their present speed, it seemed improbable, if not impossible, that they could now avoid the most terrifying accident, and he wondered whether Knocker was waiting for some further order from him.

Desperately he grabbed at the wheelhouse door and screamed, " Hard a-starboard! " even as he saw the terrified passengers in the *Mary Lou* scrambling to the far side of the boat to avoid the awful impact of the inevitable collision. Thwaites, he noticed, as the *Silver Streak* began to swing, was already snatching at the lashing that held the lifebelts.

With a great thundering roar of water, as it was forced against her sloping topsides, *Silver Streak* surged round a few feet from the *Mary Lou*, and as she came abreast, with a mere six or seven feet separating them, Michael heard himself shouting above the noise of the engines, and the screams of the *Mary Lou* passengers, " Open fire! "

The reaction was immediate. A long white jet of extinguishing foam curled upwards into the air, and fell in an accurate cascade onto the target area. The bombshell of oily cotton waste soared out over the rail and landed creditably near to the panic-stricken

Thwaites. The boy, with a finger jammed into his ear, was aiming the Verey pistol into the air, and the squeegee, propelled by Puddenead with the force of a torpedo, bounced hard against the stricken, pitching hull of the motor-boat, registering, as Puddenead called out ecstatically, " One 'it. Abaft the engine-room." But most effective of all was the curving, hissing wave of the wash that reared up in the narrow space between the two hulls, and tumbled gleefully into the smaller boat, mixing with the oily water in her bilges and slopping about the deck boards in a thick, scummy stew.

As *Silver Streak* pulled away, the gallant members of Number One Gun's crew, led by Brewis and Puddenead, let out a spontaneous, triumphant, heartfelt cheer. Michael, feeling weak and exhausted by the incident, had neither courage nor strength enough to turn towards the *Mary Lou*, from which he could hear the outraged Thwaites screaming and threatening in the most emphatic nautical language.

Fifteen minutes later they were approaching the jetty, and Brew, who had been busy with the hands clearing up after the action, gave another of his eerie whistles.

" Both watches of the 'ands," he called, " fall in for entering 'arbour."

The passengers shuffled up again on to the foredeck, only this time without any noticeable resentment. Quietly and efficiently, they sorted themselves out to port and starboard, and were turned, after a little preliminary manœuvring, to face outwards. Knocker, handing the wheel back to Michael, went out and joined up with the starboard division. Only Leo, standing indolently in the bows, ready with the breast-rope, spoilt the splendid, ordered symmetry.

Not until the vessel was finally secure against the landing-stage did Brewis allow them to move.

" Ship's company," he bawled, in a voice that surprised the anglers on the jetty and carried far inland, " ship's company, turn right . . . dismiss."

There was a moment's hushed immobility; then gradually the lines disintegrated. Knocker turned to Brew and shook him warmly by the hand. " All right, mate," he complimented him, " a bit of all right, that was."

Brew grinned. " I reckon we's wasting our time in the flipping Navy," he said.

The passengers seemed reluctant to leave. The thin, sallow man came up to Michael and smiled benignly. " I haven't enjoyed anything so much," he said, " for a very long time."

Even the small boy, by now partly dried out, seemed converted to the new order of things.

" Thanks, mister," he said, " that was smashing."

And his large, laminated mother, smiled warmly as she took him away. " We'd better hurry along," she said " or you'll catch your death of cold."

As she clambered laboriously up the seaweed-covered steps, Michael remembered the neat, deadly parabola of the cotton waste as it fell unerringly upon the cringing enemy Somehow, he felt, she deserved a medal.

" I've always wanted to do something like that, all my life," confided one of the more elderly members of the disbanded starboard watch, as he bade adieu to Michael and the three ratings.

But as the passengers moved away, Michael could see the *Mary Lou* hurrying back at her full five knots, and he knew that neither Thwaites nor the rest of the drenched passengers would be prepared to take quite such a philosophical view of the proceedings.

" Petty Officer Brewis," he called out, as he switched off the engines, and came out onto the deck, " I think the order of the day is splice the main brace—and splice it pretty smartly."

" Ay, ay, sir," said Brew. " Splice the main brace. Shall I make a signal to that effect, or can we take it as read? "

" Let's take it as read," said Michael, looking nervously at the approaching motor boat. " The enemy is close at hand."

" Ay, ay, sir," said Knocker mischievously. " Come on, Brew, and c'mon, Puddenead. We 'aven't got all day to closing-time. Come on, sir," he added, seizing Michael by the arm, " let's get under way."

Linking arms, the four of them walked quickly up the jetty towards the shelter and protection of one of the pubs ashore, only glancing back once to see if Skipper Thwaites was yet in pursuit.

" Full ahead both, Knocker," said Michael, as they saw the damp and dirty owner of the *Mary Lou* clambering up the wooden steps to the jetty. " We're going to need all she's got."

" That's all right, sir," said Brew, setting an intolerably fast pace. " We'll look after you."

From now on, Michael considered, the Navy was going to have to look after him for a long time to come, and he found the prospect immensely pleasing

* * *

THE CHRYSALIDS

Here is neither moon magic nor Martian horror. Discarding ray gun and spaceship, Argosy offers a new sf story with all the originality and compelling power one would expect of the author of those enthralling novels, "The Day of the Triffids," and "The Kraken Wakes."

"We are no longer so interested in this or that scientific marvel," says John Wyndham. "We want to know what

EVEN when I was a small child I would sometimes see a place like this.

The picture of a city would come into my mind: there would be streets lined by buildings that were quite unlike anything I had ever really seen; there were machines, utterly strange to me, running along those streets; there were even machines flying in the sky above it. Sometimes I would see it by day; sometimes by night, as an unbelievable carnival of lights . . .

When I was still young enough not to know any better I asked my elder sister where this place could be. She shook her head, and said there was no such place. Perhaps, she suggested, I might somehow have been dreaming about the world that the Old People had known; the world as it had been before God sent Tribulation. But after that, she warned me very seriously not to mention it to anyone else: other people did not have such pictures in their heads, so it would be unwise to speak of them.

That was good advice, and it was lucky for me that I heeded it. Everybody where I come from has a swift eye for differences; and I was already under a slight cloud for being left-handed . . .

But now that I am here, now that I can be myself among people of my own kind, and do not need to be for ever on my guard, I feel it a duty to put on record some account of what life can be like for people of our sort in other parts of the world, and I think the best way I can do it is to tell my own story.

It is the time round about the day when my young sister Petra was born that is marked for me in half a dozen ways. Although I would be about eleven and a half then it was rather as if there had been no sharp marks in all that time. I had just been there and growing slowly and not noticing the world about me much

it will do to us and our children—to the people of tomorrow."

So he takes us to Waknuk, in the country that was once called Labrador, and in this pioneer community, battling against new primeval difficulties and terrors, peopled by a generation with a different way of life, strange Commandments, and even undreamed-of powers—in this new society, for all its primitive strangeness, we recognize our own.

This world could be our world—
we could be these people.

BY JOHN WYNDHAM

except as a background which was sometimes pleasant, but usually severe and puzzling. And then all these things happened on top of one another: it was as if they woke me up, and after that the world could never look quite the same.

The first of these things was the invasion. That'd be about two or three weeks before Petra came, and it meant a kind of offstage feeling of excitement all round because it was a real invasion that time.

Occasional small raids or forays used to happen two or three times a year. Nobody took a lot of notice of them as a rule except the people who got raided. Usually they had time to get away and only lost their stock and sometimes had their houses burnt. But this time it was different.

The people of the Fringes—at least, one had to call them people because although they are really Deviations, and therefore Blasphemies, they do often look quite like ordinary human people, if nothing has gone too much wrong with them—these people, then, don't have a lot out there in the Fringes, which is the border country between civilized parts and the Badlands. So they come to steal our grain and livestock and tools, weapons too if they can get them; and sometimes they carry off children.

Some years they get more hungry and come more often, but usually there is little plan about it; just a matter of a dozen or so of them raiding quickly, and then running off back into Fringes country. The people who live near the border seem to look on it rather as one might on a bad season.

There wasn't any plan to deal with it, either, because you never could tell within four or five hundred miles where they might come next. The result was that when the Fringes people found a leader and came as an organized invasion there was not at first any system

of defence to delay them. They simply pushed forward on a broad front, looting and stealing as they came, and meeting nothing to hold them up until they were over twenty miles into civilized parts.

By that time we had the beginnings of a militia to harry them and head them off. Our men—quite a lot of them, at any rate—had guns; the Fringes people for the most part were armed only with bows and arrows, and knives, and spears. Nevertheless, their path of advance was so wide that they were difficult to deal with. They were better woodsmen and cleverer in concealment than real humans, so that they were able to come on another twenty miles before we could contain them and bring them to battle.

It was exciting for a boy. The Fringes people were within ten miles of our house at Waknuk, and our yard was one of the rallying points for the militia. My father who had had an arrow through his arm a week before was helping to organize the newcomers into squads. For several days there was a great bustling and coming and going as they were registered and sorted, and eventually they rode out with a fine air of determination, and all the women of the household waving them off with handkerchiefs.

Finally, when they had all gone, the place seemed strangely quiet for a day. Then there came a rider, dashing back. He paused long enough to tell us that there had been a big battle and the Fringes people were running away as fast as they could and some of their leaders had been taken prisoner, before he galloped on with his news.

That same afternoon a troop of ten horsemen came riding into the yard, with two of the captured Fringes leaders in their midst.

I dropped what I was doing, and ran up to see. For a moment it was disappointing. There were such tales about the Fringes that I fully expected to see creatures with two heads, or hairy all over, or with half a dozen arms and legs. Instead, at first glance they seemed to be just ordinary bearded men, though rather dirty and in very ragged clothes.

One of them was a short man with long fair hair which looked as though it had been trimmed with a knife. But when I looked at the other, I had a shock and stood dumbfounded, staring at him. His face was so familiar that I felt physically jolted. I went on staring, with my mouth open. Except for the ragged clothes and the unkemptness of his beard, he was the image of my father. He might have *been* my father . . .

He looked down and noticed me, casually at first; then he stared harder, and a strange look that I didn't understand came into his eyes . . .

I don't know whether he would have spoken then or not, for at that moment people came out of the house to see what was happening—my father, with his arm still in a sling, among them.

I saw my father pause on the step and survey the group of horsemen; then he, too, caught sight of the man in the middle of them. For a moment he stared, just as I had done—then all his colour

drained away, leaving his face a blotchy grey. For a moment he looked like a very ill man, but his eyes never left the other's face.

I looked quickly at the other man again. He sat on his horse rigid, as though petrified. His expression made something clutch suddenly in my chest. I was terrified. I had never seen naked hatred before, the lines cut deep, the eyes glittering, the mouth like a savage animal's. It came like a sudden searing flash, this horrid revelation of something I had never known to exist; the expression seemed to burn my mind in an instant, so that I have never forgotten it . . .

Then my father put out his good hand to steady himself against the doorpost, and turned back into the house.

One of the escort cut the rope which held the prisoner's arms. He dismounted, and it was then that I was able to see what was wrong with him. He was a good eighteen inches taller than anyone else, but not because he was a big man. If his legs had been right, he would have been no taller than my father's five-foot-ten; but they were not: they were monstrously long and thin, and his arms were long and thin, too. He looked half spider, half man . . .

The escort gave him food and a pot of beer. He sat down on a bench, his bony knees sticking up almost level with his shoulders. He looked round the yard malevolently as he munched his bread and cheese, and noticed me again. He beckoned. I hung back, pretending not to see. He beckoned again. I became ashamed of being afraid of him, so I went a little closer, then a little closer still, but keeping warily out of range, I judged, of those spidery arms.

" What's your name, boy? " he asked me.

" David," I told him. " David Strorm."

" That was your father at the door? What's his name? "

" Joseph," I told him.

He nodded several times, as though to himself.

" This place, then," he said, looking round the yard, the house, and the outbuildings, " this will be Waknuk? "

" Yes," I told him.

I don't know whether he would have asked more, but somebody told me to clear off, and presently they all remounted, and began to move on, the spidery man with his arms tied together behind him once more. I watched them ride away in the Kentak direction, glad to see them go. My first encounter with someone from the Fringes had not been exciting at all, but it had been unpleasantly disturbing.

I heard later that both the Fringes men managed to escape that same night. I can't remember who told me, but I am perfectly certain it was not my father. I never had the courage to ask him about that day, and I never once heard him refer to it . .

It would be about three days after that that Petra was born. It happened, I think, about five in the morning—though, of course, nobody actually mentioned it at all We of the household spent an anxious

morning, trying to pretend that there was nothing unusual afoot, while we waited for the Inspector to come and issue his certificate so that we could admit that Petra had been born, and give her a name.

But the Inspector took his time. He had had a row with my father, and was taking the chance to get a bit of his own back.

Father hung about the house and yard, now and then exploding with bad temper over trivial things, so that everybody kept out of his way as much as possible. Everything was held up because the word " baby " couldn't even be mentioned or hinted at until the Inspector had issued his certificate declaring it to be a true and normal human being—if he could not do that, he would take it away with him, and everybody would pretend that nothing had happened; just as we were pretending now that Mother was in bed with a cold.

My elder sister, Alice, tried to cover up her anxiety by loudly bossing the household girls. I felt compelled to hang about so that I should not miss the announcement that the baby was all right. My father kept on prowling. The proprieties of the occasion would not even let him say aloud what he thought of the Inspector—which was perhaps as well, for such tardiness in coming to visit a household of our standing was little less than a studied insult. What made it worse was that on the last two similar occasions the Inspector had not given a certificate; and everybody was well aware of that unmentionable fact.

It was not until mid afternoon that the Inspector ambled up on his pony, and my father went out to receive him with a politeness which must almost have strangled him. Even then, the Inspector was not brisk.

He dismounted in a leisurely fashion and pottered into the house, talking about the weather. Father, red in the face, handed him over to Alice, who took him along to Mother's room. Then there was the worst wait of all.

Alice said that he hummed and ha'ed for an unconscionable time while he examined the baby in minutest detail. At length, however, he emerged. In the living-room he sat down and fussed about for a time, getting a good point on his quill.

At last he took a form from his pouch and in a slow, deliberate hand wrote that he officially found the child to be a true female human being, free from any detectable form of deviation. After signing and dating it he handed it to my enraged father with a faint air of uncertainty. He had, of course, no real doubt in his mind, or he would have called in another opinion; my father was perfectly well aware of that, too.

Only then could Petra's existence be admitted.

I was officially informed that I had a new sister, and taken to see her as she lay in her crib beside my mother's bed.

She looked so pink and wrinkled to me that I didn't see how the Inspector could possibly have been quite sure; however, there was nothing obviously wrong with her, like having extra fingers and toes

and so on, so she got her certificate. Nobody could blame the Inspector for that: she *looked* as normal a human as I did . . .

Ours was a very godfearing household. My grandfather, who was one of the pioneers at Waknuk, had built the chapel, and preached in it. My father had followed his example and preached there frequently, too. He also preached and prayed a lot at home, so that some of our workers got rather tired of it. However, the thanksgiving for Petra was not a thing anybody would grudge, so we all listened patiently to my father and made our responses with a good will.

Most of the life of our house went on in the big kitchen, rather than in the sitting-room, and you had only to enter it to realize that we were orthodox and exemplary.

Among the burnished pans that hung against the walls because they were too big to go into the cupboards were a number of wooden panels with admonishments, mostly taken from Nicholson's *Repentances*, decoratively burnt into them.

The one on the left of the fireplace said: *Keep Pure the Stock.* On the opposite wall was: *Blessed is the Norm*, and the largest was a panel on the back wall that faced you as you came in. It warned everybody: *WATCH THOU FOR THE MUTANT!*

References to these texts had made me familiar with them long before I could read, and with the others elsewhere about the house, such as: *The Devil is the Father of Deviation*, and *The Norm is the Will of God.*

I think there was considered to be some virtue in my ability to quote them at an early age, but there might have been more if anyone had taken the trouble to see that I had some idea what they were about.

The truth is, however, that they meant almost nothing—I was able to join in the thanksgiving for the normality of Petra quite sincerely, and remain unperturbed by the surrounding precepts although I had by that time known for some years that I had one quality not shared by anyone else in the household. Somehow, I still failed entirely to connect my difference with the implications of those long-familiar texts.

There was, therefore, no mockery at all in my heart while I listened to my father thanking God for blessing his house with the addition of a new child of the true human stock. Even though at one moment I caught my Uncle Axel's gaze resting speculatively upon me while my father prayed, I thought nothing of it.

Nor did it occur to me—and probably not to anyone else, with the possible exception of Uncle Axel—that the Inspector could have been in any way deceived about Petra . . .

My half-Uncle, Angus Morton, owned the big farm less than a mile away, with fields that were in some places contiguous to our own.

Half-Uncle Angus and my father had never cared for one another.

My father had been heard to declare that Angus lacked moral fibre, and that the broadness of his principles, if he had any, was a serious menace to the rectitude of the neighbourhood; Angus reciprocated by considering my father to be a hard man and bigoted beyond the brink of stupidity. Though they were on the opposite sides of every question, the antipathy remained almost entirely verbal until the affair of Angus's greathorses came up.

My father had heard of greathorses, though none had previously been seen in our district, but when he went to look at the pair that Angus had bought, doubt was already in his mind. The moment he set eyes on the huge creatures, standing nearly twenty-eight hands at the shoulder, it was confirmed. He knew that they were *wrong*. He went straight to the Inspector and demanded that they should be destroyed as Offences

But the Inspector shook his head. " You're out of order," he told my father cheerfully, with an air of relishing the fact that his grounds were incontestable. " They're Government-approved."

" I don't believe it," said my father. " God never made horses the size of these. The Government *can't* have approved them."

" They have," the Inspector assured him. " What's more, knowing this district pretty well by now, Angus took the precaution of getting individual certificates for them."

" Any Government that could pass such creatures as normal is corrupt and immoral," said my father.

" Possibly," agreed the Inspector, calmly, " but it is still the Government." My father was roused.

" It is easy to see *why* they'd approve them," he said. " One of those brutes could do the work of two or more ordinary horses, for a lot less than double the feed. But that's no excuse for casuistry. A horse like that is not one of God's creatures—and if it isn't His, then it is an Offence, and should be destroyed as such."

" The official approval states that the breed was produced simply by mating for size. And I defy you to find anything identifiably wrong with them, anyway," the Inspector told him.

" It doesn't follow that they're *right*," my father persisted. " No horse that size could be *right*. It is your moral duty to issue an order against them," he told the Inspector.

" It is my official duty to protect them and their owner against attacks by bigots, or any other irresponsibles," said the Inspector, growing suddenly short-tempered.

My father nursed his wrath for an address in chapel next Sunday in which he seared the whole community for tolerating Mutants.

The dispute died to a smoulder. My father did not change his opinions, but in face of the Government approval, they found little support. Six weeks later he shot at one of the greathorses on the grounds that it had broken down our fence and was on our land alarming our cattle. The creature was only lightly touched, but the incident did nothing to improve relations with Angus Morton.

The greathorses remained. My father continued to mention their presence as the cause of any divine displeasure manifested locally.

Half-Uncle Angus acquired the habit of referring to my father as " that purity bigot." And it was my father who came off worst, because it is always wise to keep on the right side of the District Inspector, as the delay over Petra's certificate showed.

Now, to you, in a country so differently situated, this matter of Offences, which played such a large part in our lives, may not be quite clear. Our neighbours to the east were less concerned with it the farther east one went, but when one was as far west as Waknuk there was need for constant vigilance.

Some thirty-five miles away at the nearest point, Wild Country began; ten or fifteen miles farther on, it merged into the lawless Fringes, which extended another forty or fifty miles until one reached the impassable barrier of the Badlands.

The chief difference between Waknuk and the Wild Country was the degree of stability. When proper care was taken, there was an almost eighty-per-cent chance that seeds sown or stock mated in Waknuk would produce orthodox results: with the rich soil, this made farming there quite profitable.

In Wild Country, however, although it was quite possible to live there in a civilized way, the chances were fifty per cent or more that a crop would go wrong, even using imported seed, so that farming became barely economic at all; while if you were to plant close to the Fringes, no one could say what monstrosity might not come up. All these things that you didn't expect were Offences. Uncle Axel explained it to me when I was small and rather worried by some of our more severe texts such as: *Accursed is the Mutant in the Sight of God and Man!*

" A Mutant," he told me, " is a thing that God didn't intend to exist. You know what a head of corn should look like, or a potato—well, that's the way God made them and intended them to look. But sometimes there is an evil in them which makes them grow differently, so they are called Offences. It is our duty to destroy these Offences so that they shall not produce young Offences of their own kind."

" But how do people know which are the right ones? " I asked.

" A lot of them are described—some with pictures—in Nicholson's *Repentances*," he told me. " I'll show you that one day. And then there is a list which the Government at Rigo sends out, so that if there is any argument the Inspector looks it up in his copy of the list, and if he still can't decide, he appeals to the Council. But that doesn't happen very often, because when there is anything wrong, you can usually tell pretty easily."

I was silent for a while. His explanation had shed a new and helpful light on several things that had puzzled me—and, while exciting me, had been rather frightening, too.

Sometimes these had been quite impressive occasions. The first sign of one was usually that my father came into the house in a bad temper. Then, in the evening, he would call everyone together and proclaim that we were harbouring an Offence.

The next morning we would all be gathered in the yard before it was properly light, and we would sing a hymn while my father, with a large knife, ceremonially slaughtered the two-headed calf, or four-legged chicken, or whatever the Offence happened to be.

Sometimes, too, my father would stamp into the kitchen and throw down on the table a few stalks of corn, or some vegetables that were Offences. If it was no more than a matter of a row or two of vegetables, they came out and were destroyed, but if it was a whole field, a few men would be sent off with scythes to mow a swathe on the leeward side of it.

Then, early the next morning, if the wind and weather were favourable, we would all march along to the offending field. Just as the sun came up, my father and one or two other men would set fire to it on the windward side, and we'd all sing hymns while it burnt. It was a very fine and exciting sight indeed.

We used to have more fires and slaughterings than anyone else because my father was a careful and pious man, with a very sharp eye for an Offence, but any suggestion that we were more afflicted than other people hurt him. He did not have any wish to throw good money away, he said. If our neighbours had been as conscientious as we were, they'd have had quite as many cleansings as we did—probably more.

All kinds of Deviations and Offences were serious, of course, but there was one much more serious than the rest, which was called a Blasphemy. Uncle Axel explained about that, too.

"You know that man was created in God's image?" he asked me.

"Yes," I said. I recalled what I had been taught: "And God created man in His own image; and God decreed that man should have one body, one head, two arms, and two legs: that each arm should be jointed in two places, and end in one hand: that each hand should have four fingers and one thumb . . ." And so on. I repeated some of it.

Uncle Axel nodded.

"Well," he said, "any child that is different from the definition is called a Blasphemy. People are so ashamed of it they just pretend it doesn't exist."

"What happens to it?" I asked.

"The Inspector takes it away," he told me.

"What does he do with it?" I wanted to know.

But he wouldn't tell me that. He went on to explain that Blasphemies were not to be talked about for fear of hurting people's feelings—except those that lived in the Fringes; their existence was a scandal that could be talked about and deplored.

I grasped the idea, in a rough way. A child is taught to regard customs and proprieties as the natural habits of his kind.

Differences of opinion can be very distressing: one has been taught what is right and what is wrong, so what can the dispute be about? It is very puzzling: if the difference becomes intense, it can be shocking too.

I was shocked some two days after Petra was born, without understanding why.

I was sitting quietly that afternoon in the small room next to my parents' bedroom where my mother still lay in bed. It was not entirely by chance. There was a tendency for people to find jobs for me to do in the afternoons, but if I could slip away early from the dinner-table and remain invisible until they had all gone to work again, I was safe. Nobody had yet thought of looking for me in that room.

The chief drawback was that the wattle wall between the two rooms was cracked so that I had to move very cautiously on tiptoe lest my mother should hear me.

On that particular day I was just wondering whether I had allowed enough time for safety, when a high-wheeled trap came driving up, and as it passed the window, I had a glimpse of my Aunt Harriet holding the reins.

I edged carefully on stockinged feet to the side of the window where I was able to watch her tether the horse, pick a white bundle out of the trap, and carry it carefully into the house. A moment later her steps passed the door of my room, and the latch of the next door clicked.

" Why, Harriet! " exclaimed my mother's voice, in surprise, and not altogether in approval, " so soon! You don't mean to say you've brought a tiny baby all that way! "

" I know," said my aunt's voice, accepting the reproof in my mother's tone, " but I had to, Emily—I had to. She was born a week ago. I didn't know what to do. Then I heard that your baby had been born early. It was like an answer to a prayer, so I came as soon as I could—Oh, there she is! Oh, she's lovely, Emily. She's a lovely baby."

There was a lot of mutual congratulation which didn't interest me very much.

Presently my mother said, " Henry must be delighted."

" Oh yes, of course he is," Aunt Harriet told her, but somehow there was a flatness in her voice. After a brief pause, she added: " You've got the certificate for her? "

" Of course! " My mother's tone was sharp, ready to be offended. I could well imagine her expression. When she spoke again, there was a quality in her voice that disturbed me.

" Harriet! " she said, abruptly, " you don't mean to say you've *not* got a certificate? "

My aunt made no reply, but I caught the sound of a suppressed sob. My mother said, " Harriet! let me see that child properly."

For some seconds I could only hear more sobs from my aunt. Then she said unsteadily: " It's such a little thing, you see. It's nothing much."

" *Nothing much!* " snapped my mother. " You have the effrontery to bring your monster into a godfearing house and say *it's nothing much*! "

Aunt Harriet broke into little moaning sobs.

After a time my mother said, " Why did you come here, Harriet? Why did you bring it here? "

Aunt Harriet's sobs grew less, slowly. She said, in a dull, flat voice, " When she came—when I saw her, I wanted to kill myself. I knew they wouldn't approve her, although it's such a little thing. But I love her. She's a lovely baby—but for that, isn't she? "

My mother didn't answer. Aunt Harriet went on, " Well, then I thought at least I'd keep her as long as I could. The month they give you before you *have* to notify. I decided I'd have her for that long, at least."

" And Henry? What did he say? "

" He said we ought to notify at once. But I wouldn't let him—I couldn't, Emily, I couldn't. I just prayed and hoped. And then when I heard your baby had come a month early . . ."

" Harriet," said my mother coldly, " I do not see what you mean."

" I thought," Aunt Harriet went on, spiritless now, but forcing herself to the words, " I thought that if I could leave my baby here, and borrow yours—"

My mother gave an incredulous gasp.

" It would only be for a day or two, just while I apply for the certificate," Aunt Harriet went on. " You are my sister, Emily—you are the only person in the world who can help me to keep my baby."

She began to cry again.

There was a longish pause, and then my mother's voice, " In all my life I have never heard anything so outrageous. You produce a Deviation, and instead of hiding your shame, you come here suggesting that I should make an immoral, criminal conspiracy to . . . I think you must be mad, Harriet. To suggest that I should lend—"

She broke off at the sound of my father's heavy step in the passage.

" Joseph," she said, as he entered, " get her out of this house—and see that she takes *that* with her."

" But—but it's Harriet, my dear," said my father, in bewilderment. " It's Harriet."

My mother explained, fully. There wasn't a sound from Aunt Harriet. At the end, he demanded incredulously, " Is this true? is this why you came here? "

Aunt Harriet said slowly, " They'll take my baby away. I can't stand it—not again. Henry will turn me out and take another wife who can give him proper children. There'll be nothing in the world left for me—nothing. I came here, hoping against hope for sympathy and help. I—I see now that I was foolish to hope at all."

Nobody said anything.

" All right—I'll go now," Aunt Harriet told them presently, in a dead voice

My father was not a man to leave his attitude unexplained.

" I don't understand how you dared to come to a godfearing house with such a suggestion," he told her. " Worse still, you don't show a trace of shame."

Aunt Harriet's voice was steadier as she answered: " Why should I? I've done nothing to be ashamed of. I am *not* ashamed—only beaten. I have done my best to save my baby. I can't do any more."

" Not ashamed! " repeated my father. " Not ashamed of producing a mockery of your Maker—or of trying to plan a criminal conspiracy! " He took a breath, and launched off in his pulpit style: " The enemies of God work to distort the true image: through the weak vessels they attempt to defile the race. There is one defence only—eternal vigilance for the impurities they attempt to send among us. Deviation, *any* deviation from the true image is blasphemy...

" If you had your way, your child would grow to breed and, breeding, spread pollution until all around us there would be mutants and abominations. Shame on you, woman! Now go! "

There were two light footsteps. The baby gave a little whimper as Aunt Harriet picked it up. At the door she paused.

" I shall pray," she said. " I shall pray God to send charity into this hideous world, and sympathy for the weak, and love for the unhappy and unfortunate. I shall pray Him, too, that the hearts of the self-righteous may be broken."

Then the door closed behind her, and she passed slowly along the passage.

I moved cautiously to the window again. I saw her lay the white bundle gently in the trap. She unhitched the horse, climbed up, and took the bundle onto her lap, with one arm round it. For a moment she turned a face as blank and hard as granite towards the house. Then she shook the reins and drove off.

Behind me, in the next room, my father was saying, " I could never have believed such wickedness in a sister of yours. But sometimes women get strange ideas at these times. We must pray for her."

My mother started to answer, but her voice cracked, and she began to cry. I had never heard her cry before. My father went on explaining about the importance of Purity.

I could not help feeling a great curiosity about the baby, but I never found out what was wrong. When they broke the news to me next day that my Aunt Harriet had been found drowned in the river, no one mentioned a baby.

Though there was much that I did not understand in what I had overheard, it was quite the most disturbing thing that had ever happened to me. For several nights I dreamt of Aunt Harriet lying in the river, with her open eyes seeing nothing, while her hair swirled round her pale face, and her arms still clasped the white bundle to her. And I was very frightened . . .

A Mutant, my father had called it . . . a Mutant! I recalled the voice of a visiting preacher, and the way he had thundered from the pulpit, " *Accursed is the Mutant!* "

Accursed is the Mutant . . . The Mutant, the enemy of the human race, of all God's creation; the emissary of the Devil who tries unflaggingly, eternally, to destroy the divine order and turn our land, the stronghold of God, into a lewd chaos like the Fringes; to make it a place without the law, where the plants and the animals and the almost-human beings, too, brought forth young unlike themselves; where unnameable creatures prowled, abominable growths flourished, and travesties swam in the waters, where madness mocked the Lord with obscene fantasies.

I prayed very earnestly those nights. " Oh God," I said, " please let me be like other people. I don't want to be different. Make it so that when I wake up in the morning I'll be just like everybody else."

But in the morning, when I tested myself, I'd find that the prayer hadn't altered anything. I had to get up just the same person as had gone to bed, and I had to go into the big kitchen and eat my breakfast facing the panel which said, *Accursed is the Mutant.*

And so I went on being very frightened . . .

After about the fifth night that praying hadn't done any good, Uncle Axel caught me at the end of breakfast and said I'd better come along and help him mend a plough. We worked on that for about a couple of hours, then he declared a rest, so we went out of the forge to sit in the sun, with our backs against a wall. He gave me a bit of bread and cheese. We munched for a minute or two, then he said, " Now, Davie boy, let's have it."

" Have what? " I said, though I knew.

" Whatever's been making you look as if you were sickening for something the last day or two," he told me.

Uncle Axel was the only person who could have asked me that without throwing me into a panic. He was the only one—well, the only *normal* one—who knew about the difference. All the same, I still hesitated.

Nearly two years before, he had come upon me one day when I was talking to Rosalind—Rosalind Morton, my half-cousin, whose father owned the greathorses—and I was doing it out loud because I hadn't had much practice then.

It must have been an instinct of self-preservation that had made me keep it to myself, for I had no active realization of danger—so little, in fact, that when Uncle Axel came across me behind the rick apparently chatting to myself, I made very little effort to dissemble. I can remember how he stood regarding me, with a half-amused frown: he must, I think, have been there for a minute or two before I looked up and saw him.

" Hullo, Davie boy, and who would you be chattering to? Is it fairies, or gnomes, or just the rabbits? " he asked.

I shook my head.

" Can rabbits talk? " I inquired. " I've never heard them.

" Nor have I," he admitted. " Still, I suppose they'd have to have some way of telling one another things, wouldn't they? "

" Yes," I said. " I suppose they would."

He limped closer, and sat down beside me, chewing on a stalk of grass from the rick.

" Feeling lonely? " he asked

" No," I told him

He frowned a bit again.

" Wouldn't it be better if you did your chatting with some of the other kids," he suggested. " Wouldn't it be more fun than just sitting and talking to yourself? "

" But I was," I protested.

" Was what? " he said, still frowning.

" Talking to one of them," I told him.

He looked puzzled. " Who? " he asked.

" Rosalind," I told him.

" H'm—I didn't see her around," he said.

" Oh, she's not here. She's at home—at least, she's near home, in a little secret hut her brothers built in the spinney," I explained. " She often goes there when she wants to talk."

He didn't seem to be able to understand at first. He kept on talking as if it were some make-believe game; but after I had gone on for some time trying to explain, he became quite quiet, and looked very serious. After I'd stopped, he didn't say anything for a bit; then he asked, " This is the real truth you're telling, Davie boy? "

He looked at me very hard and steadily.

" Yes, Uncle Axel, of course," I assured him.

" And you've never told anyone else—no grown-up person at all? "

" No," I told him, truthfully.

He threw away the remains of his grass-stalk, and pulled another from the rick. After he had bitten a few pieces off it and spat them out, he looked at me directly again.

" Davie," he said. " I want you to make me a promise."

" Yes, Uncle Axel? "

" It's this," he said, very seriously, " that you will never, never tell anyone else what you've just told me—*never*, it's very important. You mustn't do anything that would let anyone guess. Will you promise me that? "

His intensity and gravity were so unlike his usual self that they impressed me strongly.

When I gave my promise, I was aware that I was promising something more important than I understood.

He nodded, satisfied that I meant it. Then he went on, " It would be best if you could forget it altogether."

I thought about that, and then shook my head.

" I don't think I could do that, Uncle Axel. It just happens. It'd be like—" I broke off, unable to express what I meant.

" Like—forgetting how to see, perhaps? " he suggested.

" Rather like that, only different," I admitted.

He nodded, and thought again.

" You hear the words inside your head? " he asked.

" Well, not exactly *hear*; and not exactly *see*," I told him.

" But you don't have to say the words out loud as you were doing just now? "

" Oh no—but sometimes it helps to make things clearer."

" It also makes things a lot more dangerous, for both of you. I want you to make me another promise, *that you will never do it out loud any more.*"

" All right, Uncle Axel," I agreed again.

" You'll understand when you're older how important it is," he told me, and then went on to insist that I should get Rosalind to promise the same things, too.

I didn't tell him anything about the others because he seemed so worried already, but I decided I'd make them promise, as well. At the end he put out his hand.

" We'll swear to keep it a secret? " he said.

And with that, we had clasped hands and sworn, very solemnly.

Since that day, we had scarcely mentioned the matter, and then only when we were far away from everyone else.

Now, while I hesitated, he went on, " What's the trouble? Has anyone found out? "

" No," I said.

He looked greatly relieved. " What *is* the trouble, then? "

So I told him about Aunt Harriet and the baby, and before I had finished, I was talking through tears. It was such a relief to be able to tell someone.

" It was her face as she drove away," I told him. " I've never seen anyone look like that before. I keep on seeing it, in the water. And it was all because the baby was different—and I'm different. I—I'm frightened, Uncle Axel."

He put his hand on my shoulder. " No one is ever going to know about it," he reminded me. " No one but me—and I'm safe."

" One of us stopped suddenly six months ago," I said.

He looked puzzled.

" Rosalind—" he began.

" Not Rosalind—one of the others," I explained.

He was startled. It took him a few moments to understand; then, " Who? " he asked.

I shook my head.

" I don't know. Names don't have any thinking-shapes so we don't bother with them. You just know who people are. I only found out who Rosalind was by accident. But we used to talk to this one—and then he suddenly stopped. We've been wondering if somebody found out . . ."

Uncle Axel shook his head. " I don't think so. We should be sure to have heard of it. Was he far away from here? "

" I don't think so. I don't know really," I admitted.

I told him what little I did know and when it had happened, and he said he'd try to find out about it.

" I'd be pretty sure something as sudden as that means an accident, though," he consoled me.

" Aunt Harriet called this a hideous world," I said. " Do you think it's a hideous world, Uncle Axel? "

He thought that over, spending what seemed to me a long time on a simple question, then he said, " If it's the people she was meaning, I think they're more stupid than bad. As for the place—" he lifted his head and looked across the fields and woods, and then at the blue mountains in the distance—" well, I reckon it's not as good as it might be, and I reckon it was once a whole lot better than it is now, most likely: but, for all that, I'd rather be here than in the other places I've seen."

I looked where he was looking. In the foreground the great bank came curving into view from the left, and then ran straight as an arrow towards the mountains. It was very, very old, and crumbled almost away in some places, but no one could ever mistake it for a work of nature. The sight of it prompted me to ask, " Was the world better when the Old People were here? "

" Must've been," said Uncle Axel.

" The Old People must've been very wonderful themselves," I said, looking at the massiveness of the bank, " with their big cities, and the machines that ran about, and the other machines that could fly."

" That's nothing but stories," he told me. " People like to think the Old People were wonderful, so they say they could do anything—even fly like birds. What I say is if they were only half as wonderful as people say, how is it they're not still here? "

" But it wasn't like birds," I told him. " The machines didn't have wings, they had kind of whirling things on the top of them."

He looked at me very hard. So then I had to tell him about the dreams I had had of this place—only I still thought it was the Old People I was dreaming of. He couldn't make a lot of that. He seemed to think they were just stories I'd picked up somewhere, and kept on thinking about. He shook his head.

" There's a lot of nonsense talked about the Old People," he persisted, " but where are they? "

" God sent Tribulation upon them," I quoted.

" Sure, sure. That's easy to say, but not so easy to understand, especially when you've seen a bit of the world. Tribulation wasn't just tempests and hurricanes and floods and fires, the way they often tell you. It was like all of them together, and something a lot worse, too. I can understand that it destroyed almost all the world. What I don't understand is *the queer things it did to what was left.*"

" Except here," I suggested.

" Not except here, but *less* here than anywhere else," he corrected me. " What could it have been? That's what's been puzzling me for nearly twenty years now. You've got to see it to understand what I mean. What could possibly have caused it? "

I did not see his real difficulty. After all, God, being omnipotent, could cause anything He liked. I tried to explain that to Uncle Axel, but he shook his head.

" We've got to believe that God is sane, Davie boy. We'd be lost indeed if we didn't believe that. Whatever happened out there—" he waved a hand round the horizon at large—" what happened there was *not* sane, not sane at all. It was something too great for men, but beneath the wisdom of God. So what was it? What can it have been? "

" Tribulation . . ." I began.

" A preacher's word," said Uncle Axel. " A peeled mirror of a word, reflecting nothing. It'd do them good to see for themselves. They'd not understand, but at least they might begin to think."

" What *is* it like out there, then? " I asked.

He looked at me seriously for a moment. Then he said, " All right, but keep it to yourself. There are plenty like your father who want to think that the outside is nothing but Badlands to the end of the earth, except where it's sea."

" Isn't it? " I said, in surprise.

" It isn't, boy. I'll tell you—the part of it I know, anyway . . ."

I knew, of course, that Uncle Axel had made several voyages, but he seldom spoke of them, and because I believed that there was nothing but Badlands or sea, there hadn't seemed to be much to inquire about.

That was what I had been taught, and that in the centre of the world of Badlands there was one oasis of purity, ever threatened and ever to be defended against external encroachment and internal deviation; this was our land of Labrador, of which Waknuk was only a very small district.

Labrador was thought to be the name that the Old People had given the country. The one or two references in Nicholson's *Repentances* were puzzling. Round most of Labrador there was a great deal of water, called the sea, which was important because of fish.

Nobody in Waknuk, except Uncle Axel, had ever seen this sea: it was a long way off, but if you were to go four hundred miles or so to the east or north, or a little less to the north-west, you would come to it. But if you were to go south-west or south, you wouldn't, because you would be stopped by the Badlands.

From some of the higher places in the Fringes you could look out over the Badlands, and guess about them, but nobody knew what it was really like there. There were lots of stories about them, of course, but as no one who had ever ventured into them had been known to survive for long, it was difficult to see how they could be true.

People said, though on no clear authority, that in the time of the Old People, Labrador had been so cold that no one could really live there. But that had been a long time ago. A thousand years? two thousand years? even more? Nobody knew.

There was no way of telling how many generations had lived in near savagery between the coming of Tribulation and the start of recorded history. Out of that dim wilderness period only *Repentances* survived to tell of the struggle against barbarism, and that only because it had lain safely sealed in a stone coffer for a long time—perhaps centuries—before it had been rediscovered.

The past, then, except for the last three recorded centuries, was a long state of oblivion. But if the long line of tongues had relayed some of the truth about Labrador, it must have changed greatly, for it was no longer cold except in a couple of the winter months, and, though there was plenty of forest country about Waknuk, the farther east one went the smaller the woods became, and the more the land was covered with pastures and arable fields. However, that was no reason to suppose that tradition lied—a mere change of climate was only one of the lesser things that Tribulation could have caused.

The world was thought by most people to be a pretty big place. It was probably round and, in all parts other than Labrador and Newf, quite godless.

It was, therefore, somewhat shocking, as well as exciting, for me to hear the account which my Uncle Axel opposed to this conventional view.

In Rigo (said my Uncle Axel) the sailors tell a lot of stories, but mostly they tell them among themselves, or they're liable to get into trouble with the preachers.

They say that if you sail due east the sea goes on for ever: or else it comes to an end suddenly, and you sail over the edge. To the north you can keep along the coast, and then turn west, and then south, and reach the other side of Labrador—or, if you keep straight on northwards, where it is colder, you come to a great many islands with not much living on them. To the north-east there is said to be a great land which is very godless and impure. There are Deviations there which look just like human women . . .

But the only way I know is south. Three times I've been south. You sail down the river from Rigo, and keep along with the shore to starboard. After a couple of hundred miles or so you come to the Strait of Newf. Forty miles or more farther on, the Strait widens right out; you lose Newf to port, and soon after that the Labrador coast to starboard turns into Badlands.

When you sail close inshore, you can see that there's plenty growing there. Nearly all of it is deviational. Some of the animals are so different that it'd be hard to classify them as Offences against any known species.

The fact that they are there at all makes some people think that the Badlands line may have receded thereabouts and that it has actually become habitable Fringes country now, but nobody has risked landing there to find out.

When you get a day or two's sail farther on, there's plenty of Badlands coast, with no doubt about it; and soon there aren't

any gaps: it's all Badlands. There's a mighty big river-mouth there, with Badlands up both sides, so you turn south till you pick up the coast again.

When the first sailors came to those parts, they were pretty scared. They felt they were leaving all purity behind and sailing farther and farther away from God. They all knew that if you walk on Badlands you die, and they'd never expected to see them so closely with their own eyes. But what worried them most was to see how a lot of things that are against God's laws flourish there just as if they had a right to. And it's a shocking sight, too.

You can see giant, distorted heads of corn growing higher than trees; you see huge saprophytes on rock pinnacles, trailing fathoms of aerial roots in the wind; some places there are colonies of huge fungi that you'd take at first sight for boulders; some of the succulents are like big barrels, as large as small houses, and with spines ten feet long.

You see plants that grow on the cliff-tops and send long green cables down a hundred feet and more into the sea. There are hundreds of kinds of queer things, and scarcely a normal one among them—it's a kind of jungle of Deviations, for miles and miles. Just occasionally you may see an animal, but there don't seem to be many of them.

There are a few birds, and once or twice people have seen flying things in the distance with a motion that didn't look right for birds. It's an evil land, and many a man after seeing it has suddenly understood for the first time what might happen here, but for the Purity Laws and the Inspectors.

But the Badlands aren't the worst.

Farther south you begin to see patches where only the coarser plants will grow, and poorly, at that. Then there are stretches, maybe forty or fifty miles long, where nothing grows. All the coast is empty and black and hard.

The cliffs stand up, all harsh and stark, out of the sea; and in that sea there are no fish, no weeds, not even slime. There's death in the water there. Even the barnacles and the fouling on a ship's bottom drop off, and leave her hull clean. There are no birds.

The land and the sea and the sky are all empty: it is all desolate, nothing moves except the waves, lapping on a cinder shore. It is a fearful place; a land so damned that ships put about and run out to sea for fear of it.

But it hasn't always been like that. There have been some ships that risked sailing closer inshore, and they reported that in some places they were able to see great stone ruins protruding from the black, naked ground. There was no doubt that they were artificial; they might, they thought, be remnants of one of the Old People's cities. But no one knows any more about that, for nearly all the men who were in those ships died of strange sicknesses, and those who survived were never the same men again.

The Badlands, with stretches of the utterly dead lands, go on for hundreds of miles down the coast. So far that on earlier

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voyages ships turned back for fear they would never reach any place where they could water and provision. They came home, saying that they thought the alternation of Badlands and Blacklands must continue to the end of the earth.

But they don't. The Badlands do come to an end, but the world beyond them isn't civilized, it isn't civilizable, it's more like the Fringes. They don't have any sense of sin to stop deviation. The people are Mutants, and unashamed of it; it doesn't seem to worry them when children turn out wrong.

In other parts you'll find a deviational form that thinks that it is normal, and has suppressed all other deviations. There's one tribe where all the men and women are hairless, and think that hair is the devil's mark. Another where they all have white hair and pink eyes. Some of them think it is right to have webbed fingers and toes. Some places, no woman who is not multi-breasted is allowed to have children.

Wherever the people were friendly, we tried to talk to them. Sometimes you couldn't understand anything of it, but more often, after you'd listened a bit, you'd begin to find that a lot of the words were really like our own, but spoken differently. And we'd find out some strange, disturbing things. One was that they all have much the same legends of the Old People as we have—how they had machines that could fly, how they used to build cities that floated on the sea, how a person could speak to any other person, even hundreds of miles away, and so on.

But there was another thing, too. Most of them, whatever they were like—whether they had seven toes, or four arms, or hair all over, or six breasts, they all thought they were the true image of the Old People, and anything different was a Deviation.

Of course, that seemed very foolish at first, but when we found more and more kinds just as convinced of it as we were ourselves, it began to worry some of us a bit.

We'd never thought about it before. When you are at home, you don't, because everyone is quite convinced; but after you've come across a dozen or more kinds of deviations just as much convinced as we are—well, you can't help wondering. You begin to say to yourself: what real evidence have we got about the true image? And you find it all comes from Nicholson's *Repentances*—and he admits that he was writing some generations after Tribulation started, so perhaps Nicholson himself wasn't a true image, but only *thought* he was . . .

Uncle Axel paused for a minute or more before he added, " Do you see why I've been telling you all this, Davie? "

I saw well enough, but I resisted admitting it. I was reluctant to allow the flaw in the foundation of all that I had been taught.

" I'm telling you that a lot of people saying that a thing is so doesn't *prove* it," went on Uncle Axel. " I'm telling you that nobody, *nobody* can *know* what the true image is—they can only think they know." He turned, and looked steadily at me again.

" How can I be sure that this *difference* that you and Rosalind have doesn't bring you nearer to the true image? After all, one of the things they say about the Old People is that they could talk to one another over great distances. Now, *we* can't do that—but you and Rosalind and the others you spoke about, you *can*."

He paused awhile to let that sink in.

Of course, I know now what he was doing. He did not really believe the one any more likely than the other, but he had seen that I, as well as being frightened, was beginning to feel that the difference made me inferior to other people, and he meant to give me more confidence.

He did, too.

I stopped praying to be made like other people. Instead, I lay awake in the dark that night and told Rosalind and the others all he had said. It shocked them at first, but when they had thought it over, I could feel that it helped to give them more confidence.

There was another thing, as well, that helped us. Uncle Axel made inquiries and found that just about the time we had lost one set of thought-shapes a nine-year-old boy called Walter Brent on a farm ten miles away had been hit by a falling tree, and killed. We were sorry about Walter, of course, but it was a relief to know that it had been simply an accident.

After that, we thought it wiser to find out one another's names in case something should happen to one of us. We did, but I am not going to give their real names. Some of them still live near Waknuk: soon they may have children of their own, and it would be bad for them if word should somehow get back there.

There were five of us, in all—well, when I say that, I mean that there were five of us who could talk easily in thought-shapes; there were some others, but they could do it only very weakly, so they scarcely counted. We just caught occasional shapes from them, nothing really connected.

We kept on being very discreet and careful; I'm sure nobody really knew about us but Uncle Axel, and he knew no names but Rosalind's and mine. We were able to strengthen one another, and we almost ceased to worry about the warnings and texts against Mutants. We stopped being oppressed by the thought that we were Deviations of some kind. We were just us, but very secretly . . .

And so it went on for almost six years until, suddenly, the five of us became six . . .

It was a funny thing about my little sister Petra. She seemed so normal; we never suspected—not one of us. She was a pretty child, with close golden curls, a happy child, too.

I can still picture her as a small, brightly dressed figure, constantly dashing hither and thither at a staggering run, clasping an atrociously cross-eyed doll that she loved with uncritical passion. A toy-like creature herself, prone as the next child to bumps, tears, chuckles, and solemn moments, and to a very sweet faith and trust.

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I loved her. We all loved her . . . No thought of difference ever crossed my mind, until it happened . . .

It was harvest-time. Up in the twelve-acre we had six men mowing in echelon. I had just given up my scythe to one of them and was helping with the stooking by way of a breather, when the thing hit me . . . I had never known anything like it.

One moment, I was placidly and contentedly propping up sheaves; the next, it was as if something had struck me, inside my head. Whether I staggered physically I don't know, but I shouldn't be surprised to know I did: certainly my mind staggered.

Then there was pain, pulling like a fish-hook embedded in my brain. There was no questioning whether I should go or not: I *had* to go.

I dropped the sheaf I was holding, and pelted off across the field, past a blur of amazed faces. I ran for all I was worth; across half the twelve-acre, into the lane, over the fence, and down the slope of the East Pasture, towards the river. I did not know why I was running; only that I must . . .

As I pounded at a slant across the slope, I could see the field, one of Angus Morton's, which ran down to the other side of the river, and on the path that led to the footbridge was Rosalind, running like the wind.

I kept right on: down to the bank, along past the footbridge, downstream towards the deeper pools. There was no hesitation. I kept on right to the brink of the second pool, and went into a dive without a check. I came up quite close to Petra. She was on the deep, steep-banked side, holding on to a little bush whose roots were on the point of pulling free from the soil. I swam to her and caught her under the arms . . .

Just as suddenly as it had started, the compulsion stopped. I towed her to an easier landing-place. When I found bottom and could stand up, I saw Rosalind's startled face peering anxiously over the bushes.

" Who is it? " she said, in real words, and a shaky voice. She put her hand on her forehead.

" Who was able to do that? "

I told her.

" *Petra?* " she repeated incredulously.

I carried my little sister ashore, and laid her on the grass. She was exhausted, and only semi-conscious, but there did not seem to be anything seriously wrong with her.

Rosalind came and knelt on the grass on the other side of her. We looked down at Petra in her sopping dress, with her curls darkened and matted. Then we gazed at one another.

" I didn't know. I'd no idea she was one of us," I said.

Rosalind put her hands on either side of her face, fingertips on her temples. She shook her head slightly, and looked back at me from deeply disturbed eyes.

" She isn't," she said. " She isn't one of us. None of us could *command*, like that. She's something much more than we are."

Then other people came running up. Some who had followed me from the twelve-acre, some from the other side, wondering why Rosalind had run as she had. I picked Petra up to carry her home. One of the men from the field looked at me in a puzzled way: "But how did you know?" he asked. "None of us heard a thing."

Rosalind turned on an expression of surprise.

"What, with the way she was yelling for help! You must be a deaf lot," she remarked, disparagingly.

It was confirmation enough to make them uncertain of themselves, and stop curiosity.

That night I had a dream. The whole household was gathered in the yard, singing hymns as it always did when an Offence was to be expiated. My father stood in the middle, waiting for the first rays of the rising sun. Presently they glanced redly across the yard.

He lifted the knife in his right hand. It glittered there, and everybody sang a little louder. Then he brought it down with a sweeping motion to cut the throat of the Offence—only, this time, it was no deviating lamb or sucking-pig that was being cleansed: the form that his left hand grasped by both ankles and held up ready for the knife was Petra's . . . I woke up, sweating with fright.

The next day I tried to send thought-shapes to Petra. I was anxious for her to know as soon as possible how important it was not to give herself away.

I tried hard, but I could make no contact with her. I told the others, and they tried, too, but there was no response.

Rosalind and I consulted, wondering whether we should try to warn her in ordinary words. Rosalind was against it.

"It must have been panic that brought it out," she said. "If she can't feel it now and understand, it might be dangerous to tell her about it at all. She's only six, remember. She might easily say something to make them suspicious."

I had to agree with that. It isn't easy to keep on hiding things all the time. They will slip out now and then. We'd all had difficulties at times with the unexpected word or comment that made people's eyebrows rise. Most of that trouble was due to Michael.

School, in Waknuk, meant going to the parlour of one of several old women who taught a few children how to read and write and do a little with figures. You read parts of the Bible there, and some of Nicholson's *Repentances*, but there wasn't much more to it; when you could do that well enough, you had finished with school.

But Michael's parents wanted more than that for him, so they sent him to a school over in Kentak where he learnt a great deal more than our old ladies could teach us. Of course, he wanted the rest of us to know what he was learning.

At first he wasn't very clear, but when he'd had some practice, he got good enough to hand on everything he was being taught to the rest of us. So after a time it was difficult always to remember how much one was supposed to know. We had to watch ourselves

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very carefully, particularly when people were having silly arguments that we could have settled at once; or wanted to do things one way when we knew there was a much better way.

So I understood well what Rosalind meant when she said it might be dangerous to tell Petra. We decided to wait a bit, and see how things went. We had to keep on waiting for nearly a year.

By that time, Rosalind and I were wondering how we could get married. It wasn't going to be easy. The feud between our families had been established for years. My father and half-Uncle Angus both kept hawk-like eyes upon each other's land for the least Deviation or Offence, and even went to the length of rewarding informers who brought news of irregularities in the other's territory. Rosalind's mother had already attempted match-making for her; and my mother had put one or two suitable girls in my way. Neither had any idea about us, for we only seldom and accidentally met.

Both of us knew, and had known for some time that when we married, it would have to be to one of " us." To have to live intimately with someone who had no thought-shapes would be intolerable: we'd still be closer to one another than to the people we had married, and from them we should be separated by something as wide as a different language, and more solid than a wall.

Worst of all, we'd never be able to have any confidence: it would mean a lifetime of guarding against slips, and we knew already that some slips were inevitable. Besides, when two people have known one another's thought-shapes for as long as Rosalind and I had, they grow to need one another very much.

I don't see how " normal " people who can never share their thoughts can understand how it is with us: we are so much more a part of one another. We don't flounder among the shortcomings of words; we don't hide or pretend, nor do we misunderstand one another. What, then, could there be for any of us tied closely to a half-dumb " normal " who can never at best make more than a clever guess at another's feelings and thoughts? Nothing but misery and frustration—with, sooner or later, the fatal slip or sum of slips . . .

It was an impasse. We should have had to make our own way out if the course had not been thrust upon us.

One fine May afternoon Petra went off, riding the pony. She did two things that she knew to be forbidden. First, although she was by herself, she went off our own land: secondly, she went into the woods.

As a rule, the woods about Waknuk are fairly safe, but it never does to count on that. Creatures can work their way down the necks of forest which thrust out of the Fringes almost clear across the Wild Country in places, and then slink across from one patch of woodland to another.

Big creatures seldom get as far as Waknuk; nevertheless, it is unwise to go into the woods without a weapon of some kind.

The call that came to us this time was distressed and anxious, and, though it did not have the violent, compulsive panic of the other, it was bad enough to be highly uncomfortable.

The child had no control. She simply set up a thought-pattern which blotted out everything else with a great, amorphous splodge.

I tried to get through to the others to tell them I'd attend to it, but I couldn't make contact even with Rosalind. It is difficult to describe: something like being unable to make oneself heard against a loud noise, but also rather like trying to see through a thick fog.

What made it still more troublesome was that it gave no picture or hint of what was happening. This trying to describe one sense in terms of others is so difficult—but one could say it was like a wordless yell of protest. It wasn't directed: I doubt even if she knew she was doing it . . .

I ran from the forge where I was working, and got the gun—the one that always hung ready charged and primed on the wall. Then I saddled up the bigger pony, and was away in a few minutes. The one thing that was as definite about the call as its quality was its direction. Once I was out on the green lane, I gave the pony a touch of my heels, and we were off towards the West Woods at a canter.

If only Petra had let up on that distress-pattern of hers for just a few minutes, the consequences would have been quite different. Indeed, the whole affair might have had no consequences at all. But she did not. She kept it up like a screen, and one could do nothing but make for the source as quickly as possible.

I took the branch of the track that cut through the wood to the north-east. It was kept clear because it was fairly well used to save a considerable circuit. Soon, however, I knew that the trouble was away to the right: that meant turning onto a small path where the going among the trees was less easy, but I had only to cover a couple of hundred yards of it before I reached the scene.

Petra herself, I did not see at first. What took all my attention was her pony.

It was lying in a small glade, with its throat torn open. Working at it, ripping flesh from its haunch with such single-minded intent that it had not heard my approach, was as deviational a creature as I had seen until then.

It was a reddish-brown, dappled with both yellow and darker brown spots. Its huge pads were covered in mops of fur which was matted with blood on the forepaws, showing long, curved claws. The tail, too, had fur hanging from it in a way that made it look like a huge plume.

The face on the large head was retroussé, but with two large incisors projecting. It used these, as well as its claws, to tear at the pony.

I had time to see that much and was still in the act of unslinging the gun when an arrow took it in the neck. The creature leapt writhing into the air, landed on all fours, and stood searching for the source of attack. My movement in trying to aim the gun

attracted its attention. It turned and crouched, its yellow eyes glaring.

My pony took fright, and reared, but before the creature could make its spring, two more arrows took it, one through the hind quarters, the other in the head. It stood stock-still for a moment, and then rolled over, dead.

Rosalind rode into the glade from my right, her bow still in her hand. Michael appeared from the other side, with a fresh arrow already on the string, and his eyes on the creature, making sure about it. Even though we were so close to one another, Petra's distress was still swamping us.

" Where is she? " Rosalind asked, in words.

We looked round and found her. A small figure ten feet up a young tree, clinging to it with both arms round the trunk. Rosalind rode over to encourage her to come down. She seemed unable to let go, or to move. I got off my pony, climbed up, and helped her down until Rosalind could reach up and take her. She put her on her pony in front of her, and tried to soothe her, but Petra was looking down at her own dead pony. Her distress was, if anything, intensified.

Michael joined us. He regarded Petra worriedly for a moment.

" She doesn't know what she's doing. Better start by getting her where she can't see the pony."

We moved off a little. He spoke to her.

She did not seem to understand, and glanced at me for reassurance. The distress-pattern did not abate.

" Perhaps if we were all to try the same thought-pattern on her simultaneously," I suggested. " Soothing—sympathizing—relaxing. Ready? "

We tried, for a full fifteen seconds.

" No good," said Rosalind. " There was a moment's check, then she crowded us out again."

The three of us regarded Petra helplessly.

" Rosalind," I said, " it's very dangerous. Petra will bring them all here. We've got to stop this."

Then, as we were waiting, tense and anxious, the thing that I had been afraid of happened . . .

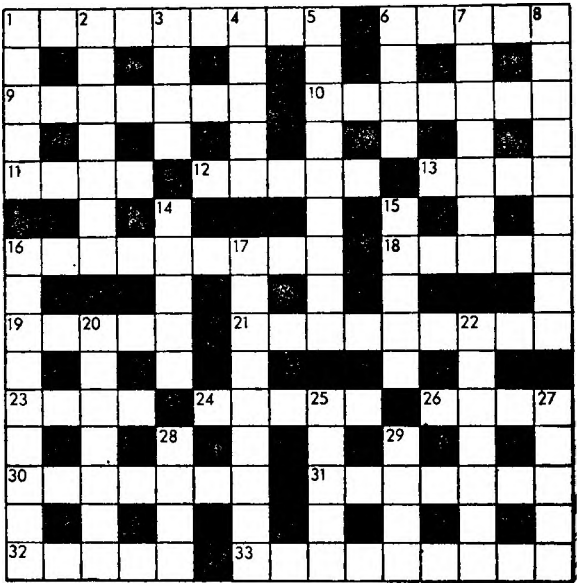
★ ***The Second Part of " The Chrysalids," by John Wyndham, appears in next month's Argosy on sale September 9.***

ARGOSY CROSS WORD

☆

Solution on Page 83

☆



CLUES

Across

1 Suitable shop-front for a haberdasher, perhaps (3-6).
6 Ascend rather like a centipede (5).
9 One who comes late to the harvest (7).
10 Ruin cob in crossing the stream (7).
11 The Yorkshire terrier, no doubt (4).
12 Early French lesson—soon to be forgotten? (5).
13 Trollope hero from Northern Europe (4).
16 A list of music-hall acts? No, something on different lines (4-5).
18 A green that means stop rather than go (5).
19 The boy to make the tea down under (5).
21 "With sweet —— and with eglantine" (Shakespeare) (4-5).
23 As indolent as bone (4).
24 Habit that grows on us with years (5).
26 Something to get your teeth into, honey (4).
30 Style certain to describe a haircut (7).
31 What gin! Very warming (7).
32 Live in good condition, mostly (5).
33 Nearly led into confusion with erudition (9).

Down

1 Too big, and nothing less than a fanatic (5).
2 One who may welcome an ill wind (7).
3 Where barristers take their refreshment? (4).
4 "By forms unseen their —— is sung" (Collins) (5).
5 Describes something of no value—but can it also be this? (9).
6 It is as broad as it is long, anyway (4).
7 Tend to be out of the perpendicular (7).
8 Do managers send these to tell clients they are overdrawn? (4-5).
14 Support for a mast or a figure (5).
15 Welshman who is good at fencing? (5).
16 Bad ale? Tut! It's well arranged (9).
17 Explosive combination colloquially causing consternation (4-5).
20 Suitable heraldic device for a chemist (7).
22 "Can —— urn or animated bust . . . ?" (Gray) (7).
25 German town or plane (5).
27 A devil on the golf course? (5).
28 Heat up this island for a drink (4).
29 The chief part of the globe's surface (4).

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