Men are like Animals

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Donald Macpherson

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by

DONALD MACPHERSON

Mr. Donald Macpherson is an expert in the occult and macabre. His first novel, *Go Home Unicorn*, displayed his unusual imagination and his ability to make a thrilling plot out of events which are perfectly credible if one believes in extra-sensory perception. *Men are like Animals* is another scientific thriller in this same realm, more exciting than *Go Home Unicorn*, stronger in human interest, and resting on a scientific basis which is not far-fetched or difficult for the ordinary reader—it would make a magnificent film on the lines of Frankenstein's monster, if the board of censors would pass it.

Several of the characters of *Go Home Unicorn* reappear in *Men are like Animals* —the clever and unscrupulous Olive, the intelligent Reggie Brooks, with his attractive wife Mary, and perhaps most likeable of all, the hard-boiled Canadian journalist George McTavish. The scene is worked out among the Thousand Islands of Canada, and there is an electric atmosphere from the moment that the cat leaps five feet into the air, scuttling rapidly with its back feet, to the last page, where the sun returns after the storm. The infernal episode of the owl in the night-time, and the even more infernal introduction of the thought-machine, will scarcely be forgotten by the most hardened reader.

Men Are Like Animals

by the same author

GO HOME UNICORN

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Note

With the exception of certain internationally known names, which are printed without alteration, all characters and incidents in this book are strictly imaginary, and no reference is intended to any living person.

Chapter I

The Lady in the Motor Boat

There seems to have been no particular reason why circumstance should have singled out MacReady, deck-hand and man-out-of-all-work in general, to play Harlequin to the dramatic events that took place on Nelson Island. It is, of course, true that nature had designed him expressly for a pantaloon, whom fate and foremen alike took pleasure in cuffing. Mild in his manner, familiar to the public librarians of a dozen cities, inherently shifty in his eye, he was obviously the first to be blamed when anything went wrong, and the first to be fired when his superior had been drinking. But to have become entangled at the outset with the vagaries of those strange occurrences, to blunder into the web of the exotic and beautiful woman who was their mover, and, in addition, to lose yet another job, this time as cargo hand on the ferryboat *Thousand and One Islands*—a job, too, which he had held down over the unprecedented period of fifteen months—to encounter all this during the space of three days seems to have been due to a

cumulative sport of fate undeserved by even the meekest of men. It was, as he himself in a reminiscent mood later put it, a Bit Thick. As for Nelson Island, that might perhaps have been expected. Nelson Island is eccentric in its very familiarity. The last of the Thousand Islands, it is utterly peaceful and utterly bucolic. It is in fact so peculiarly familiar that it gives the impression of unreality, and was thus properly the scene of Strange Adventure. Those who have been to the Island will know what I mean.

It was, then, Sunday afternoon on the Shore Road. MacReady had escaped from the ferryboat and was sitting by the roadside. He was in fact wondering whether the cat was mad. This was, indeed, no ordinary cat. Escaping from the lash of the mate's tongue that hot, June afternoon, MacReady had trudged along the limestone track in the brazen sun, towards a farmhouse where a drink and some American cigarettes awaited him. In the distance he could have seen, had he looked behind him, smoke lazily rolling from the white ship's funnel. Between him and the mainland stretched three miles or so of blue unruffled water. In the distance he could hear the rumble of a buggy carrying home the last of the passengers. A still, dusty, blue day, and as hot as the devil. A perfectly ordinary Sunday afternoon, one would have said. But to repeat, it was no ordinary cat that he saw in the road twenty yards ahead of him. That is why he had taken the unprecedented course of sitting down on a rock to watch it. MacReady

was not given to watching Nature, and least of all to watching stray cats.

"There it goes again!" The words burst from his lips. As he spoke, the cat leaped five feet into the air, scuttling rapidly with its back feet, and landed once more on the road, in a manner foreign to all the cats he had known. MacReady was amazed and perturbed. It was unnatural. With the instinct of the country born to kill what may be killed, he reached for a stone that lay ready to his hand and took aim. Then he thought better of it, stood up, and began to walk cautiously towards the animal, still holding the stone in readiness.

What might have happened if it had been one of the other deck-hands on the *Thousand and One Islands* may never be known, nor whether the course of events might have been altered. But MacReady was by no means an ordinary sailor. Diffident and shy by nature, the boisterous company of the taxicab shelter was not for him, where his shipmates of the ferryboat used to gather between sailings. Nor was he to be seen at the monthly winter dances at the Nelson Island Town Hall, where young bucks still swing their partners in the square dances of a generation ago. While MacReady was not above these things, he was, nevertheless, not part of them. And in any case his worship of the other sex was carried out from a distance. For when, again, his companions were to be found at the Superior Picture Theatre at Castleton, port of call on the mainland,

he was generally to be seen at the public library, where his fine scorn for all romance was well known. At this moment he had in fact on his bed at home the best selling and very scandalous *Memoirs of a Court Dancer*, with a marker at the last and most scandalous chapter of all. Thus it may faithfully be claimed that of all deck-hands stalking a cat in the continent of America, MacReady was probably the only one who would, or could, have behaved as he did.

For he suddenly stopped in his tracks, dropped the stone, slapped his thigh, and with a burst of laughter cried out:

"By golly, yes. That's Nyejinski."

At which surprising remark the startled animal looked up, hesitated a moment, bellied over the brow of a rock away from the water and was gone.

That, thought MacReady later, should have been enough for any man's day. But the startling part was only beginning. For from under his feet, it seemed, on the lake side of the road, from what his reading had taught him to call "the bowels of the earth", from nowhere at all, came the most silvery, laughing, woman's voice.

"*N*ijinski, Mr. MacReady," it said.

At once the admirer of the ballet was gone, and in his place stood again the deck-hand. Leaped, rather. For as he said afterwards, he must have jumped a foot. Automatically, at such a voice, his hand went to his cap.

"Ma'am?" he said, turning towards the water, where the brow of the rock hangs over.

"*NI*jinski, I said," repeated the voice, a little more impatiently.

MacReady saw a woman standing in a motor boat, which had been concealed by the steep limestone rock. She had on a pair of dark goggles, and as he moved nearer to the water he could see that she wore leather breeches. That she was young, the voice had told him. That she belonged to the class which the islanders call vaguely "the summer people", he sensed from her bearing. Summer people he saw daily during the summer months on the ferryboat, and assisted them with their pianos, their dogs, parrots, violincellos, hold-alls, and other strange belongings.

"Not an American," he reflected. It is to be feared that MacReady was staring. He came to himself with a start. She was speaking again.

"Well?" asked the voice.

"Yes, ma'am. *NI*jinski," answered MacReady.

"Yes, of course," again somewhat impatiently. "Mr. MacReady," went on the voice, "I am in difficulty. Will you help me?"

MacReady looked down at the leather-sheathed figure beneath him, and at the head barely appearing above the rocky edge. Had he been a wise man he would have remarked that it was a lovely day and gone on his path. But he was not a wise man, at least on that day, and in that company. For

somehow or other, whether by the poise of her body or the softly peremptory tone of her voice, the lady of the motor boat had conveyed to him the fact that here was not merely good looks, but Beauty, such as he had read of during his excursions into biography and seen during his less frequent visits to the pictures. He was, as we know, given to expressing his thoughts to himself in words.

"Some dame!" he reflected, in the manner of the best moving picture models. "Goggles and all!" He was a simple soul.

But the lady was watching him obviously waiting for an answer, and obviously—it would have appeared to any disinterested woman looking on—knowing the value of an embarrassing silence. Then:

"You see," she went on, "I can't get the motor to go. The starter won't work, and I can't turn the engine."

Without more words the man bent down in order to lower himself into the boat. As he did so, a certain uneasiness came over him. Or perhaps he recognized an uneasiness that had been growing since the beginning of the meeting. At any rate, he half straightened himself again, to see the lady of the boat looking at him through her goggles. A man may be somewhat too much of a coward to give way to his cowardice. This happened to MacReady. He was afraid to run away. So, moving slightly along the rock, as though to obtain a better place to jump

down from, he put his hand on the limestone and lightly lowered himself into the launch.

"Here's the starter button," said his hostess. "Perhaps you can make it work."

He bent over the button and pushed hard with his thumb. To his amazement his push was answered immediately by the roar of a high-powered engine. The boat leaped forward under him. MacReady found himself lying on his back, his knees sprawling in the air. He heard a woman's merry laugh. In fury he straightened himself to jump to land.

"The cow!" he thought. "Fooling me like that!"

Even more than he knew, his exasperation was justified. For the land was forty feet away and the powerful motor boat rapidly making towards the open lake!

It was Bernard Shaw who pointed out that if we wish to discover an expert on hair restorers, we should not go to the luxuriantly tressed but to the baldhead. Or if we desire to know the best plays, we should ask the stockbroker, not the actor manager, who has no time for the theatre. Now MacReady was neither baldheaded nor the manager of a theatre, but he was a sailor. And he could not swim. It was then with real terror that he saw the quickly widening gulf between him and the island—a terror that was increased by the casual attitude of his companion sitting in the stern, with the tiller in her hand. For by a rapid flash of intuition he sensed that this was no accident, that in some mysterious way or other it meant business.

"Take me back, you . . . you . . . " he spluttered. Even in his extremity MacReady could not speak to such a woman in the manner, let us say, of man to man.

The woman laughed a laugh that had lost some of its silk.

"Perhaps I can help you out," she said. "Was it bitch you were going to say? An animal, Mr. MacReady, that has its necessary place in the world, though, as an epithet applied to one of my sex, a trifle derogatory, let us say. Or perhaps", she turned her head for a moment to the shore, "one of the other b's? Most of them, however, seem for some reason or other to have masculine associations."

The shore was a good hundred yards off. MacReady could see nobody on it. He stood up and advanced towards her.

"Take me back, you . . ." he repeated.

"We may let it go at bitch. And," she added, in a low voice, "sit down!"

MacReady shivered, as though a cloud had passed over the sun. He sat down. The shore was receding fast. He scanned it anxiously to see whether there was any sign of life in one of the cottages. But Sunday afternoon on Nelson Island is given over to sleep by resident and visitor alike. Nothing stirred. In any case, the sight of a young man and a woman in a boat would not arouse any curiosity, especially at such a distance. Nobody would know whether he

was signalling or waving. Even if he could attract somebody's attention, and were rescued, the ridicule would kill him. He would have to change his job, and changing jobs once more. . . . Well, it couldn't be done on a good many counts. But where was this mad woman taking him?

Suddenly terror struck his heart. Mad. Yes, of course. He would have to shout. He drew a deep breath.

His companion had been watching him through the goggles.

"Don't shout," she said, again in that dangerously low voice. "You needn't be afraid of that. I'm not mad. Not by any means. *But don't shout.*"

He saw that she had her right hand in the pocket of her breeches.

MacReady was silent. The woman turned the tiller, changing the course in a wide sweep to the west, from the northerly direction in which they had been travelling. They were leaving the Island, and making for the open lake. We have seen that Nelson is the most westerly of the multitude of islands which dot the lower St. Lawrence River, and are known to pleasure seekers as the Thousand Islands. Upon them it is well known that plutocratic fancy has erected many fantastic residences. One may see baronial castles, moat and all, with concrete swimming pools to the side, and Greek temples with a motor-boat shed attached. Some of these places have now fallen into decay. Their swimming pools

serve as the breeding place for frogs; and the swallows, aptly enough, have made their homes beneath the temple roofs. In common with one or two others of the larger islands, Nelson Island does not share except incidentally in the frivolity of catering for tourists. The economists know how it makes its living, but they have not told anybody.

To which of these islands he was being transported, MacReady had no means of guessing, nor indeed whether they were going to any of them or to the mainland. After his first mild attempt, however, and chilled as much by the tone of his captor's voice as by the hint that there was a revolver in that capable looking pocket, he considered that the less he said the better. The launch was carefully steered away from the two or three grain boats that were clanking over the lake that hot Sunday afternoon. By now the motor boat and its passengers were nearly out of sight of land. Suddenly the woman did something to the engine and the screw ceased to revolve. They were drifting. After a while they stopped. The baking sun was behind them. The water was blue and peaceful. There was not a cloud in the sky, and hardly a sound save the soft splash of the water on the sides of the boat, and occasionally the distant hoot of a steamer.

MacReady saw with some trepidation that his captor was looking at him. "I wish she would say something," he thought. The silence became almost unbearable.

"Well, Mr. MacReady?" He started at the sound of her voice.

"Well, Mr. MacReady, how about a song? We've quite a while to wait."

MacReady's jaw dropped in dismay.

"I . . . me . . .?" he stuttered. "I . . . I don't sing."

"Not ordinarily, perhaps, but these are unusual circumstances, and I won't be critical. Something to while away the time. It will keep your courage up."

"But. . . ."

The woman put her hand in her pocket. "A song please, Mr. MacReady." There was menace in her voice.

There was nothing for it. MacReady's mouth was dry, and his heart was excusably tattooing beneath his shirt. He could only think of one song, and he sang it.

> "'*Twas on the Isle of Capri that I found her,*
> *Beneath the shade of . . . of . . .*"

MacReady's voice tailed away. He was not used to singing in public. Anxiously watching his companion, he had seen her lips compress. How was he to know that it was to avoid a smile? What was that tree in the song? A ludicrous stage fright held him voiceless.

"Start it again, Mr. MacReady. That often helps." The man hesitated.

"Start it again, please." Again there was the trace of a threat.

With throat dry, his heart pumping, and his breath catching, MacReady began again.

> "'*Twas on the Isle of Capri that I found her,*
> *Beneath the shade of a . . . a hickory tree,*
> *Oh, I can see . . .*"

And so to the dismal end he sang it, his thin voice quavering as he watched his strange companion. His apprehension was unfounded. Never was tenor soloist more highly applauded. Loud and long, the woman clapped gauntleted hands, and laughed with ironical merriment.

"Bravo. Bravo," she cried. "I like that," she said. "The first time I've heard it. I've been abroad, you know." This with a touch of apology. "If you were a botanist, however, you would know that there are no hickories in Capri. It's an exclusively American genus. Still, the song will pass—all but the bit about the thin golden band on her finger. The rest is most appropriate. I rather think that will do for the present." They lapsed into silence. . . .

The sun sank and sank and still they did not move, except as far as was necessary to keep them in approximately the same position. There was still no wind, and hardly any current. Suddenly the woman looked at her wrist watch.

"Yes, it's nearly six o'clock," she said. "Time to eat, if you do not mind sharing my little meal."

From a basket she produced coffee and sandwiches.

Once more, waiting! MacReady began to find the situation insupportable. He decided to make a protest, but quailed before the formidable competence of his abductor. Like a man speaking an unfamiliar tongue he composed his sentence. Then he rejected it for another. Finally, with as much assurance as he could summon, he blurted out: "Would you mind telling me where you are taking me, and what you are going to do with me?"

"All in good time. I don't mind telling you that I am waiting until it is dark."

The sky began to cloud over and a breeze blew up. "Dark enough, I think," she said. "Now, Mr. MacReady, down in the bottom of the boat on your stomach, please."

"But. . . ."

"Down on your stomach, please."

MacReady lay down, squeezing out of the way of a large heavy package sitting at the bottom of the launch and a pair of long rubber boots.

The boat was started. "You will have noticed", she said, "that what you pressed when you came into the boat was not the starter. It operates a hooter, which I never use. I never knew why they put it that end."

MacReady lay ignominiously, cursing himself. He felt the boat veer round several times, but soon lost all track of direction. He reckoned they must have travelled for more than an hour, and at a good speed. Once he tried to peer up at the sky, but the sharp

point of a shoe was dug into the small of his back and he did not make the attempt again. It was now quite dark, and MacReady could tell that a fairly stiff breeze was blowing. The speed was slackened, and the engine finally cut off. They were approaching their goal. A slight scrape of the boat's side, and they had stopped.

"Stay there, Mr. MacReady," he heard. "I am going to blindfold you." A soft scarf was wrapped round his eyes, and he was told to stand up.

"If you don't mind, I think you had better take hold of my hand. Let me see, there was something about that in the song, wasn't there? It's all turned out very fortunately. Now! Step up! A little higher! That's it!"

He was led along a path for what seemed about fifty yards, then stopped. He heard a key produced and a door was opened. Then he was taken along a passage and across a room, and told to bend his head. Then down some steps and along another passage into another room.

"All right, Mr. MacReady. Here we are. You may take off the bandage."

An electric light was switched on. After a little blinking he looked round, and saw that he was in what appeared to be a basement, with a bed and two chairs, and a couple of rag rugs on the floor. Not much else besides, save a washstand and a small mirror. The walls were bare.

"The room was originally intended for the handy-

man. I think you will find the bed comfortable enough, though I don't know that the mattress has been aired. I will bring your breakfast in the morning. Toast and coffee?"

MacReady said nothing. Events were too strange for him.

"Good night, then," said the woman. She left the room, still facing him, and with her hand in her pocket. A moment later, she returned.

"I ought to tell you", she said, "that it's no use trying any tricks. There's no window to this place. It's cut out of the solid rock, together with several others. Even if you could get out, there is my dog Cæsar around, who is a Great Dane, and nice enough when you know him but not particular when you don't. And in any case . . . well, I won't have any nonsense."

As if this settled the matter, she walked out of the door, contemptuously turning her back on him. This was too much for MacReady. With a jump he had her by the shoulders, intending to force her down. For a moment he thought he had succeeded. Then, with a strength surprising for a woman, she had wrenched herself free, snatched the revolver from her pocket, and stood facing him with it.

"It's just as well that you should see for yourself that this isn't a bluff." Panting just perceptibly, she nodded at the revolver, and disappeared once more behind the door. . . .

It says much for MacReady's nerves that he slept

soundly through the night, after having first verified the fact that the room was indeed cut out of the rock. "Probably intended as a cold storeroom," he thought. With this thought in his mind he went to bed, and did not wake until he saw his captor standing by the side of his bed. She was dressed as on the night before, and still had on the goggles.

"I've brought your breakfast," she said, indicating a tray on the table. "All the comforts of home. You don't want to try any more . . . er . . . wrestling, do you? Because if you do, you might as well get it over with."

She stood a couple of feet from the bed. Now there was one thing that his hostess had not provided, and that was pyjamas. MacReady was sleeping in his shirt. Much therefore though the woman infuriated him, he was prevented from doing anything by his sense of shame, together with a grim respect with which he now regarded her. Besides, the position was all to her advantage.

She looked at him for perhaps a minute. "Well," she said finally, "that's all right then. I'll be back in an hour."

The door slammed, and he heard the key turn in the lock. MacReady dressed himself, and set to the breakfast. Meanwhile, he attempted to make out why he had been brought here so ignominiously. Somehow he felt that, as the woman had said, she was as sane as he was himself. Ransom was out of the question. Deck-hands on the *Thousand and One Islands* are

not worth holding up for ransom. Besides, the woman gave every evidence of wealth. Murder was obviously not in her mind, which was some relief. The whole thing was a puzzle. One thing that worried him was his job. He would be missing for the eight o'clock trip at least, and the captain's temper was short, especially on a Monday morning. His heart had the familiar feeling of approaching doom. If ever he had a chance, he thought grimly what he would do to this absurd woman. He decided to wait for his chance. He was a prudent man.

In about an hour, his captor came back.

"Up and dressed! That's good! I see you've made a good breakfast. Now to business. You were asking why I brought you here, and what I wanted to do with you. I'm sure you have decided that I don't intend to murder you. Why should I? Or hold you for ransom, either?"

Macready was watching her for an opportunity to catch her off her guard. The woman had sensed it. She took the revolver from her pocket and eyed the man appraisingly.

"I thought we were done with that nonsense," she said. "You really haven't a chance. I'm a pretty good shot with this, and nobody can possibly hear anything that goes on down here."

She stepped back to the door. "See that mark on the wall?" She pointed to a discoloration on the plaster, about two inches wide and at the opposite end of the room. Then with the careless grace of long prac-

tice she flicked up the little pearl-handled weapon. Crack! The plaster fell down, drilled exactly in the middle of the spot she had indicated.

"You see, it's little but it works," she said.

MacReady stood very still.

"Now I'm sorry I can't tell you exactly what I want you for. That would spoil it. But I can tell you that you will come to no permanent harm and won't be hurt. You ought to get your job again, if you don't talk. For that matter, you'll find you won't be able to talk even if you want to. They will think you have been on a spree, which won't hurt your reputation much. Do it good, if anything."

MacReady reflected that she didn't know much about ships' mates, but felt it was better not to say so.

"But what is it all about?" he stuttered.

"I can't tell you." Her voice was a trifle impatient. "It'd spoil one of the controls." She went on more tolerantly. "I don't suppose your scientific education ran as far as explaining what a control is. It should have, because that's the most important thing in science. But I may tell you quite broadly that a control is . . . well, exactly what we should spoil if I told you what was going to happen. Sit down there."

She indicated one of the chairs. MacReady eyed it suspiciously.

"No, it really isn't electrocution. You may move it a bit, if you like."

He moved the chair. As she had said, there were no wires or anything else suspicious attached to it. He

lifted it in the air. It was a perfectly ordinary chair. Then he breathed a long sigh, and sat down.

He saw the woman at the door, her hand on what looked to be a switch. This she carefully moved down little by little, watching him intently and frowning. His head began to grow misty. What was this she was saying? Nijinski? No, that must be what she had said before. He found himself standing up, moving, out in the open air. Drunk. . . . Drunk. . . . DRUNK . . . . Yes. That was it. He must be DRU . . . .

The sky was blue. There was not even a cloud. Late that afternoon he suddenly found himself at the wharf at Castleton. The captain was telling him, with many embellishments, that somebody else had his job. . . .

Chapter 2

Terror on Wings

About two weeks later, young Mrs. Reginald Brooks sat on the stile of a summer cottage in Nelson Island waiting for the master of the house to come home. It was about five o'clock, and the sun was still hot. This was their first summer holiday together since their much advertised wedding. It is not often that a Canadian wedding achieves the dignity of the French fashion papers. The Brooks-Raiche wedding did, and for good measure there was even a paragraph in *L'Illustration*, describing in succinctly French terms, the lady's dress and the eminence of the guests. It is not often that a Canadian wedding is mentioned from the platform of a German scientific meeting. The Brooks-Raiche wedding was. "We have been fortunate enough to prevail upon Dr. Brooks, who was recently married and is passing through this city on his wedding trip, to speak to us upon the subject which he has made peculiarly his own. We hope that his charming wife will hold this intrusion against us, not him." From which it may be inferred that Mary

Brooks soon experienced the disadvantages of being married to a celebrity. And finally, it is not often that a Canadian wedding is chronicled in the European news reels. But there it was, for the curious to see. "Dr. Brooks, whose hurdling record at the international games is still unbroken, was married last week. Here he is, coming out of the church, his beautiful bride on his arm. Congratulations, Dr. Brooks, and may you leap lightly over the hurdles of matrimony." The Brooks-Raiche match was, in fact, an affair of incredible publicity, entirely, it may be said, unsought by the principals themselves. But the world took an interest in Brooks, and their wedding woke up and found itself famous.

For Reginald Brooks was a scientist of more than ordinary interest to the world at large. Atoms, electrons, nebulæ . . . in such things the public takes a certain dizzy delight, and in listening to their explanation by the major prophets in homely metaphor and diagrams of deceptive simplicity. Relativity, as expounded by Einstein, the man in the street gaped at and retired discomfited. Chemistry, even, has been known to stir his pulse to the extent of a quarter column in the more conservative newspapers, when some worker has spent a year in isolating a new element or in discovering an old one in a comet. But in all these things public interest, which is newspaper interest, is transitory. A kitten's real interest is in its own tail. The man in the street's real interest is in his insides. Are there not twenty articles in the Press each

day on "Knowing Your Body", to one on "Knowing Your Atoms" or "Spinning the Nebulæ"? The human being is an intellectual hypochondriac. As the poet who was the epitome of the man-in-the-street tells us, the proper study of mankind is man.

Thus it was that Brooks had an initial start over the atom-twisters and the star-gazers. For he was not only a biologist, with a knack, which puzzled and disconcerted him, of striking the popular fancy—as when he developed a guinea-pig which broke every law of its being by growing a six-inch tail, an occasion which was signalized in every boys' paper in the world by half-tone pictures depicting Brooks with the new creation on his knee—or when he demonstrated that the sensitive plant, immortalized by Shelley, could learn, and was shown in the Sunday newspapers in cap and gown teaching the multiplication table to a room full of cabbages. But in addition to this wholly unsought propensity towards the Sunday News he had lately been investigating the most puzzling and intimate feature of man's internal economy, that tail in which the human kitten takes a more than ordinary interest, on which, indeed, it sits in happy and unique pride—the act of thinking. Known to the Nobel committee before he was thirty, senior neurologist at the renowned McDuffie Institute of Montreal, that gilt-edged creation of a hard-fisted lumberman's fancy, he had in the last eighteen months bared the action of the brain in a series of experiments which, according to those who knew, were unsur-

passed for brilliance of conception, thoroughness of execution, and novelty of outlook. Brooks's discoveries bade fair to revolutionize the science of psychology, although he never ceased to tell reporters that he was not himself a psychologist and knew nothing about that subject. This latest exploit was heralded in the *New York Record*, and, equally, recorded in the *Los Angeles Herald*. The *Sunday Telegram-Courier* printed an interview on the future of the human mind, in which he was made to say that thought could be weighed like butter. ("I most certainly did not," said Brooks, "what I said was that it is as easy to measure the intensity of thought as to weigh butter!") In short, much against his will, a new celebrity had arrived. On this whirlwind of syndicated news the Brooks-Raiche wedding was borne inevitably towards the higher publicity.

But that was all finished a year ago. And now Mary Brooks sat and waited for her husband on a stile leading to what is known as Willow Point on Nelson Island. Willow Point was chosen because it was the opposite in every way of the famous Brooks-Raiche wedding. It is quiet. It is secluded. It is simple. You live in the single cottage on the twenty acres, and you wash in the lake. You wear few and old clothes. You sleep on a hard mattress. You cook your own breakfast on a wood fire, with wood that your husband has sawn in the despairing fury of self-righteous exercise. You are three miles from the village, which is itself three miles from the mainland, so that your

friends must be very hardy and very dear to reach you, while you are almost inaccessible to your acquaintances, and quite out of the reach of casual visitors, reporters, and publicity men. In a word, Willow Point is a small paradise on earth, and entirely delightful.

Camping primitively in a cottage is a concession to what Freud would call the Canadian's super-ego, that mass of inhibitions, habits, rules of life, acquired in early childhood, and which exercises such a tyrannical sway over us all as adults. It may punish us harshly when we disobey its mandates. Then we will snub our best friend, offend our testamentary aunt, run our new motor bicycle unaccountably into the lamp post. "I can't imagine why I did it," we say. "I never did such a thing before." But the super-ego knows why. We have offended its code—climbed out of that position into which it has pleased God to call us, been extravagant when our lamented parents have inculcated the necessity of economy, looked with interest at our neighbour's wife when we have at heart the instincts of a puritan. The super-ego punishes us and we feel more comfortable about it all. Sometimes, like the famous judge of the Dead, it castigates first on principle. Then we are free to commit our crimes. So it is with the city-living but soil-loving Canadian. He spends his summer in self-sentenced hard labour—hewing of wood, pumping of water, and sweeping of floors. He blisters his hands tilling the soil in impossibly rocky places. He smites

himself for the postman's kindly offices by walking a mile and a half for his letters. He fishes for fish that he would send back to his fishmonger with a complaint. In a word, he pays for his next year's comfort by six weeks of self-inflicted toil. "I feel all set up for the winter," he says. "It's good to get down to the soil."

Those blisters and that backache are the super-ego's retribution for his life of ease in his profession and his business. Brooks was not a Canadian. He had only been in the country for two years. But his wife—good Canadian that she was—had the theory that all men liked camps, and Willow Point was indeed a haven of quiet. So far as an Englishman may do so, he had taken to it as a duck to water, though splitting wood and rising at seven did seem to him an unnecessary rigour. But, of course, his super-ego was cast on different lines from those of his adopted countrymen. Meanwhile, Mary tapped one small foot against the other. She watched the cars pass on the distant road by which her husband was to come. She began to quote to herself impatiently. "Why is his chariot so long in coming? To every man a damsel or two. No, I don't like that," she added hastily to herself. "But he is a long time. There he is. No, there are two people. Yes, but that *is* Reggie. I do hope some reporter or other hasn't got hold of him."

Jumping to her feet, she waved her hand round and round, running along the rough track that leads to the main road. Now they were within speaking

distance. She saw that the other man was carrying a bag. Her heart sank.

"Well, Reggie, you have been a long time. I thought you were never coming."

"The boat was late." She noticed that he did not look at her. At last she caught his eye with a note of interrogation concerning the other man. Brooks was plainly feeling a little uneasy.

Indicating the other, he said: "This is Martin. He has come to help us out."

"Help us out, Reggie?" The girl was plainly astonished. "But, Reggie dear. . . ." She looked round at the quiet fields, hummocked where a past generation of farmers had tilled them, but now overgrown with grass. She heard the soft call of the birds and in the distance the hardly perceptible splash of the water against the rocks. "Even the noises are quiet here," she thought. And was this . . . this lout coming to spoil it all? Help them out! She looked the unfortunate visitor up and down contemptuously. Then turning pointedly to her husband:

"But was it necessary?" she asked.

Brooks was momentarily growing more uncomfortable. The man he had called Martin was plainly trying to keep a neutral attitude, though it could be observed that the looks he surreptitiously cast every now and again at Mary were charged with astonishment, which later gave way to something nearly approaching hatred. Naturally enough!

Brooks relieved a tense situation. "Go over to the

cottage," he said to the other man, pointing to the red-roofed little house, now about fifty yards away. "There are some things I want to talk over with Mrs. Brooks."

The man ambled along with his suit case. When he was out of hearing: "Why *did* you bring him, Reggie? We don't want anybody else here. Why, it was only this morning that you were saying what fun it was to do things together."

"He's out of work, and he's been a butler-chauffeur. He hasn't saved anything—he sent all his money when he was in a job to a sick sister in Newfoundland. I thought he would be useful to . . . to saw wood, and that sort of thing, for a day or so, anyhow."

"What do you know about him? Has he any references?"

Brooks was silent. They were walking along the limestone rocks fronting the lake. Nothing was said for a minute or so.

"Well, let's not talk about Martin any more," she said finally. "I suppose we'll have to keep him a day or two. But you can't expect me to like him."

They sat down on the rock together, still without speaking. Suddenly she smiled affectionately at him. "Of course you fed him before you left Castleton?" she asked.

Brooks nodded. . . .

They sat on the verandah of the cottage after dinner. Dusk was falling. The lakeside was about thirty

yards away, at the foot of a gentle slope covered by a thin layer of grassy earth. Hardly a ripple disturbed the three miles of water that separated them from the mainland. The silence without was broken only by an occasional dull throb of life, the muffled hoot of a distant car, the trailing note of shouting children. From time to time a fish rose, and they could see the widening circles interlace. Behind them, in the house, they heard the quiet tread of the man Martin in the kitchen.

"He's bringing coffee out," said Brooks. "Don't you like it?"

Mary screwed up her lips into what the irreverent might have called a grimace. Once more they were silent. The hoot of a bird sounded mournfully from a distant tree.

"That's the owl I found today in a hollow elm," said Mary. "The biggest one I ever saw. There are two of them."

"Unpleasant birds, owls," said Brooks. "Symbols of knowledge and stupidity. Very appropriate. Nothing looks wiser than an old owl sitting on his perch. Entirely self-contained and self-complacent. Just like science."

The dismal hoot sounded again, a little nearer. The girl shivered slightly.

"Yes, I know, Reggie," she said. "They're inhuman. I get afraid of your science sometimes. It's just a great owl groping about in the dark, living on things that haven't done anybody any harm, mice

and rats and guinea-pigs, and things. Think of all the frogs you buy for your laboratory. I heard young Lubitsch say, with tremendous pride, the other day: 'Yes, we *use* two thousand frogs a year at our place.' *Use* them, Reggie! Or was it two thousand quarts of frogs? I don't remember. How many quarts of mice and guinea-pigs do you use a year? Remember that article you showed me the other day. That was a horror. Something to do with frogs' nerves. 'Over six hundred preparations were made and photographed, and the results were somewhat inconclusive.' Even you were laughing at it. I suppose if you are a frog, 'preparation' is a polite term for having a nerve taken out of your leg and stuck on a piece of glass. One doesn't *use* the rest of the frog."

"But I didn't do that, Mary."

"No, but your work is just as bad, worse, if anything. You are an expert on the brain. You've got to kill an animal, slice up its brain, doctor the slice up with all kinds of horrible dyes, and put it under the microscope, before you write a paper saying that you don't quite understand it. I often wish you were in another profession. All these experiments and this tampering with life seem to me to be destructive. Some day, Life is going to hit back at you. Don't let it, Reggie. I couldn't bear it."

A large fish jumped in the lake. Then, as though to answer derisively for the man, the melancholy screech sounded once more, this time from close at hand.

"Well, cheer up, old girl," he said. "The owl won't do you any harm . . . nor will science."

"Well, I hope you're right. But it frightens me." They were silent for a while. In a sudden fit of apprehension, she clutched at her lover's hand.

"I think I'll go in," she said. "I don't feel very well."

He cursed the bird under his breath. This was not like Mary, the lover of all wild things. "Perhaps it's a bit mopey out here for her," he thought. He reassured her. "The coffee will be out in a minute. He will be disappointed if we do not have it out here now."

They heard the step of the man carrying the tray across the living-room to the open door. Suddenly, with a wicked despairing shriek, a great winged shape swooped above their heads, wailing as it disappeared again into the dark.

"Take me in, Reggie, take me in quickly!" the girl cried. "I can't stand it."

He took her in his arms, lifting her up. "It's only the owl, darling. Come along then."

He was too late! With a howl of demoniacal fury, the great bird had returned and was upon them. He sensed a cruel, curving beak, great eyes, and wicked talons clawing at his face. Struggling to beat off the attack, he knocked over the chair. Horror! Mary had fallen and was lying on the ground face down. Before he could lift her into shelter, the great bird was upon her head, clawing, lunging with its beak. Brooks

made a dart at the bird's throat. At once the bird was upon him again. The powerful wings beat round his face, stifling him. The fierce talons clawed at his throat. He felt close to suffocation.

"Where is that man?" he thought desperately.

Suddenly, almost as suddenly as it had started, the attack ceased. He felt a great heave from the creature's wings. He was free. In the fading light he saw the man Martin, a stick in his hand. Outside, the owl was disappearing into the dark of the trees, hooting derisively on its way.

"Where's Mrs. Brooks?" he asked.

"I'm here, Reggie," came a cheerful voice from the other side of the door. She had her hand on the door to come out. "Are you all right?" she asked, in alarm.

"Quite. . . ." But his sentence was cut off by a great hoot. The owl had returned, and was attacking Brooks. Again Brooks smelt the sickening stench of the wings about his face. Why on earth hadn't they gone in when they had the chance? But the fight was shorter this time. Brooks felt the bird fall to the ground. Martin stood crouching with an open clasp-knife. The owl lay on the floor, moving round and round in circles, flapping with one wing. The other wing half trailed behind. He saw Martin straighten himself up with pardonable pride.

"Pretty near cut its wing off," said the man. "Nasty beast. Must be mad, I guess."

The three watched the convulsive flapping gradu-

ally grow weaker. All of a sudden, as it approached nearest to Mary, by some impossible seeming effort it pushed itself viciously towards her. The great beak snapped.

"Look out!" cried Brooks. The girl jumped away. Brooks's heel came down on its head. A few twitches, and the owl was dead.

The girl ran to her husband. "Are you sure you are all right?" she asked, anxiously peering at him in the dark.

"Right as rain." She drew him into the living room where the man had lit a lamp, and examined his head and face carefully. Save for a few scratches over his temples, and a rapidly growing swelling on his head, he was unharmed. She sat him on one of the easy chairs with which the cottage had been provided. The man brought in hot whisky, lemon, and water. They were both rapidly recovering from the extraordinary onslaught.

"Do you think it was mad?" the girl asked.

Brooks shook his head slowly. "No, I hardly think so," he said. "It takes brains to be mad. An owl's hardly got enough sense to go out of his mind."

"But what made it act like that then?" asked his wife. "Especially with me. I've never known an animal attack me before. Any kind of an animal. They all like me. Even snakes and things."

It was true. The girl had an uncanny power over living things. Horses, and dogs and birds, and even snakes, as she said. A visit with her to a dog show was

described by a friend as "half a mile of licking tongues". A trip with her to the Zoo was a triumphal progress.

Her husband was puzzled. "Well," he said, after a while, "it seems absurd to say so, but if I had not known otherwise, I should have thought that the bird was attacking you for some good reason of its own. As though it saw in you some danger to its young, or its mate, or something like that. They do that sort of thing when you interfere with their instincts. Anyhow, it looked as if it *had* a reason, in its own poor way. It wasn't mad, as you call it. I'm a little puzzled."

Mary rose. She was white and shaken for all her apparent courage.

"Well, it seemed mad enough to me," she said.

They went to bed.

Early next morning Mary woke up with the rising sun shining on her face. She stretched herself. "Not much use trying to sleep any more," she thought. The bedroom opens directly on to the grass. The door stood open wide. She stole across the room and looked out. The red sun was just above the ridge of a little plateau of limestone about half a mile to the east of the cottage. She put one foot on the grass, and hurriedly withdrew it. The grass was drenched with dew. She stood at the door, marvelling at the long shadows. They pointed towards the lake, great dark shapes like the caricatures of trees, stretching down into the lake

and over the water. Already mist was silently rising from the ground, disappearing in rosy wraiths as she watched the sun mount steadily higher. In the distance she could hear a crow calling to its fellows. On a tree nearby a song sparrow sang its liquid song. She recognized the bird. It was Brooks's pet. He had taught it to sing the notes of the common chord. . . .

In her light green pyjamas she stood at the edge of the lake, dipping first one foot then the other into the water, shivering slightly.

"They're indecent really," she thought, looking over herself from her feet up. "I might just as well not have anything on." They had been her husband's gift in Paris, a week after they were married. He had made a remark at the time which still caused her to blush.

"But it's a shame to swim in double chiffon," she thought. With a quick movement and a shrug of the shoulders she was out of the spider-web garments and running through the shallow water. . . .

Her husband sat waiting for her on a granite boulder. There was a gun lying beside him.

"What's that for?" she asked.

"The owl."

"But, Reggie! Didn't we kill the owl last night?"

"We certainly did," he answered grimly. "Martin and I cleared up what was left of it just now. There wasn't any mistake about it. That owl was dead, all right. This is for the other one."

She put on her pyjamas.

"Well, just because an owl goes for you in the evening that doesn't mean you have to go and shoot its husband or its wife, or whatever it is, the next morning, does it?" There was a trace of indignation in her voice.

"It was the male that attacked us last night."

"Well, the female then. Look here, Reggie. Why are you going to do it? Have you got to?" She suddenly became indignant in earnest. "Damn it, Reggie, I sometimes think you *like* killing things!" Her eyes blazed. "Let me pass," she said.

He followed her up the path to the house. "Mary," he said. "Wait a minute."

She stopped, looking at him with unfriendly eyes.

"Well?" she said.

"Believe me, I don't like killing things any more than you do. But I didn't like the way that thing came at us last night. There's something suspicious about it. I only once before heard of an owl attacking a human being, and that was when it had been wounded. They don't do it. Otherwise they would have been exterminated long ago. Like the poisonous snakes and the bears and the other dangerous animals that used to live in these parts. Suppose it had some disgusting disease that had affected its nervous system? I don't say it had, but it wasn't natural, and I'm not going to take a chance."

"Well, you are supposed to know more about the nervous system than anybody else. Can't you make a slide of its brain, or something, and find out? You've killed one owl. Isn't that enough?"

"Good heavens, do you take me for God?" They were approaching the house. "Don't you know that of all the patients at the insane asylums, there's no man on earth that can detect anything wrong with the brains of more than twenty per cent at the very most? And these are mad people, and I've told you the owl wasn't mad. Even if I spent a lot of hard work sectioning that owl's brain, what there was of it, I shouldn't know where to begin when I got it under the microscope. And when it was all done, I'd have to spend weeks comparing the slides with normal specimens, which would mean killing a lot more owls. And I'd have to make a bacteriological examination as well. In any case . . ." he hesitated, "there wasn't much of that owl's brain left, after I trod on it. But the whole thing's ridiculous."

But the girl had capitulated. "Well," she said, "if you think the other owl is dangerous, you will have to shoot it. I suppose you know all about owls' diseases, just as you know about everything else." There was malice in her voice. He ignored it.

"Will you show me the nest?" he asked.

She led the way. They disappeared under the trees. There was the sound of a shot. Ten minutes later they returned to the house. Brooks was carrying the gun and looking grim. They were met by the man, inquiring about breakfast.

"By the way," asked the girl, who had recovered her good humour, "what's that chap's other name?"

"MacReady," answered her husband.

Chapter 3

Brooks has Misgivings

It was the same afternoon. Lunch was finished, and they sat on the verandah looking out over the water. In the kitchen they could hear the man Martin deftly washing the dishes.

"I must say", said Mary, "he sounds as if he wasn't breaking them. He's taken to this place like a fish to water. He's pathetically anxious to clean it all up. He has the wood shed done already. It looked as though it hadn't been cleaned since the house was built."

Brooks nodded benevolently. "He's a good lad," he said. "He was pretty well down when I met him. Hadn't had a meal for twenty-four hours. He followed me like a dog into the restaurant."

Mary was regarding the shore-line opposite with a pair of binoculars.

"That's the grain elevator," she said. "Look at it, Reggie. It's a symbol of Canada. White and beautiful and large against the sky. Just like a Norman Castle. No, Moorish, perhaps. Those things are the life of the

country. They're strongholds, like the old castles, and they're just as beautiful."

He took the glasses from her and examined the structure she had shown him. Standing on the blue edge of the lake, with its round black towers, its delicate dark filigree running round the top, its fluted walls, it might indeed have been the creation of some eastern magician. He was startled by the sound of his wife's voice.

"You're fast becoming civilized, Reggie," she said, "That's why I'm sorry we had Martin here. It will delay your education. You know, you're not in Canada when you do your job of work at the McDuffie Institute. That's a bit of the league of nations. There's hardly a Canadian there. Old man McDuffie was a Canadian, but his Institute isn't. Nobody can be a real inhabitant who hasn't split wood and carried water in a camp for at least two months, and kept a wood fire going for a week of wet days. You've got to get educated. What's that you said? Eton and Balliol and Harvard? Oh, no, Reggie, certainly not! They're not education. They're a positive disadvantage. They uncivilize a man."

She took the glasses from him, and gazed over the lake. They listened for a while to the soft splash of the water.

"Well, decivilize him, if you like," she said, laying them down. "Yes, and shingle a house. Did I mention shingling a house? Nobody over here is civilized unless they have shingled a house. The Indians didn't

shingle houses, and they weren't civilized. You don't want to be like an Indian, do you?"

"Isn't a shingle what you had done to your hair in the spring?"

"It's what you don't have done to your hair if you're civilized. All the same, I must say you can cook an omelette with the best of them, and on a wood fire, too."

They heard a heavy tread at the other end of the verandah. Looking round, they saw its owner, a slight but muscularly built man looking about thirty-two, with a straw hat tilted at the back of his head, a cigarette in his mouth, a newspaper under one arm and a battered suit case in the other hand. He gave an indescribable impression of exposure, not to the elements but to human wear and tear, which had weathered his face until only the hard places were left. He looked, in fact, like a journalist.

In a moment Mary was at the other man's side, and her arms were round him.

"George McTavish!" she cried, kissing him. "Here, give Reggie that bag. Why didn't you let us know you were coming?"

With one arm Brooks took the case. The other he placed round the visitor's shoulders.

"Yes, why didn't you let us know you were coming?" he said. They made their way to the door.

"No, let's sit out here," said Mary, "and talk to George. Why, we haven't seen him for over two weeks."

The newcomer sat on the rocking-chair and put his feet on the pillar. He leaned back and tilted his hat at an even more dangerous angle.

"As I was going to say . . ." he began.

"We were talking about shingles, George. Did you ever shingle a house?"

"Shingle? Shingle? Did you never hear of the great American shingle case? Out in Matapawak, Quebec, on the American boundary. Half the cottages are on American ground, half on Canadian. Ours was just on the dividing line."

Mary looked triumphantly at her husband. "It was a cottage, too," she said. "But," with some severity to McTavish, "did you say *was*?"

McTavish answered quickly. "Yes, we've given it up now. As I was going to say, our cottage was a long one, and it stretched north and south, and the International Line cut it absolutely in the middle. Father used to go for a trip to the States when he had the gout. Did him no end of good! Well, the cottage had to be shingled. As you may know, there is a heavy duty on shingles between this country and the other. It was easy to buy shingles on the American side, and I worked a week or so getting them on. Then when I came to do the Canadian end, I couldn't get any to match. Did I say that the first lot was jade green? So I had to do the best I could, which was pretty bad. A kind of muddy rose. It was quite a small village," he added apologetically.

"Is, George, *is*."

"Yes, *is*," he hastily corrected. "Well, the results were rather startling, and that's how it began."

They looked questioningly at him.

"Yes. One of the neighbours, who was a farmer by trade said it scared his cows, and brought action against father. The case was tried in the local court, and father insisted that he could speak French. So he lost. Then father appealed, and won the case. The farmer appealed, and won the case back. Altogether, they had quite a giddy time appealing. Finally the Privy Coun. . . ."

Brooks was regarding him severely. "McTavish, you are a liar," he interrupted. "Don't you know that cows are colour-blind? Blue and yellow they might conceivably distinguish, but not red and green."

"Yes," answered the journalist. "That's what the Supreme Court of Quebec argued. But the Privy Coun. . . ."

"McTavish, you are a liar. Do you think you might pull yourself together and answer one question truthfully?"

The journalist grinned.

"What *is* a shingle?"

McTavish looked out over the lake. "Good God!" he said. After a while:

"The fact is," said Brooks, "I'm really quite glad to see you. You see, I want your support."

Rather puzzled, they looked at him. "What's the matter?" asked McTavish. "Has Mary been getting

jealous, and you want me to patch up the splinters of matrimony? That'll be grand."

"Yes, it'd be grand. But it isn't that." He was plainly a little hesitant.

"Anyhow," put in Mary, indignantly, "I'm not jealous, not a bit. Nobody could be less jealous than I am. Only I don't like to see him making a fuss of other women. You should see him in a drawing-room, George. You'd think he was in love with them all. But of course, you never go into drawing-rooms."

"Not if I can help it," answered McTavish.

"Of course you don't. Nor does Reggie, unless I make him. No, you couldn't call me jealous," she added abstractedly. Once more she turned a puzzled look to Brooks.

"Come on, Brooks. Out with it. Is it flannel trousers?"

"No," he broke in irritably. "She's given them away already. You see," he went on irrelevantly, "I don't think we ought to stay here."

"Reggie! Why on earth not?" The girl turned an astonished look on him. "Not *stay* here? Why we've only been here a week, and you've got nearly two months' vacation left."

"Well, I don't feel comfortable about the place. One or two things have happened round here that aren't as they ought to be. Look at this."

He pointed to the long scratch on his face, made by the owl the night before. Briefly he related to the other man what had happened.

McTavish looked at him in astonishment. "But that's not enough to drive you away, surely. Especially when you have killed the other one."

"No, of course it's not. But last night, when you were asleep," he turned to Mary, "I was lying awake thinking about the owl. A motor boat was passing, or so I thought. It was quite near, and I wondered what it was doing at that time of night. There is a good deal of bootlegging going on across the water, so I decided it was some poor fellow turning an honest penny and let it go at that. But then I heard the motor boat stop, on the west side. So I got out of bed and slipped round in my pyjamas to have a look."

"Quite a pyjama party round here last night," put in Mary.

"Yes, but listen to what happened. The boat was tied up at the old wharf, and there was nobody in it. Just as I had decided to go back to bed, I saw someone coming along the shore, up past the willows in the bay. So I lay down behind a rock to have a look. When they came up to the boat, I felt rather mad. It wasn't so warm out there in pyjamas, at three in the morning."

"No, it wasn't so warm at six," put in Mary. "Go on, Reggie. Did you catch the smugglers?"

"There was only one of them. I told you that. And when this person came up, I walked towards the boat and said: 'What are you doing here? Don't you know this is private property'."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing. Just whipped out a revolver and fired at me. Damn near hit me, too. The limestone chipped just over my head."

"But Reggie, my dear!" The girl ran up to him, threw her arms round him, and looked into his face, as though to make sure he was unharmed. "Why didn't you tell me about it?" she said reproachfully.

"I hated to spoil your morning. In any case, we had enough to worry about last night."

"Well, what happened then?"

"I squatted pretty flat on the ground, and the person shoved the motor boat off and was gone in a twinkling. So I came back to bed."

"Which way did it go?" asked McTavish.

"West. But that doesn't mean anything. It might have been going anywhere on the island, or round it."

McTavish nodded.

"So after what happened in the evening, and with this in the night, I don't think we should stay here!"

"But look here, Reggie," put in the girl. "Surely there's no need to go away for that. I don't suppose he'll ever come again, now he knows he's been seen. Smuggling isn't worth shooting people for, not since prohibition was repealed. I'm quite sure he was just trying to scare you off."

"Yes," answered her husband slowly. "That was the idea, all right. I wasn't to come too close. That's one thing that makes me uneasy. You've got to be a good shot to go as near as that to a man without danger of hitting him. It was somebody dangerous,

not just a village lout turning an honest penny."

"Well, in any case, I'm quite safe," said Mary. "I don't believe your smuggler, or gangster, or whatever he is, would shoot at a woman. They're as sentimental as schoolgirls, from all one hears."

Brooks regarded her gravely. He seemed on the point of saying something. Then he checked himself. "In any case," he said, "it isn't the . . . the smuggler alone that worries me."

The girl looked at him with puzzled eyes. "But you don't mean to say you connect the owl with the motor boat, Reggie? That's surely absurd."

"I don't know what to connect," he said. "Believe me, I've connected more absurd things than these in my work, and found they've fitted together afterwards. We're often ashamed to tell people what we do suspect."

Mary stood up. She stamped her foot on the verandah floor. "Well, Reginald Brooks, we *won't* go, and that's flat," she said. "I know that sounds vulgar, but it's what I mean."

McTavish looked sympathetically at his friend.

"Did I ever tell you the story of the woman who stamped her foot on the verandah?" he said.

"No, you didn't, and you're not going to tell it now. Not to me, at least." She was up and through the screen door leading to the living room. They heard her giving orders to the man in the kitchen.

McTavish winked at the other man. "It's always the same, once a man gets married," he said.

"Shut up. And don't wink at me. Keep it for your dirty newspaper." He disappeared after his wife into the house.

McTavish looked mournfully over the lake at a steamer making its way against the wind.

"Marriage . . ." he began to soliloquize.

He could not think of anything to complete the sentence. . . .

Chapter 4

"La Belle Dame Sans Merci"

When, after the event, Brooks now relates the history of the strange occurrences which took place on Nelson Island, it is always at this point that his hearers begin to express polite incredulity. An owl attacking a pair of human beings on a verandah, yes! Owls have been known to attack people. Though as Brooks is always at pains to point out, this particular case, followed as it was by his midnight adventure, aroused his suspicion from the first, and vaguely connected itself, by some process of intuition, with things that ought not to be. A cat jumping strangely and a man kidnapped, yes! Such things have happened, too, and are related by Brooks without much protest from his auditor of the moment. As we know, he was ignorant of these last events until a later date, although in retrospect they could be seen to fit neatly enough into the whole eccentric scheme, and, in Brooks's story, were always given their logical place at the beginning of things. But the Visitation that they all witnessed that evening! The Visitations,

rather! "No, Brooks. Sorry, old man, but isn't it . . . well, a little *elementary*? I stopped taking that sort of thing seriously several years before my mother presented to the church jumble sale a basket full of the red-covered books that my aunts persistently gave me for Christmas!" Brooks's listeners don't say it, but they think it and gaze sadly at him. What they do say is: "Well, you seem to have taken it pretty calmly! If ever I saw anything like that I should be scared stiff. You say Mary and McTavish saw it too?" and they look accusingly at Brooks. At which Brooks is wont to reply: "I know what you are thinking. You don't believe me because you think it is conventional and belongs to Christmas Annuals. If you would listen to the end of the story you would see that this makes it all the more convincing. Nature imitates Art, according to Oscar Wilde. If you wait till I have told you everything that happened afterwards, you will see what he meant. And", Brooks generally concludes, "it's just because we weren't scared that the incident fitted in so well with everything else that did happen afterwards." At which point Brooks sticks out his chin rather truculently at the doubter, who remembers that the man was proposed for the Nobel Prize last year and withdraws his objection. For Brooks has a manner that brings conviction.

It was, then, the evening of the day that McTavish arrived. A drizzling rain had come up from the north. The mainland was invisible in the mist. The water of

the lake had turned a sullen grey. The platform, scene of last night's fight with the owl, was a soggy, slippery wasteland. They had eaten their evening meal indoors, instead of on the screened porch at the back of the cottage. Mary took one look outside, and hastily slammed the door.

"It's a good night to shut out of doors," she said. "Let's build a really good fire, and then it'll be a grand opportunity to make George spit in the ocean."

"Expectorate, Mary. It's more ladylike," said the journalist.

"As you like. My dentist calls it 'Wash your mouth out, please'. I said to him, 'You mean, spit it out', and he answered, 'Just as you wish. Wash your mouth out, please'."

"Well, what do you want me to do? Saving your presence, Mary, I can spit anywhere. When I was a boy. . . ."

"That will do. There are limits." She piled up the already brightly burning fire with logs. "It's animal vegetable and mineral. Spitting is what the younger lecturers call it. It makes them feel like he-men. Into the kitchen, George, with Martin. It's nice and warm in there, and you'll find him reading Lord Northcliffe's Life. You'll be able to tell him an awful lot that didn't happen to Northcliffe. You remember, how you were cycling in Kent, and Northcliffe's car broke down, and you helped Northcliffe's chauffeur to repair it, and then Northcliffe offered to make you director-in-chief of cartoons, or sub-editor of the

Woman's Encyclopaedia, I forget which. But you declined, saying: 'Lord Northcliffe, sir, I respect you but I do not respect your papers. The fact that I have been able to be of some slight service to you this afternoon does not entitle you to take advantage of me'."

The fire was blazing. In its light one could see that McTavish was clearly puzzled. "Are you sure that wasn't . . . er . . . some other gentleman?" he asked.

"Possibly it was, George. It often is with your stories. But Martin will love it. Turn the handle the other way. That's right."

The journalist was gone. They could hear him greet the man in the kitchen. The fire blazed up, throwing long shadows on the sloping roof from the great rafters that ran across the cottage. The place had been built for two storeys, but the top one had never been added.

"What'll we give him?" she asked. "Something difficult. Let's make him really work for half an hour." They thought a moment. "That fire won't last," said Brooks, "it's softwood. How about a Salamander for George?"

"No, he'd guess it in a minute. He's clever."

They were silent again. The fire, truly enough, was past its highest. It was settling down to a steady light. The back of the large room was now in shadow. Outside, everything was silent, save for the dismal hoot of an occasional distant steamer. From time to time a gust of wind drove the rain against the window panes and the roof, and the house would creak uneasily.

The girl shuddered slightly.

"Let's make it the first lie George ever told," said Brooks. The woman started.

"The first lie? No, that won't do. He'll never remember that. I think it ought to be some character out of fiction." A heavy gust struck the house. The roof gave a great creak. A blast of cold air. Crash! The wooden walls of the cottage shook. A newspaper flew across the room. A great cloud of smoke blew into their faces from the fireplace. The outer door was open and was banging to and fro against the front wall.

In a moment Brooks was across the room, and had shut the door to. McTavish's cheerful face appeared at the kitchen door. "What on earth?" he asked. "This place feels like a witches' parlour tonight. Are you ready?"

"Sorry, old man," said Brooks. "We won't be a second."

The journalist retired into the kitchen once more. They could hear the men's voices alternate, the journalist's rapid, fluent, kindly, Martin's slower, and shy. Brooks looked over at his wife. She was silent. Was she a trifle pale? He thought she seemed so in the firelight. She had not seemed like herself the last few days. Perhaps the owl had been too much for her.

"Would you like to go to bed?" he said. "Don't let's bother about the game."

She pulled herself together with a start.

"Oh yes, the game," she said. "We'll give him one,

now we've kept him so long. What's that poem of Keats's about the woman by the lake who snared men? 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci!' That's it. Fair lady with no mercy!" She gave a little shiver. "Let's give him something about her . . . about her." She whispered the last two words. "Her powder puff," she added.

"Come in, McTavish," called Brooks.

The journalist entered, and sat down. "You two certainly have been a long time." He sat down.

"Is it something at present existing in the world, Mary?"

"Yes . . . no." The girl's voice was strangely confused and excited.

"Has it existed as a real thing?"

"No," came Brooks's decisive voice.

"Something in literature, Mary?"

"Yes . . . something in literature. Yes, of course." The girl was watching the corner of the room, next to the door. From time to time the fire blazed fitfully up, casting its jagged shadows over the room. There was a long silence.

"Get a move on, George," broke in Brooks's cheery voice. "You're a bit slow on the uptake tonight."

"Literature's a pretty large subject to choose from," replied the journalist. "Is it in prose?"

"No."

"Some object in poetry. Belonging to a woman, Mary?"

The girl shuddered slightly, and gave a nervous

glance at the corner of the room. "Y . . . es," she answered.

"Women in literature. Let me see." He drummed his fingers on his chin. "A pretty bad lot, most of them. Messalina, Milady, Madame Bovary . . . all M's. There must be some in poetry. Oh yes. The Lady of Shalott. Modern English poetry, Brooks?"

"Yes."

"Nineteenth century?"

"Yes."

"Well, I know you won't give me Tennyson. That leaves Shelley and Keats. You're not old enough for Wordsworth. Lots of women in Keats! The Witch of Atlas would be good, though. Keats, Brooks?"

"Yes, but your logic's all wrong."

"Don't you know that's the way to get your conclusions right? Let me see," he reflected. "Women in Keats. Isabella, Lamia, Diana." He ticked off the names on his fingers, watching the other two carefully as he did so.

"Lamia, Brooks?"

"No."

"That leaves La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Mary?"

Mary nodded.

McTavish rose, yawned unashamedly, and stretched himself.

"There you are," he said. "All done by kindness . . . aided by a little irregular deduction." He looked round the darkening room. The wind had risen considerably, and they could hear the waves roaring on

the limestone shore. They could hear Martin knocking out his pipe in the kitchen.

"Hold on, George," put in Brooks. "You don't think it's as easy as that? You haven't half finished. You've forgotten it's an object, not a woman."

McTavish sat down disappointed and looking a little crestfallen, so far as a member of his profession can do so.

"Oh yes, it was something belonging to her. But it's no use asking me about women's clothes. I don't know a 'what you call 'em', from a 'thingumbob'. Just tell me the names of a few . . . er . . . articles, Brooks."

But Brooks remained silent. He was watching Mary, who appeared strangely intent on something or other at the far end of the room. He made a gesture of interrogation towards the bedroom door. But the girl either did not see it, or did not heed it. All this the journalist apparently did not notice.

"Tell me, Brooks," he said, "is this feminine gewgaw . . . er . . . visible or invisible? Let me see, the limit of visibility was reached about nineteen twenty-six, as I remember it." He looked inquiringly at Brooks.

It was with a certain acerbity that Mary's husband answered.

"Whatever you do, McTavish," he said, "you manage to inject an element of vulgarity into it. The thing you are trying to guess is visible." A flicker of amusement passed over his wife's face. Then she relapsed once more into a moody stare.

"That's easy then. Lipstick, powder-puff, compact rouge, manicure stick, bus ticket, purse, Pomeranian, roadster. That's about all. Oh yes, and there's leg, aunt, and cigarette case. Is it one of these?"

Mary nodded. "Powder-puff," she said. "Spare us any more."

McTavish nodded appreciatively. "Not so bad," he said.

They sat for some moments in silence. Brooks lifted up his head to say something. The words never passed his lips. For openly, in the sight of them all, a man in armour strode across the room between Brooks and his wife, stood for a moment motionless by the fireplace, and then rested his arm on the brick mantelpiece, put his mailed chin upon his gauntlet, and gazed intently at them. They glimpsed a pair of dark eyes motionlessly fixed upon them through the metal headpiece.

McTavish sprang up towards the figure, and almost immediately sat down again. Brooks had waved him back. But that might not have stopped him, had it not been for what he saw.

The figure had lifted its hand, and was slowly raising its vizor.

Not one of them, they discovered later, felt any trace of fear, only an almost ungovernable curiosity. This absence of fear was, in fact, one of the clues by which Brooks was later able to guess at the origin of the strange figure. But, at the time, such was the personality they sensed through the suit of mail that

the three sat motionless and almost reverent, as though they were in the presence of one of the great ones of the earth. The vizor was slowly rising, for how long they had no means of telling. Time was gone. Now they could see a dark, bearded chin.

Suddenly, by common impulse, they stood up, awed by the majesty of the figure before them. The figure's right hand ceased to move, and the vizor fell again. Then, with a gesture of infinite and kingly condescension, the left hand motioned them to sit down again. Without questioning, they did so. Nobody thought of disobeying. To have done so would have been more than impertinence. It was a privilege to obey. No one spoke. One of the strange things in this visitation was that not a sound was made throughout—not a voice, nor a clink of metal, nor the softest quiver of a footstep. Everything was profound silence. Even the elements had subsided. There was not the splash of a wave nor the whisper of a breeze. But this they did not notice until afterwards. Time was stilled and nature with it.

For a while, the figure stood once more almost motionless before them. They saw the fireglow gleaming on the dark armour. They noted the exquisite tracery of the finely chiselled metal, burnished and polished to a dark lustre by some loving hand. The supple joints slid noiselessly as the figure swayed slightly from time to time. The rings of the delicately pointed boots slid imperceptibly at each such change of posture. At each heel they saw a brightly ground

spur with seven points. The sides of the shoes were stained green, as though with grass. On one of them they saw a withered clover leaf, caught between the supple rings. On the neck, at a level with the shoulders, was a flower with five petals, enamelled in delicate blue—the solitary spot of colour on this dark warrior. At the right hip a dirk handle of chased silver protruded, on the left hung the great sword, reaching from the waist to the ground. Through the shaped waist and the exquisitely fashioned calves of the metal casing they could sense the beauty of the form within.

McTavish was the first to recover himself to the extent of critical examination. But so natural and, as I have said, unalarming did it seem at the time that a fully armoured knight should appear in a Canadian summer cottage that even he was content to speculate mildly about the date of the fittings. One of the most remarkable things about the whole occurrence was its astonishing naturalness, from the knight's first appearance on.

"Early fifteenth century, I should think," he said to himself. "Those shoes look like Italian work to me. Wonder where he stained his shoes. I wish I'd brushed up a little more on armour at college. Someone's brushed up his suit all right." He turned to Brooks, and might have spoken to him. But as though sensing the impertinence of his thoughts, the figure began to move again, lifting up its vizor, but this time more quickly. The vizor was up. At the sight of the face

revealed they started forward in shocked commiseration, so great was the contrast with the stalwart frame at which the armour hinted. Here was tragedy before them, the wastage of nobility. The noble brow was pale and moist with suffering. The cheeks betrayed a hint of their former glow of health, but they were fallen and on each was the hectic spot of fever. On a full, dark brown beard McTavish saw one white hair, standing out against the rest. This the others did not observe. The lips were full and pale, and set in an expression of resignation. Here, one felt, was a man whom nature had given courage to command, strength to rally determination when lesser men gave way, fortitude and sweetness to help the weak, but upon whom had been laid a burden too great to be borne. The mighty had fallen. No, not fallen. For still in that feverish forehead and those burning eyes rested the majesty of suffering accepted, if not overcome.

For a second time that evening they had the impulse to rise. But something in the eyes of the knight checked them. He was waiting. They waited, whether for a minute or for an hour, they could not tell. They were no longer in the world of time.

What were those restless eyes waiting for? They wandered from one to another of the friends, searching, searching—for something that could not be found, something that did not exist on earth, perhaps. An overwhelming wave of compassion swept over the three human beings. A tear rolled down Mary's

cheek, glistening in the dull light of the fire. At this the bright eyes of the armoured figure moved from her to Brooks and from Brooks to her, then turned away again in infinite pain and resumed their searching.

Searching for what?

Suddenly a gleam of interest seemed to awaken in the resigned form before them. The warrior bent forwards, as though listening. Then a slow smile of unutterable sweetness spread over his face. His eyes looked forwards, past them, in passionate anticipation. Goaded by curiosity, McTavish looked behind him, to see what was coming. There was nothing there, save the window-frame gleaming white in the darkened room, and the open door leading to the bedroom on the left. He turned quickly back to the figure. Still the eyes were looking far away, but the face was transfigured with joy and growing anticipation. It was coming. It was coming nearer!

Then suddenly, as suddenly as the knight had come, she was there! From the left corner of the room, she came tripping with the lightest of fairy footsteps, clad in a single green garment, her golden hair floating behind her. Halting opposite the knight, at the other side of the fireplace, she gave an amused glance at the three seated friends and slowly turned her gaze up and down the knightly figure. Then they saw her eyes, the eyes of a pagan thing. For perhaps a minute, it seemed, she stood there, silently watching the man in armour, a look of laughing curiosity on her face.

She was beautiful, fair of complexion, delicate of feature, but of a strangely perverted beauty, a beauty that ought not to be. Her eyes swept over the knight, finally resting on his face. A smile without a soul played momentarily over her lips. Her lips parted. She was speaking to him, but they heard not a sound. But from the look of adoring gratitude that lit his features, they knew it was a declaration of love he was hearing.

Suddenly a look of bored indifference flickered over her face. She turned her back brutally upon him, and let her gaze rest on Mary. Brooks's hand involuntarily went over to his wife in protection. . . .

Then quickly, without warning, as she had come, she tripped daintily, elfishly across the room, shot a glance of fleeting interest at the dejected figure by the fire, and was gone. With her went the magic of the woods and the warmth of the spring breeze. Out went the arms of the warrior in passionate entreaty, and in a moment he was through the door after her.

A gust of wind struck the building. With a crash, a door flew to at the back of the house. Startled back into the world, the three friends leaped up.

It was Brooks who ran out through the slamming bedroom door, through the bedroom and on to the grass outside. The trees were softly swaying in the wind, the pale moon was rising. By its light he could see over the rocky grass, through the trees, to the grey lake. There was nobody there. Was it fancy, or did he hear a hoarse whisper on the breeze?

> *"La Belle Dame Sans Merci*
> *Hath thee in thrall."*

He never knew.
Slowly he returned to the cottage.

Chapter 5

Dark Forces

The surprising events of the evening were not finished. Arrived in the living-room, Brooks was astonished to find the others in the kitchen bending over the figure of the servant. Martin was seated on the chair, at the table where, during his brief stay at the cottage, he had prepared the meals, read his book and written laborious letters in his strangely cuneiform hand. His body was bowed over the table, his hands clasped above his head. He had the aspect of one who has fallen asleep while reading. McTavish was peering down into his face, Mary bending over on the other side of him, fanning him with a newspaper.

When she saw her husband, Mary ran to Brooks and threw her arms round him. Her face was white and drawn.

"Reggie, Reggie," she said, in a low, frightened voice, "he's dead." He gathered her into his arms and kissed her tenderly. "I hope not," he answered. "Though heaven only knows . . ." he added to him-

self. He lifted up the man's hand, and let it fall. It collapsed limply on the table. Martin did not stir.

"Is he breathing?" Brooks asked the journalist.

"I can't see any sign," was the answer.

Brooks looked anxiously at his wife.

"Wouldn't you like to go on to bed," he said, "while . . . George and I look at him?" The two men exchanged glances. McTavish shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of utter bewilderment.

"No, do let me stay. Poor Martin!" She clung desperately to her husband. Brooks freed himself gently.

Together, the journalist and the scientist laid the man on the floor. Brooks opened the shirt, and delicately felt the heart.

"He's still alive," he said. The other two breathed deep sighs of relief.

"What's the matter with the poor fellow?" asked Mary, solicitously. "Is . . . is it serious?"

The scientist was puzzled. "I can't say that I quite understand it. It seems to me like some sort of a seizure. Almost as though he were in the later stages of an anæsthetic, but much less breathing."

He deftly turned down the man's eyelid and brought the lamp nearer. The great staring pupil was completely unaffected. He looked serious. "No reflex," he said. "I can't understand it." He touched the eyeball with his finger. There was the merest flicker of a blink. Brooks stood up, relieved.

"That's good," he said. "I think he'll be all right. But it's strange. You don't suppose he takes drugs?"

With some indignation the girl replied. "I don't know, Reggie. You brought him." She paused a moment. "Have we all been taking drugs?" she asked.

They looked at each other, nobody saying a word. Everyone was frightened to allude to what they had seen earlier that evening. The silence was interrupted by Brooks.

"We ought to be doing something for that poor fellow," he said. "Get a little whisky, George."

As he went, Mary darted to the man on the floor. "Look, Reggie, he's moving," she said.

It was true. The man had shifted his head slightly. Then he turned it over, like someone in a fitful sleep. His lips twitched, as though forming words.

"What's he saying, Reggie?" The scientist bent over, straining to hear.

"I can't make out. Here, you listen, George. You'll be able to understand him better."

The journalist had returned with the spirit. "Give him the whisky, first, George," said Mary. "We've got to get him round."

Brooks bent over, and almost snatched the glass from him. "No, don't. We've got to hear what he's saying. Quick, George. See if you can hear." The man on the floor was muttering, a little louder.

Mary's eyes blazed. "Give him the whisky, George. Damn you, Reggie, standing there like a stuffed owl, with that man dying on the floor. Give me the whisky, I say." She snatched at the glass, but Brooks held it high over his head.

"Listen to him, George, quick," he said. "We've *got* to know." The girl stood before him, vainly trying to clutch the glass from her husband's hand.

"Because . . ." her husband went on, "because . . . of tonight," he lamely concluded.

Once more the two gave a white, frightened glance at each other. Without more ado, McTavish bent down again over the prostrate man, who was now audibly saying something, which, however, they could still not distinguish.

But Mary was not contented. "I can't see . . ." she began. Brooks was inflexible.

"Shh!" said McTavish. "I can't make it out. It sounds like some kind of gibberish. Something about Capr . . . Capri, that's it. 'The Isle of Capri'. He's saying over the song, poor fellow."

Brooks bent over with a look of intensely puzzled concentration. The others listened intently, wondering what strange fancy had possessed him. No, not fancy. Brooks had good reasons for what he wanted. Always. If he said that MacReady's muttering had to do with the strange scene they had watched that evening, then it was so, ridiculous though it might sound to the rest of them. The man was a scientist. The age of ghosts was past. They had no doubt that he would be able to tell them by what strange freak of mind or of matter they had seen what they had seen. His sheer power inspired them.

They listened, the guttering candle throwing a dim light into the cottage kitchen, showing up the wood

stove on which MacReady toiled with unaccustomed fingers, showing the muslin he had draped over the kitchen shelves to keep the crockery "nice and clean", and the pulley he had arranged for the trapdoor leading to the limestone cellar, showing the meticulously swept floor—all evidences of the man's pathetic gratitude.

Suddenly, in a distinct voice the man on the floor said: "There are no hickories in Capri."

"No, not by a long chalk there aren't, old man," cried Brooks, in a tone of intense relief. At this the man rolled over, as though awakening from an uneasy sleep, and opened his eyes.

At once Brooks was down on the floor with the whisky. "Here, Martin," he said. "Have a sip of this. It will do you good." The man swallowed a little of the liquor, and closed his eyes again. After a moment, he opened them once more, stared from one to the other, and sat up.

Mary was the first to speak. "Well, Martin," she said. "What's been the matter?"

"Ma'am?" said MacReady.

Brooks was frowning at her. "Martin," he said, "try and answer what I am going to ask you. What have you been dreaming about?"

The other two were surprised, but they held their peace. In any case, it was no use trying to stop Brooks now. He had set his jaw at what Mary called its professional tilt, and was regarding the man on the floor with a coldly intense look. His blue eyes were fixed

immovably on the servant's face. McTavish edged uncomfortably away from him. "Heavens," he thought. "He's a different man when he gets on the job. That look of his . . . it's like Euclid's line. It's the shortest distance between two points."

Meanwhile, the man MacReady was puzzled. He passed his hand over his forehead, and was evidently trying hard to remember.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Dreaming, that was it."

Brooks bent down, until his face was quite close to the other man's, and gazed directly into his eyes. Placing a hand on his shoulder, he said kindly:

"Try and remember what it was about."

MacReady shifted uneasily, and gave a great yawn.

"Pardon me, sir," he said. Once more he remained silent, visibly trying to recall something. His eyes wandered round the kitchen, resting first on one point then on another, as though he might catch sight of some object in these familiar surroundings that would help him. Finally, "I was dreaming, sir, but I'm afraid it's gone," he said. He was fast coming to his senses, and, like the others, was plainly puzzled at Brooks's insistence. He made as though to get up, but Brooks restrained him.

"Don't get up yet. You've had quite a turn. What was the last thing you remember?"

Mary looked indignantly at her husband.

"Have you *got* to badger him like this, Reggie?" she whispered indignantly.

But Brooks disregarded her. Instead he looked inquiringly at MacReady.

"Well, sir," began the man. He was still bewildered at the continued inquisition, but willing to do what he could: "Mr. McTavish came out into the kitchen and was telling me how he met Lord Northcliffe."

McTavish coughed, and looked away. Mary smiled to herself. Even Brooks's set face almost took upon it the fleeting shape of a grin. So he *had* told the story. But MacReady was continuing.

"Then you called him, and I took out my book and propped it up, and began to read. Then I heard you all talking, and Mr. McTavish asking questions, like, and then I must have gone to sleep. Oh yes, I remember knocking out my pipe and thinking I would fill it again, and my tobacco was on the shelf. I must have gone to sleep right after."

McTavish bent down to the floor, and picked up an object from under the table. It was a pipe, and it was empty.

So the man had fallen asleep before the end of their game, and must have remained unconscious all through their strange experience. They remembered that it was just when McTavish had thought he had finished the riddle that they had heard the sound of a pipe being knocked out.

"You don't remember hearing anybody round, do you?" asked Brooks.

"No, sir. I'm sure if I had I should have gone out to see who it was."

"You aren't sore anywhere, as if you had been hurt?"

"Me, sir? No, sir!" He was plainly becoming tired.

"Thanks so much for answering these questions. It's more important than you think. Do you feel you could get up now and get to bed?"

"Yes, sir, of course." He stood up, and walked rather unsteadily to the door, towards his bunk in the back part of the cottage. At the door he turned back, and placed his hand on the doorpost.

"How about breakfast, ma'am," he said.

When he was gone, Brooks pulled out his watch. "I think we had all better get to bed," he said. "It's no use chewing over things tonight. It's nearly one o'clock. McTavish, you know where your room is. It's the one I . . . er . . . I ran through. Yours is the bed in the corner. I think everything's there." They moved to their respective rooms. When he was half undressed, Brooks went over into McTavish's room.

"I believe if I were you I would close the outer door," said the scientist.

The journalist was already in bed.

"Nothing doing," he said. "Remembering what I saw come in here, I'll leave everything open and risk the mosquitoes. 'Her foot was light'," he quoted. "I don't mind if she does wake me."

Brooks grinned at him. "Well, it's your own look out," he said. "I should have thought. . . ."

"You think too much, old man." But Mary was

calling. Brooks disappeared. Very quickly they were all four of them asleep. Surprisingly quickly, considering the astonishing things they had witnessed! But that is part of the story! The moon was well above the horizon. Hardly a sound disturbed the air, save the occasional leap of a desultory wave.

Late in the night, Brooks sat up in his bed. The muffled sound of a powerful engine was throbbing over the water from the direction of the point. Running to the door, he saw a boat heading for the open lake. He returned to his bed, thinking.

Breakfast was excusably late. After it was finished, they sat on the verandah, smoking and looking over the water. By mutual consent, nobody had mentioned the apparition of last night. For some reason or other they felt shy about it, though each knew what was on the other's minds. From time to time they glanced at Brooks, waiting for him to broach the subject. He seemed in no hurry, but smoked, remarking from time to time on the progress of the young birds learning to fly on the verandah, on the boats that were passing over the still water, on the withering of the grass over the point. Finally he stopped altogether, and gazed moodily into the sky.

"Well, Reggie?" Mary said timidly.

He turned an affectionate smile towards her. Then, in a discouraged voice: "I thought you'd ask me that. The point really is, are you still determined to stay here?"

His wife threw her head back with the little proud gesture he had seen before, when she was in the face of danger. "Yes," she answered. "Quite."

"I was afraid so. People who don't work with nature haven't learned to be afraid of her. For my part, I've been a research worker too long not to know that there are occasions when discretion is the better part of valour. This is one of them. Believe me, this is more serious than you think, either of you."

The tone of his voice commanded respect. They looked inquiringly at him.

"Don't forget, Mary," he went on, "that it was you who were telling me the other day that life would hit back at me, some time. You don't like it when I cut up a frog . . . a thing that every fisherman over here has done, if he doesn't use a live minnow on his hook. But you don't mind tinkering with forces that might easily flatten us all up against the wall like so many flies. Yes, and not notice we were there at all. I don't know what is happening round here, but it's something whose power is terrific. It might . . . it might do anything to us. My advice to you both is . . . beat it." He was evidently a little ashamed of the word.

"And how about you, Reggie?" asked Mary, with a certain sparkle. "Do you propose to . . . er . . . beat it yourself?"

Brooks looked uncomfortably across to the mainland, reached absently in his pocket and took out the key of the cottage, which he contemplated silently for a few moments.

"To tell the truth, I thought I'd hang round for a bit," he said, a little shamefacedly.

McTavish stood up in delight, and gave out a great whoop. "Reggie," he said, "you're priceless." Mimicking his friend's voice:

"I propose to hang round for a bit." He said. "In order to observe . . . er . . . what further developments may occur." He concluded triumphantly, in the exact intonation of the other man. Then, turning to Mary:

"What about you? Are you going to Beat It or Hang Round? I gathered you had made up that mind of yours, but one never knows."

"I know," she said. "I told you once. I'm going to Hang Round."

"Well, it seems to be settled for good and all. Come on now, Brooks. Tell us."

The ice was broken. But Brooks refused to be drawn. Instead, he answered with some impatience. "Good heavens, God isn't in it. First of all Mary wants me to make slides of an owl's brains, when we've trodden on them, and when it hasn't any brains—to speak of, that is to say. Then you ask me to explain something I don't understand, nor anybody else either. Except perhaps one person, and he's dead," he added inconsistently. "Don't you see, that if I understood it, there'd be no danger. Science *is* understanding things, and that means being able to control them."

"Then there really is danger?" This from Mary.

"Of course there is. I suspected as much after the owl, and after I was shot at. That was why I wanted to go away then. And after what we saw last night, and after poor Martin's fit, I'm quite certain."

McTavish sat up and looked at Brooks, with the air of having had an idea.

"I suppose, Brooks," he said, "we weren't all hypnotized, the owl and my countryman MacReady, and ourselves last night?"

Brooks regarded him with a look of irritation that slowly gave way to one of pity.

"McTavish," he said, "they call you Rags at your office, don't they? Yes, I thought so. That's what you should be called. I never yet met anybody that had such a capacity for soaking up popular misinformation. Hypnotized! Hypnotized!" He said it as though it were something he did not like to touch. "A grand word, isn't it? Somebody claims to have seen the Indian Rope Trick. Some other wiseacre comes along and claims to have taken a photograph, with nothing coming out on it. Oh, yes! Mass Hypnosis! Grand, isn't it?" He stuck out his chin and glared at the unfortunate McTavish. "Some poor girl with hysteria takes a lover and steals a diamond ring and a couple of wrist-watches. You write her up in the Sunday papers, sitting opposite her man with lightning coming out of his finger nails! What does it mean, *hypnotized*, McTavish?"

The journalist stirred uneasily in his chair. "I can't say that I can explain it, but I thought. . . ."

"No, nor can anybody else explain it. Anybody can hypnotize a frog or a hen or a turtle. I'll do it myself for you one day, if you like. Anybody can learn to do it to a human being, with a little practice. It's just as easy as learning to pull out teeth. But we don't know what it is, except that there's some deadening of parts of the nervous system for a time, with an excitement of other parts."

"But, Reggie," expostulated Mary, "isn't it possible to do queer things by hypnotism? It doesn't follow that because some people are silly about it there's nothing in it? George never said all that."

"No, but he thinks it. I've seen what he's written. 'Claims she was hypnotized by man sitting behind her in the theatre'."

He glanced accusingly at McTavish, who turned his head away.

"There, you see?" said Brooks triumphantly. "Let me tell you this," he went on, still turning towards the journalist. "There's nobody that can hypnotize a man and make him do what is against his convictions. There's nobody that can hypnotize a person against his will. In particular, there's nobody on earth who can hypnotize a whole crowd. It's just a word people like you use when they think they're being scientific. Who could have hypnotized us last night, and Martin in the next room at the same time, and the owl on the tree? By the way, McTavish, I'd like you to try your hand at hypnotizing an owl."

"But look here, Reggie," insisted Mary, "I'm not

satisfied. Animals can be hypnotized against their will, can't they. At least, I can't imagine you asking permission of a hen or a frog."

"Yes, that's true enough. And as a matter of fact, under certain very special circumstances human beings can be hypnotized without knowing it. It happens sometimes by accident. It did happen once at a barber's shop in New York. People kept having fits the first day the place was opened, and they found that men getting a shave were squinting straight at a silvered ball hung up for ornament. Men driving a car at night have been hypnotized by the road in front of them, just like a hen with the white chalk mark. But nothing happens in these cases except more or less of a sleep. For anything more, you have to have some other person, who must get the subject's consent to put him to sleep, and can make the suggestion after that. But there wasn't a soul here last night who could have hypnotized us. It's silly.

"Hypnosis is a perfectly commonplace method of treatment and diagnosis," he continued, "used by perfectly commonplace physicians. We don't know how it works, but then we don't know how a poultice works."

"I'll take your word for it, Brooks," said McTavish. "You certainly do take the joy out of life, though. But if it wasn't hypnosis, what was it?"

Brooks looked at him solemnly for a few moments. They both looked expectantly at the scientist. Finally:

"I don't know," he said.

"Reggie," Mary exploded, "you are the most infuriating person. I don't know whether all scientists are like it, or whether it's just you. You're always the same. You get us all worked up and you have such an air of knowing it all, and then you say with that exasperating voice: 'I don't know'."

This Brooks took as a compliment. He beamed on her.

"Quite honestly," he said, "it's hard to know what to say. Let's try and sift it out logically. Perhaps we had better compare our accounts of what we saw last night. It may be important. Suppose you tell us exactly what you saw after McTavish solved his puzzle."

Mary related her story. At various points during the narrative Brooks bent forward, very much interested. When the recital was finished, he turned to McTavish.

"Is that what you saw?" he asked.

"More or less. But Mary saw the man's beard brown, and I'm quite positive it was black. And I'm absolutely sure he didn't have a lily in his hand. How could you carry a lily in one of those things? Anyhow, he wasn't the *kind* of lad to be carrying a lily about."

Brooks nodded with tremendous interest.

"Yes?" he said excitedly. "Go on."

"And I saw quite a scar on his left cheekbone. I'm quite certain about it, because I wondered how he could have got away with a whack like that. Mary didn't mention it."

"I didn't see it," she said simply. "It wasn't on the man I saw. I'm sure of it. Quite. And I'm absolutely certain about the lily, because I did wonder how he could carry it in one of those gauntlet things."

"Well," said Brooks, "it happens that the man I saw was carrying a rose, a red one. And there was no scar on his forehead, but a tremendous dint on his headpiece. I was like George. I wondered how he could have got away with a whack like that without getting marked."

"But, Reggie?" asked Mary, in bewilderment. "What does it all mean? You say we weren't hypnotized, so there must have been something there. And if there was something there, why did we all see different things?"

Brooks crossed his legs and uncrossed them again. He stood up, filled his pipe, and turned away from them to the lake. He walked to the end of the platform, waited a moment, came back and sat down again. "It's most damnably difficult," he said. "It's not a question of mind alone, or of matter alone. It's the relation between them."

"Well, mind or matter, it all seems to me to make nonsense," said Mary. "We all see two figures out of Keats's poem. We don't believe in ghosts. We weren't hypnotized. We see colour in a dark room. Was there anything there or not, Reggie? That's what I want to know. If there was, what was it? And if there wasn't, why did we see what we saw?"

"That's easier to ask than to answer. If you mean,

was that very picturesque looking knight a human being, like you or me, with sense organs and consciousness and purpose of his own, I'll have to say he was not. Nor," he turned to McTavish, "was the lady, which I am sure will disappoint you. If you fall in love with her, you will be in a worse way than the knight was. A good deal worse. She's just . . . 'a fairy's child'."

They were becoming more and more puzzled. "Then what did we see?" asked McTavish.

"That's where I find it so hard to give an answer. In any case I'm working very much in the dark. It's here that you'll just have to listen to a little theory. It's off my subject, though it won't be in a few years. Have a look at that, McTavish." He pointed to Mary's wedding ring.

"How do you see it?" he went on.

"I . . . I suppose I just see it. I suppose that something happens in my jolly old retina and that affects the nerves, and . . . you know," he concluded brightly.

Brooks regarded him gravely. "I wish I did," he said. "Well, it's a fact that the nerves are affected and they affect the brain. That's where we do the seeing, of course. When the brain is excited we become conscious and see the ring. It doesn't matter how the brain is influenced, whether its done through the eyes, say, or by some other means. The result is the same, at least as regards what we perceive, so long as the proper brain pattern is present. It may be disease,

when we call it having hallucinations. Or it may be," he hesitated while they looked at him, puzzled, "it may be somebody using outside means."

"You see," he went on, "there's a part of it that is important, and which you must both have noticed at the time."

He turned to his wife. "When that knight came in at the door and strode along the floor, were you afraid?" he asked.

"Not a bit," she answered. "It never occurred to me to be afraid, though I did wonder afterwards why I wasn't. It all seemed so natural at the time."

Brooks turned to McTavish. "And you, George?" he asked.

"No, nor I," answered the journalist. "I wasn't in the least alarmed. I couldn't understand it afterwards, either."

Brooks nodded. "And I wasn't alarmed. That makes it unanimous." He looked from one to the other of them slowly.

"Isn't it strange?" he said. "Three people sit by the fire in a Canadian cottage, and in crashes. . . ."

"Not crashes, Reggie. Strides." This from Mary.

". . . in crashes a fully armoured man, with a great sword that would have slit McTavish's throat as easily as cutting butter, and a nice little dagger that would have gone slickly and silently under McTavish's fifth rib." He said the words with a certain grim unction. "And all the time we sit there and speculate on the date of the armour and the kind of metal polish he

used. And armour, *armour*, my dear man." He turned almost savagely to McTavish.

"Why didn't you run away, George?" he said. "Why didn't you give one look at him and cut off as fast as you could? Why didn't we all, for that matter?" he added, as though a little ashamed of himself. "That armour meant business, all right. Did you see a stain of blood on the sword handle?" he asked McTavish grimly.

McTavish nodded silently. With some embarrassment he answered Brooks's first question.

"I suppose it was my natural . . . ah . . . braggadocio, and that sort of thing," he stammered.

Brooks stood up with the spring of the athlete, his powerful and well-knit frame seeming to burst through his flannels. He eyed the other man up and down with a certain mild contempt.

"Well, it wasn't," he retorted. "It was because the knight came from within us. It belonged to us. It was part of ourselves. We should all have run fast enough if that had been a real knight stamping into the room. But a knight that we are *caused to see* is much more part of us than a real knight would be. It slipped into our minds like a seal slipping into the water, without making a ripple. It seemed natural."

Wide-eyed they both nodded.

"And so we were not afraid of it. There never is fear when this sort of thing happens. Everything hangs together very well."

The astonished pair looked at him questioningly.

"*If I am right, there was something there, but it was not what we saw. There was an influence causing us to see, working directly on our brains.*

"It's been done," he went on, "experimentally, and in the laboratory, under conditions that are quite watertight. I have on my bookshelf at home a book called *Extra-Sensory Perception.* It was written by a fellow in the United States, a protégé of the great McDougall."

McTavish opened his eyes wide. "I thought that would get you," said Brooks.

"Of course," he went on, "I only use the title of the book as an illustration. What he did was something very different from anything we experienced. But the fact remains. He showed that a person can be made to perceive things without using what are ordinarily called his five senses. I suspect this is what happened to us."

Mary suddenly became grave. "You said, 'made to see things', Reggie," she almost gasped. "Do you mean that some *person* was making us see all that? Working directly on our brains? How could they?"

Brooks nodded gravely. "That is what I suspect. But I don't know. I want to find out."

McTavish looked quickly at his friend. "Who is it, Reggie?" he asked.

Brooks frowned slightly at him, as though to check further inquiries. "If I am right," he said, "knowing the last question, the same influence which caused us to see what we did last night also affected the owl and

Martin. This is only a guess, but it does seem plausible to me. I don't understand it all, but——" he paused impressively. "I must repeat, I rather think there may be danger."

The last few words were said with a gravity that chilled them. They were silent for a while. Then:

"Won't you go away, you two?"

Mary spoke first. "Will you tell me something, Reggie?"

The man nodded.

"Do you love me?" She ignored McTavish, who was resolutely looking out over the water.

Brooks nodded. "You know I do," he answered.

The girl sighed. "I'll stay with you," she said.

McTavish turned round. "I feel I ought to register embarrassment," he said. "But I've known Mary longer than you have. I've played postman's knock with her, and she's turned me down when I wanted to make an honest woman of her. I feel I belong to the family. I'll stay."

Chapter 6

MacReady Dances

They went in to dinner prepared by the now completely recovered Martin, on the screened porch at the back. Here the builder of the cottage, generous in everything, from rooms twice as high as need be to hand-made, hardwood beds, a foot oversize each way, and with individually marked slats, had lovingly fitted screens from roof to floor, all round the two open sides. On the hottest days the dining-room was cool, although it was next to the kitchen. They sat at the long grey refectory table, and looked out over the willowed bay where Brooks had his midnight adventure with the motor boat. McTavish was unusually thoughtful. Not even the spectacle of Brooks eating his corn on the cob—imported early from across the line—could excite his derision. A number of questions were agitating his mind. Why had Brooks so obviously headed him off when he asked who was causing the trouble? If Brooks knew who was doing it, why didn't he say so? Why hadn't Brooks discussed the motor boat and its passenger? Who was the passenger?

Brooks was very dark and mysterious about the whole thing, as though there were something he was holding back. Why? And then the owl and Martin's unaccountable seizure. If Brooks were right, and the three events were connected, why was it that Martin had been affected by being thrown into unconsciousness and the other three by seeing that extraordinary vision? Was it a vision, or what ought one to call it? A flood of half-connected questions swept over his mind.

Mary had apparently recovered her good spirits. She had not been able to resist Brooks with the corn.

"No really, Reggie," she was saying, "it's not allowed to scrape it off with a knife. You've got to take it up with your fingers and gnaw. Especially at a camp —if you can call it a camp with a living-room like a cathedral and springs on the beds. Gnash it like a gentleman."

Sheepishly, Brooks took his cob at one end, and carried it to his mouth.

"No, that won't do. Rub it in your butter and take it in your two hands." She took hers, buttered it, and bit off the yellow grains. "There's no need to look like a squirrel, even if George does. He's got his pile of old cobs stored up for the winter."

McTavish looked down at his plate, which was heaped up with four or five much chewed cobs. "When did I eat them?" he thought. "Must be getting absent minded." He went on with his train of reflection. Surely, though, the whole idea was fantas-

tic. How could there be any connection between the three events? And how could anybody be doing it all? Brooks must be wrong this time. Of course, he had only said he *suspected.* Then he remembered what a ribald but respectful American scientist had told him at a convention of Neurologists held at the McDuffie Institute, where Brooks worked in Montreal.

"That bird, Brooks," said this gentleman from the Pacific Coast, "gets me beat. He looks like a tailor's dummy, and talks like God knows what, but he's right every time. What he doesn't know about nerves, I'll tell you, isn't worth knowing. Yes, and everything else, too. Believe me, he knows more about psychology than anybody. He's going to make those guys sit up one day. I'll tell you, he's the only man in the world I would listen to with a paper of that title on the programme." McTavish remembered that it had been the meeting which Brooks had electrified by reading his now famous "Experimental Approaches to the Problem of the Relation between Mind and Matter". Not that McTavish had understood much of the speech, which it had been his duty, as a journalist, to report. But he remembered the meeting he had attended in the severely business-like hall, provided, in the Institute where Brooks worked, by the recently munificent will of the late lumber king, McDuffie. His thoughts went back in gratitude to the leather-padded seats. (Professing to find the process of reflection distressing, McDuffie had maintained, in the face of vigorous opposition to the extravagance,

that his researchers were to sit in comfort 'from top to bottom'.) McTavish still had a vivid recollection of the crowd of youngish looking men with horned glasses and a slick institutional look, all hanging open-mouthed on Brooks's words, or rather, figures. All he could remember was something about a correlational matrix and three stages of amplification, but the meeting seemed prodigiously impressed. He had never known neurologists could applaud so much. They looked a pretty thin-lipped crowd, but they nearly lifted the roof when Brooks had finished speaking. He remembered one rather pert young man who stood up and raised some question about Brooks's controls, whatever they were. "If", Brooks had said in reply, "the questioner had read the literature and had listened to the paper, he would have realized that there were three possible sources of error. Each of these three possibilities was ruled out by the statistical analysis employed. That was the main point of the paper that has just been read." Brooks sat down. The meeting heard no more from the interrupter.

"Yes," thought McTavish. "We shall have to accept what Brooks says." Probably he was the only man in the world who was capable of explaining what had happened. He hoped that Brooks would not take too long about it—his own vacation lasted only three weeks.

"When George has woken up, we'll go and have our coffee," Mary was saying.

They went.

After coffee, Brooks suddenly announced: "I'm going to have another talk with Martin. Do you children want to be in it?"

"Do we?" from McTavish. "My sweet boy, you couldn't keep me away. Or rather, you wouldn't," he added hastily.

"One or other of you may be able to suggest something. I'd be most grateful for your help. Only don't interfere when I'm talking, will you not?"

They promised with all the resources at their command. "But what are you after, Reggie?" asked Mary.

"I'm not satisfied about him. At least, I am satisfied about him personally, but not about the part he is playing in all this. He's as honest as the day, and entirely devoted and grateful to us for giving him a home and the pretence of a job. And yet there's something I don't understand about that faint of his."

McTavish thrust out his chest, swelled up like a scientist, and began to speak. "That's just what I have been thinking," he began. "Why? . . ."

Brooks interrupted him. "Yes, that's obvious enough. Why did he faint, while we had a vision? And for that matter, why did the owl fight? There are lots of possibilities. The difficulty is to decide between them. For the present, we had better stick to Martin. We can't question the owl. It's conceivable that he was affected differently because he is a different kind of person. One man's vision is another man's poison. Or because of some experience in the

past. Conceivable, I say. Or because of something he had eaten, or been reading, just as we were affected by what we had been talking about. You're dealing with the mind, you know, and a strange thing it is."

McTavish waved his hand in a gesture of despair. "All right," he said. "I give up. Bring him in."

The man came on to the verandah. Somewhat surprised, he sat on the chair Brooks offered him. "Martin," said Brooks, "I'd be very grateful if you would have a talk with us. I'm not satisfied about that turn of yours last night. This isn't a doctor's visit. We went into all that this morning. But if we all talk it over we may be able to help you."

The man looked puzzled. "Help me, sir?"

"Yes," answered Brooks. "You don't want to go having fits all your life, do you? If we can get at the cause of it, we may be able to stop it. We've got to get at it from the bottom up."

Unexpectedly recalcitrant, the man stood up, deferential but decided. "No, sir," he said. "I'm sorry, sir, but you will have to excuse me." Awkwardly he made for the door. Quickly Mary came to the rescue.

"Why, Martin," she said, "I don't think that's very nice, when Dr. Brooks wants to help you. I think it's silly of you, too. You'd have to pay twenty-five dollars an hour in Montreal."

("I hate to do it," thought Mary. "It would have been better if Reggie had done this by himself. But I do want to find out about that knight.")

She smiled at him, as a mother smiling at an erring child.

"Well, you see, ma'am," he said hesitantly, "I don't hold with this psychoanalysis, and this Eddipus complex. I've read about it. Fits and things."

McTavish was beginning to grin. Brooks scowled at him, signalling him to let the man go on, and leave the situation to Mary.

"No, I don't blame you," she said. "I don't hold with it myself. That's why we thought you would be more at ease if we were all here." ("I am disgracing myself," she thought.)

MacReady was puzzled, and clearly not willing to betray his ignorance. He sat down.

"As you wish, ma'am," he said. "What was it you wanted to know, sir?"

"It's really about yourself, Martin. How long have you been a sailor?"

"Off and on about two years, sir. Before that I was a butler-chauffeur. Before that. . . ." He paused.

"Why did you change?" Brooks passed him the cigarette box, from which, rather uncomfortably, he took a smoke and lit it with deft enough fingers.

"I had grown up by the sea, sir, and got a bit homesick for the water and the boys."

"Why did you lose your job on the ferry?"

The man blushed, and looked at the floor, then at the roof of the platform on which they sat, glanced at the door, and decided to stay where he was.

"I guess I'd been drinking," he said.

This was torture, the others thought. Why couldn't Brooks have done it by himself?

"Do you remember the date?"

"June the twenty-third, sir."

"Do you know what you did the day before that?"

Suddenly the man grew excited, as though a powerful stimulant had been injected into him. He stood up, his eyes flashing, and clenched his fists.

"Yes! No!" he shouted. Then looking round him, as though recollecting in what company he was: "That is, no, sir," he added, the mask of the servant slipping back over his face.

Brooks's jaw was tightening. "I wish you could, Martin. I'm fairly sure it had something to do with your spell the other night. You see," he went on, "I'm not so certain that you had been drinking at all." His voice was kindly.

MacReady looked at him with incredulity. Then he uttered a short, rather scornful laugh.

"I guess I'd been drinking, all right," he said. "And now, sir, I will ask you to excuse me."

He passed from the verandah by the screen door, wrapped in the dignity of his class.

Ashamed of themselves, the others did not speak. Brooks sat tapping with his fingers on his chair. Suddenly, as though he had come to a decision:

"Yes," he said. "That's the thing."

"What is?" asked Mary.

"Hypnosis."

"What?" they cried simultaneously. "Who?" This from McTavish.

"Martin, of course. I'll hypnotize him. That is", he went on doubtfully, "if Mary will persuade him to let me do it. She's the only one who can." He looked at her with affection and pride.

Mary was doubtful. "But, Reggie," she protested, "we can't ask the poor fellow to go through any more. It's wicked. As it is, I feel pretty badly about fooling him like that. And what's the idea?"

"Well, you must have noticed how upset he was when I asked him what happened the day before he was fired. He didn't behave like himself. I believe there is something he has forgotten."

"Forgotten, Reggie?"

"Yes, forgotten. What the papers call amnesia, and it's a good enough name. There's generally a reason for it, which can sometimes be found out by hypnosis. I told you hypnosis is a perfectly ordinary means of diagnosis and treatment. I want to try it. I have a hunch that what happened to MacReady on June the twenty-third may turn out to be the key to a good deal. I'd like to try it, anyhow, and it can't do him any harm."

Mary hesitated. "You were so scornful of it," she said.

"Not scornful of hypnotism. It is genuine enough. It's only using the word to explain everything that's quackery. Just like psychology! A lot of perfectly respectable practitioners use hypnosis as a matter of

routine. As a matter of fact, if ether hadn't been discovered when it was, a good many operations would be performed under hypnosis today. And then we should have known a good deal more about it," he added regretfully. He paused.

"No, because quacks have used it that doesn't mean it is quackery." He looked at Mary. "Well, what about it?" he asked. "Are you willing to stretch your conscience another notch?"

"All right," she said, still a little doubtful. "If you feel it will really help the man himself. I don't think we ought to *use* him, like one of your wretched guinea-pigs."

"No, I promise you that. This isn't just an experiment. I'm genuinely worried for Martin, quite apart from wanting to . . . to experiment."

He was clearly sincere, and a little hurt.

"What do you want me to do?" the girl continued.

"Just go out and persuade him. If it is possible, he shouldn't know why we are going to do it. Do you think you can manage that?"

The girl thought for a while. Then:

"George," she said, "go out and catch some frogs. There are generally plenty down by the marsh. Get two or three, if you can. We'll do without snakes today."

They saw what she had in her mind. McTavish disappeared round the house. Ten minutes later he came back with a large bull-frog struggling in his hand. "Here's a magnificent brute," he said. "I

chased him all round the marsh. I've three more in my pockets."

Mary stood up and disappeared into the back part of the house. In a minute or so she returned, followed by MacReady, carrying a pail of water.

"Put it down there," she said, pointing to the end of the verandah. The man did as he was told.

"There you are, George," she said. "Put them in."

McTavish had been making friends with the large green frog. With apparent regret, he dropped it into the bucket, where it swam turbulently round and round. From the capacious pocket of his tweed coat he produced three more, which he plopped likewise into the water, making the pail look like a frog's racing track.

MacReady watched with some interest. "Going fishing, sir?" he asked.

"No, the professor's going to hypnotize them," said Mary, casually. By unspoken consent they left the talking to her. She glanced at the door.

The man Martin looked up with interest. "Yes, sir?" he asked. He stood with his hand reluctantly on the door handle. "Will that be all, sir?" he asked. He was clearly reluctant to go. Mary knew that the game was won.

"Would you like to stay and watch?" she asked.

"May I, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, if you like." The man sat down.

"Do your stuff, Svengali," said McTavish.

Brooks dipped his hand in the bucket and caught

the large frog, McTavish's friend. The animal jumped and struggled and Brooks had some difficulty in taking firm hold of it. Finally, he had it safely between the thumb and first finger of his left hand, kicking and squirming anxiously. Then he turned it over, so that its white belly showed uppermost. Little by little the frog's struggles grew less spasmodic. In less than a minute it was still. Its legs relaxed and then hung limp. Carefully, Brooks laid it on the floor. It lay motionless, belly upwards, apparently lifeless.

"Number one," said the scientist.

The others watched fascinated. "Is it dead?" asked McTavish.

"No. It's hypnotized, as you call it. It'll come round in a minute or so and hop off none the worse.

"What I've done," explained Brooks, "is to press on the nervous centres, and thus check them. Pavlov did it with dogs but by different means. When he continually sounded the same note in his experiments, for months, perhaps, the animals finally went to sleep as soon as the note was sounded. What the psychologists ordinarily call 'attention' is apparently much the same thing only less intense. A good many people believe that hypnosis is a heightened state of attention to some things, with a blotting out of others. So you see hypnotism is perfectly harmless, in spite of popular belief."

They knew that the little lecture was mainly for the benefit of MacReady.

They watched the frog lying in such an undignified

position on the floor, MacReady by no means the least interested.

"Who'd like to try?" Nobody volunteered. Mary turned imperceptibly towards MacReady. This was an opportunity he could not resist. What a trick to show the boys!

"May I, sir?" he ventured diffidently.

"Yes, do. It's quite easy. Just a gentle, even pressure on the back and on the under part." But MacReady had already caught his frog, with the deftness of long fishing practice.

"Now. Your left thumb on his back, the first finger underneath." Over went the frog. "Just a slight pressure. Don't hurt it." The graceful legs relaxed, as they had with Brooks. The frog was laid on the floor. It rested quite still. MacReady was delighted at his new trick. "Well, I never knew that," he exclaimed in amazement. In the general excitement the other frog had apparently recovered and disappeared. They watched this one, as its breathing gradually grew quicker. Suddenly life seemed to return. A twitch or two, and it was on its legs in the position for which nature had intended it. Then with one great leap it was off the verandah and on to the grass.

"Is that how you do it to human beings?" asked McTavish.

Almost imperceptibly Mary nodded approval. They must not forget the purpose of the experiment.

"Not quite," laughed Brooks, "but it's almost as

easy with a little practice, and just as harmless. I'll show you, if anybody likes to volunteer."

Once more, nobody did. And once more, whether by some occult trick of suggestion, of which Mary alone was mistress, or whether prompted again by curiosity, MacReady looked hesitantly from one to the other of them.

"Would you like to try on me, sir?" he asked, almost shyly.

"If you like. You won't know much about it, though."

But this naturally whetted curiosity the more. MacReady looked at Brooks as though he were a benevolent magician.

"That's all right with me," he said.

At once, before the man could change his mind, Brooks assumed a bedside manner. "Well, take off your coat and loosen your collar." MacReady took off that white coat, which, by some miracle or other he had obtained in the village, and without which he would never appear, however hot the cook-stove, however hard the wood he was sawing.

"Lie down, please, on the bed." Brooks pointed to the cot-bed which stood on the verandah.

The man lay at full length on the bed, staring with wandering gaze at the ribbed roof, his head resting on the pillow. He blinked a little in apprehension of what might be going to happen. Curiosity was strong, but this was the unknown, and he had read about it all!

"Now make yourself as comfortable as possible. That is the essence of the whole thing." Brooks adjusted the cushion, and placed his hand on the man's forehead.

"Now, a few deep breaths, just as though you were sleepy . . . sleepy . . . sleepy. And so you are."

In truth, the man's eyelids were already beginning to twitch.

"Now. Blink both your eyelids as I count. Open. Shut. Open. . . . Shut. . . . Open. . . . Shut. . . . Open. . . . Shut. . . ."

The man's eyes seemed to grow heavier and heavier. He had more and more difficulty in opening them. His knees gave a great twitch. Brooks kept on inexorably, his voice gradually becoming more and more monotonous, more and more sleepy. With profound attention, Mary and McTavish watched the man lying on the bed, white-shirted and belted, his dark hair against the yellow cushion cover, blinking, blinking, open . . . shut . . . open . . . shut. His breathing became little by little quieter and shallower. Now it was hardly perceptible. Open. . . . Shut. . . . Brooks's voice went on in a monotonous sing-song. Open. . . . Shut. . . . Open. . . . From the artery at the side of the man's head McTavish saw that the pulse was slowing and becoming less marked. The eyes were now motionless and fixed on the roof with a curiously lifeless gaze. Brooks was regarding the man with fixed intensity. Open. . . . Shut. . . . "Damn it," thought McTavish. "He'll have me to sleep in a minute." His

own eyelids were beginning to feel heavy as lead. The regular voice went on, in weary iteration. Open. . . . Open. . . . Now the breathing of the man on the bed was becoming deeper and deeper. Shut. . . . Shut. . . . Shut. . . . Shut. . . . Shut. . . .

The man began to snore!

Quite automatically, the eyelids were opening and shutting to Brooks's words, like the intermittently-timed part of some great machine. Save for the gentle snore, the man showed little sign of life.

"Shut," said Brooks in a more final tone. "Keep them shut. You cannot open them. You are asleep."

They started towards the bed to look at the man. With a gesture, Brooks restrained them.

"Lift up your hand," he said firmly. Mechanically the man obeyed. "Put it down. . . . Now the other one." The left hand was raised and held in the air. "That will do." The arm was dropped to the bed.

"Now I am going to ask you some questions, and you will answer the truth. You will not remember anything I have asked you. What did you do on June the twenty-third?"

The man stirred uneasily on his couch as though he were beginning to awaken.

Brooks's voice became stern, inexorable. "Do you understand me?" he asked.

"Yes," from the man on the bed, the voice of a sleep talker, the voice of a man not in this world.

"Then answer."

"I . . . she said I mustn't." They bent forward in astonishment. She? She? Who was "She"? They looked round, over their shoulders, in alarm, as though some white presence of a woman might be watching them from behind the house, from under a low branched tree. But nobody was there. The sun shone brightly over the blue waters of Lake Ontario. On the topmost point of a dead spruce tree a song-sparrow sang, Brooks's song-sparrow. Round and round in the pail the two frogs swam, chasing each other in a ceaseless merry-go-round.

"So she said you mustn't." Brooks's voice became cold and masterful. "I say you will. No harm will come to you. I will see to it. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me what you did on June the twenty-third. Tell me. Now. You will forget nothing."

Still apparently sleeping, the man on the bed seemed to make a great effort, as though to break down a barrier. Tears rolled down his cheeks. His face was twisted with effort. Brooks took a step towards the bed. There was something indefinably menacing about his stride. The others shrank away.

"You must," he said. "You must." His voice had focused down to a harsh rasp. "Tell me, I say." He placed his face close up to the other man's.

"Open your eyes," he said.

Mechanically, the man's eyes opened at the word of command. They could see that the pupils were narrowed down to pin-points. His own face less than

a foot away, Brooks stared menacingly at the other man.

"Tell me, I say," he said. "Tell me. Tell me. *You must tell me.*"

The voice was stern, cold, like the sound of steel ruthlessly cutting iron.

The man on the bed said not a word!

Brooks straightened up with a gesture of weariness. He turned away for a moment as though to rest. His shoulders shrugged slightly. Then, bending down again, he seized the prostrate man by the shoulders and shook him.

"TELL ME WHAT YOU DID," he repeated. "Tell me. I say you must."

Brooks was silent.

Suddenly the man on the bed began to whimper like a child. Great broken sobs heaved his body. A flood of tears coursed down his cheeks.

Quickly Mary sprang up towards the prostrate figure. "Stop it, Reggie, at once. I can't stand it," she exclaimed, horror and disgust in her voice. Brooks barred her. "Stop it, I say. You beast! You're inhuman!" She beat impotently at his arm.

"Sit down," said Brooks urgently, under his breath. "It's coming. It's what he needs. It'll do him good. Believe me." His voice pleaded.

But the man on the bed had already settled the question. His voice still broken by sobs, he began to speak.

"She took me off in her boat and. . . ."

"And what?"

He wrinkled his face as though trying to hold back the words. Then they gushed out, in a gasp of shame.

"And made me sing!"

Bathos! Absurdity! They had to restrain themselves from laughing! Mary and McTavish glanced at each other in mystification. Sing? What could this have had to do with it? That MacReady, the shy, the female shunner, should be embarrassed at being forced to sing by a woman they understood. But surely it had no meaning. It was nonsense. To pry thus into a man's affairs was indecent. Once again Mary stood up, determined to stop the performance. It had gone far enough.

"Regg . . ." she began. Once more her husband waved her back, asking another question as he did so.

"Who was she?"

"The woman in the motor boat."

They started as though electrified. Even Brooks's stern face relaxed for a moment, as he turned to them, almost smiling. The motor boat! Had there been a woman in it after all?

"What was she like?"

"She had breeches on, and goggles."

"How tall?"

The man on the bed apparently did not hear. Instead he let his head fall back on the pillow, opened his mouth, and began to snore. Brooks took him by the shoulder and shook him. His eyes were still tightly closed.

"Come out of that," he said. "Tell me, how tall was the woman? Tell me, I say."

"How tall? Yes, how tall." The man was apparently struggling to collect his wits. "About as tall as . . . as Mrs. Brooks, but heavier, like." The words were laboured, dead, cavernous.

"What coloured hair?"

"I couldn't see."

"Oh! . . . And what did she make you sing?"

The others were growing impatient. Made to sing by a sardonic captress with a sense of humour! Yes! But did it matter what? The point was, surely, to find out what she wanted him for and what she had done to him. Brooks told them afterwards why he asked this question. It seemed that he sensed that the singing was important, since MacReady took it so hard. But the man was answering.

"The Isle of Capri!" Again laughter was very near, but they managed once more to contain themselves. MacReady embezzled by a mysterious female and forced to sing "The Isle of Capri"! It was too much! But he was continuing.

"She said: 'There are no hickories in Capri'."

Brooks nodded approvingly. "Good girl," he said. "There aren't."

At the tone of his voice Mary looked quickly at him. When had she heard that touch of professional approval before? When? She racked the corners of her mind, seeking the roots of a fleeting disquietude. But they eluded her. And those words of MacReady!

Hickories in Capri! The night of the fainting! Then they were on the track after all. But they had hardly time to congratulate themselves for Martin was speaking again.

"She said: 'I like it all but the bit about the small golden band on her finger' "

Suddenly Mary turned white, and clutched for support to her chair. The world turned black. A botanist! Brooks approving! The small golden band!

Olive!

Olive! Her brilliant school friend scientist and society girl in one, who had been engaged to Brooks, and from whom Mary had carried off a husband! Olive! Whom she had been trying to push from the corners of her mind, and whom she believed to be still in India on that hunting expedition, begun when Brooks's first engagement was broken. Beauty of the city, without nerves or conscience! Tireless, relentless, with the genius that is the capacity for taking infinite pains! Olive back! Brooks referring to her, even at second-hand, with that same touch of proprietary pride which Mary had known so well! It was too much! Unwittingly she half rose to go indoors, her shoulders drooping, her head swimming.

Then she saw that Brooks was talking.

"You shall have a rest, now," he was saying. "Sleep for five minutes. We shall talk, but you will not hear. And in five minutes' time you will call me to ask you some more questions."

The man began almost immediately to snore.

Brooks turned round to them. Sweat was running down his face. "It's Olive, all right," he said. His voice was cool and collected. He spoke with detachment, as a surgeon speaks after an operation. Relieved, Mary sat back again. "What the devil is she up to?" Brooks went on. "Anyhow, I think we deserve a smoke after all that. McTavish, your cigarettes, please! There's a lot more work yet."

He sat down, breathing heavily. McTavish produced a packet and passed it round. "Work for us or for that poor chap?" he asked tentatively.

"For both. We haven't begun yet. When we really touch things, that's going to be the rub. It'll be a real tug-of-war. Somehow or other, Olive has certainly given the works to poor old Martin. Bristling with inhibitions, he was. You could fairly rattle the bars. I don't know that I ever saw anything quite so powerful. I had the feeling of a dynamo working in the poor fellow." He was still breathing hard.

He paused. The breeze gently fluttered the long grass and the bushes. An empty rocking-chair at the other end of the verandah was gently swaying to and fro. With little uneasy calls the young swallows, guests of the house, were fluttering round and between the posts of the roof. At the foot of the sloping grass they could see the gently rolling lake, the sound of the waves forming a dull background to the bird calls. Monotonously, the song-sparrow sang and sang, always the same notes with never a variation, calling

for Brooks. They puffed their cigarettes, each full of his own thoughts.

"I wish that damn bird would change its tune," said Brooks, moodily, and relapsed once more into silence. But the bird sang on. The man on the bed snored.

"That's why I had to be so brutal," Brooks said. "I mean to MacReady. There's so much power there that I couldn't mince matters. It's really like a surgical operation. You've got to hack before you get at the trouble. That flood of tears helped a whole lot. It showed the resistance was breaking down. Yes," he repeated, "it's really psychological surgery, and he's going to be a whole lot better for it."

Sadly, Mary Brooks flicked the ash of her cigarette on to the grass. Her heart was heavy. Should she mention Olive? Better not.

"Ought we to be talking like this while he is lying there?" she asked. "Won't it confuse. . . ."

But the man on the bed suddenly stopped snoring. She and McTavish turned round, afraid that he was about to awaken. Brooks put his first finger to his lips.

"Shh!" he said. The man was speaking.

It was a strangely automatic voice, the voice of a sleeping Robot.

"You said for me to tell you, sir," it announced.

Brooks glanced at his wrist-watch. "Five minutes and thirty seconds," he said. Walking over to the bed he spoke.

"You may sleep for another five minutes and tell

me again," he said. At once the snoring recommenced.

"How did he know?" asked McTavish curiously.

"I'll tell you all about it some other time. People used to think there was some mysterious time sense, but that's been proved wrong. It's probably related somehow to the rhythms of the body. Pulse, breathing, intestines, hunger, and the rest of it, you know. It all makes a kind of biological clock. Galileo used his pulse to count the swinging lamp, you remember. Probably hypnotized subjects use the same means of telling the time as ordinary people, with a little more attention to detail. But I'll talk about it again."

He lay back in his chair. His face was lined with fatigue. He threw away his cigarette, and closed his eyes. . . .

The man on the bed was speaking again.

"You said to tell you, sir," said that curiously distant voice.

Brooks jumped up with a start. "Yes, I'm coming," he said.

The examination began again.

Into the details already related there is no need to enter. MacReady's abduction by trickery, how his captress forced him to lie face downwards on the boat, how he was locked in the gardener's room, were all described, this time with rather less resistance. But try as he could, Brooks could obtain no detail of where the prison was located. The invariable answer to questions on this point was "I don't know".

"You see," said Brooks, turning to the others, "there's nothing especially mysterious about it. He can only tell you what he has known before. There's a lot of nonsense talked about hypnotism."

When MacReady told how his captress had shot at the mark on the wall, Brooks grunted. "That settles it. Just what she did to me. She must have got a great kick out of it. I wonder where she picked up the trick shooting! She would certainly do it thoroughly, once she started it." He breathed a reluctant sigh of admiration, which clutched again at Mary's heart.

"What did she do when she turned on the switch?"

"Nothing, sir." The man was obstinate.

"What did you do?"

"She said not to say, sir." A new line of obduracy settled on to MacReady's mouth.

"But I tell you to say. Do you hear? Tell me."

"She said not to say, sir."

Brooks bent over the sleeper. His voice was full of snarling threats. He shook the man and rasped into his ear.

"But I tell you to say. Tell me. Tell me at once. I command you."

No use. With an expression of exasperating, bloodless perversity, the same reply was given time after time.

"She said not to say, sir."

Brooks sat down and mopped his brow. "Might as well butt into a granite wall," he said. "She certainly has put the jinx on our friend."

He had met his master. They would have to be content with what they had heard. He sat silently for perhaps two or three minutes, wrinkling his brow in intensely concentrated thought. The others were silent. Two or three times they saw him raise his hands, and drop them again with a gesture of despair. He was oblivious of their presence.

Suddenly he jumped up and slapped his thigh. "It's worth trying," he said. Approaching once more the man on the bed:

"Did she tell you not to *do* what you did?" he asked.

MacReady was uncertain.

"N . . . no, sir," he said.

"Well, do it. Do it now. No harm will come to you. Do you hear me? *No harm will come to you.* I promise it. *Do exactly what you did then.*"

There followed surely the strangest exhibition that ever was staged in the bright sunlight of a lakeside cottage. Anywhere, for that matter. With the unseeing movements of a sleep walker, yet avoiding accurately any obstacles in his path, MacReady passed sombrely before them along the wooden platform. His eyes were open, but, as Brooks pointed out afterwards, they hardly seemed to move in the head. The pupils were narrowed down to small points. It was as though he was gazing fixedly at some point in the infinite distance. As he passed Mary and McTavish he turned his head towards them, and the unnaturally immobile eyes followed the movements of the neck, like the beads on a doll's face. Yet it was as though

he had not seen them, as though he were seeing something through and beyond them. It was the look of a man risen from the dead. Mary shuddered as that cadaverous gaze fell upon her. Even McTavish turned his head away.

Slowly he went down the steps leading to the grass, steadying his slightly swaying body by the banister. Now he was on the grass. Where was he going? What strange actions was this grotesque shell ready to perform? They could not guess. Its head turned away from them, and gazing out over the lake, the uncouth figure groped its uncertain way down the path to the water. A crow disturbed flew up from the lakeside, trailing its raucous cry as it went towards the treetop. At this the walking figure put its hand stiffly up to its ear and brushed twice, like a cat. Mary turned white.

As the figure came towards the middle of the sloping grass its movements grew more jerky and more uncertain. Suddenly it stopped and with an air of expectation, turned towards them. They looked in breathless anticipation and horror. The prologue was finished. The show was going to start.

For five seconds the figure stood motionless, for ten seconds. Its head was half bowed, its shoulders slumped, its unblinking eyelids, even from that distance, monstrously still. A minute, and it had not moved, but stood, the shabby husk of a human being, white-shirted, preserving even in its extremity the obsequious aspect of the serving man. Two minutes. . . . Five

minutes. . . . Horror could hardly sustain itself. Then the head slightly turned, as though to listen. That was all.

Suddenly with a shriek the figure crumpled up on the ground. From a man, it collapsed into a squirming heap. Its legs thrashed convulsively, its hands tore at its abdomen, clawing like a dog. The three people on the verandah leaped up. But the contortion lasted only a few moments. For a brief space the figure was still, and then rose slowly to its feet once more. Suddenly the head was jerked erect, the posture that of an infuriated man.

The figure shook its fist wildly in the direction of the verandah.

"That's enough, you bitch!" it shouted. "I'll kill you."

It ran towards the steps, murder in every step. Hastily Brooks and McTavish pushed Mary towards the door. In alarm, Brooks shouted: "Stop! Stop! MacReady." He might as well have shouted at a cataract. The shape ran on, menace growing with every stride. It was nearly to the steps. Now Mary was behind the door. In front stood Brooks and McTavish, ready to ward off the murderous rush. "Stop, stop, I say," shouted Brooks. In vain.

"Oh my God, that thing'll kill us all," flashed over McTavish's mind. "Brooks's filthy experiments!"

The figure was half-way up the steps. They could hear its hoarse panting and see its bloodshot eyes, now no longer rigid but rolling with the frenzy of

madness. Facing the two men, it reached the top of the steps. Its foot was on the verandah.

Then suddenly, as though from a blow, it recoiled and staggered back to the grass, its right arm over its eyes. For a moment it stood at the foot of the stairs; then dropped its hands, and slowly, mournfully, with the dignity of hopeless resignation, it shambled back to the middle of the turf, its arms jerking in toneless rhythm, its head half sunken on its chest, a puppet of a human being. Again it waited, its hands twitching convulsively as though jerked by invisible wires.

Mary was peeping round the corner of the door. She came out on to the platform.

"Hadn't you better stop this, Reggie?" she whispered.

"I think he'll be all right, now," replied her husband hurriedly. "We should have known that he wouldn't get round to actually harming anybody. After all, he's only repeating some hell's performance he has already been through. Somebody seems to have had pretty firm control of him. Looks to me as though he had been played with. You notice he got almost to us, when something pulled him up short." He watched the figure, which still stood motionless, in an attitude of waiting.

"I have a notion that the first spasm was done unintentionally, as though somebody was putting on power and didn't quite know how much to use—though of course you can't tell." He continued to whisper. "Then the power would be turned off, and

MacReady would find himself in pain, and go for . . . for her," he added, almost ashamed.

"That's what I wondered," put in McTavish, under his breath. "I think you ought to go on with it, Brooks. It did him no permanent harm before, and you've got to stop those fits. He'll never get a job otherwise."

"That's what I . . ." began Brooks. "Hello, he's moving."

The man was ambling towards a large fir tree, at the foot of the grass where the turf ends and the rocky lake shore begins, the fir tree on which the bird sang.

"Had we better go down and watch him?" asked McTavish.

"No, he'll be all right. He'll be out in a moment, I think."

For perhaps two minutes they waited, the two men and the girl on the verandah, the girl between them, rocking their chairs, lighting their cigarettes, waiting for some incredible performance by this marionette of a hypnotized man, looking down over the thin brown turf as upon an arena, rocking their chairs . . . rocking . . . rocking. . . .

"I believe it's a performance," Mary suddenly whispered. "She made him sing, you know."

"Perhaps. . . . He's moving, down there at the foot of the tree on the left."

It was true. Against the blue water of the still lake they could make out the figure of a man, crouching, like a sprinter preparing to get away from the mark.

He was about to make his entrance. Never in their wildest moments had they imagined such a stage entrance!

For suddenly the crouching figure straightened itself up, poised, and leaped a good ten feet out on to the turf! There followed the wildest set of contortions, gesticulations, that the human frame has surely ever accomplished! Leaping into the air, with one hand behind his back, the other reaching to the sky, running forward a few paces, with little mincing tip-toed steps, jumping up with both arms outstretched, the man seemed to be the caricature of a drunken lunatic. If he had before been sombre, cadaverous, he was now frenzied, electric. At times he would jerk up his arms, one stiff wrist up, the other pointing towards the ground, stark fingers wide apart, like an over-jointed doll. Then again he would stand almost motionless, one leg bent, the other straight, half crouching, with a hand to his ear, as though listening. Then once more those little mincing steps to a bush towards the side, where he crouched and listened. A great bound to the centre of the stage! With the first finger of his right hand pointing to the sky, he stood bending forward on one knee, the other foot off the ground, like a burlesque Mercury on the ball. Then down again, half squatting, both knees bent, his arms crossed over his chest, his fingers extended, his hair standing up from his head.

McTavish began to titter. "Shock-headed Peter!" he muttered. "I wouldn't have believed it possible."

Brooks looked sternly at him. No use. The journalist broke out into a great guffaw. He was laughing uncontrollably. The others had to join. They laughed immoderately, painfully. Tears rolled down their cheeks.

"Oh, good heavens, stop him, Brooks," gasped the journalist. "I can't stand it!"

Forgotten was the danger that had lately threatened them, forgotten Brooks's strange experiment, forgotten the fact that this was the shell of a man, the plaything of a threatening woman. Everything was swept away in a great flood of overwhelming mirth at the antics of the Dervish on the grass.

"It's . . . it's ballet dancing," Mary managed to squeeze out between her convulsions. "Look at his toes!"

It was! MacReady was stepping back, with tiny jerked steps, on the points of his clumsy boots!

"I can't imagine how he *does* it," said Brooks in an astonished whisper. "It takes years of practice. They often seem as though they can do anything under hypnosis. Just like crazy people. He's probably got the idea that men do it."

Now he was lying down flat on his stomach, one leg swinging, the other on the ground. What was he gazing at? A daisy? No, it was the round ball of an early thistlehead, already in premature seed. With infinite and exaggerated care, he plucked the delicate sphere, leaped in the air with a bound of grotesque triumph, and squatted on his haunches. With an

enormous puff, he dilated his cheeks. "She loves me!" A delirious leap, then back squatting again. Again he swelled his cheeks, larger and larger, redder and redder. Surely they must burst, surely MacReady must burst with wind, like the frog of fable! Puff! They could hear the sound from the verandah. That magnificent blast must have broken the stem! But no! MacReady was holding the stalk aloft in triumph, pointing to it. One left! "She loves me, she loves me not!" He leaped into the air. Once more regarding with menace the seed in his hand, he squatted on his haunches. First in one hand, then in another he held it, his head absurdly cocked from side to side, as though to take counsel how best to beat down its defences. Then a great intaking of breath. Larger and larger grew MacReady, more and more bloated his cheeks, more and more purple. This time he surely must explode! He was turgid, livid! A Gargantuan puff! The greatest of the three! With wild abandon MacReady leaped up from where he was sitting, waved the stalk around his head, cast it on to the ground and ground it with his heel. "She loves me! She loves me! She loves me!"

Now he was standing, his foot on the broken stem, his arms crossed, looking up at the sky, with an expression of victory achieved, of justice accomplished.

"St. Michael with his foot on the angel!" whispered McTavish. "Olive loves him! I can't possibly laugh any more."

It was true. They had lapsed into an exhausted

silence, broken only by an occasional snicker. They could see the man's chest heaving as he stood in his posture of triumph. Olive loved him!

Suddenly he leaped up again more animated than ever. The preposterous finale was about to begin! From one side to another of the self-styled stage he leaped, with great springs, surpassing even the antics of before. The performance accelerated to a frenzied prestissimo. Wilder and wilder grew the bounds, higher and higher the leaps, more and more abandoned the ludicrous gestures. Finally, with a prodigious, culminating jerk, the man jumped into the air and scuttled his feet backwards and forwards.

"Oh, my God!" gasped McTavish, putting his hand to his side. "The entre-chat! Nijinski could do ten!"

The man on the grass came down again on his feet, gave a great spring to the place where he had started, nearly missed his balance, recovered himself, and was gone!

They looked at each other without a word, their cheeks stained with tears, holding their sides.

"Brooks, you look quite wan," gurgled McTavish. "I didn't know you could really laugh. Ought we to applaud?"

Brooks shook his head, his hair falling over his eyes. He brushed it back.

"No, he might come back for an encore. I don't think I could stand it."

Once more they waited, welcoming the respite to

collect their normal wits. Then a forlorn figure appeared from behind the tree, plodded up the steps, tramped over the verandah ("By golly, he'll be sore tomorrow," whispered McTavish) and, with unseeing eyes, lay down on the couch and began to snore!

"Just a moment, Martin," said Brooks. "Is that all?"

With infinite weariness in his voice:

"Yes, that's all," the man answered.

"Thank you. You will sleep for an hour now. You will have no headache when you wake. Tonight you will sleep very soundly. You will not remember what has taken place today, nor disclose it by any means to anybody. *By any means*," he repeated. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you may sleep now."

MacReady slept.

An hour later MacReady woke up, looked at his watch, then round at the three of them, who were anxiously watching him.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he said, as he rose to his feet. "I must have been asleep. I'm sorry the doctor's experiment did not work."

Very stiffly he moved to the door. A twinge brought a start of surprise to his face.

"How about dinner, ma'am?" he asked, carefully putting his hand on the latch. But Mary told him not to bother about dinner. MacReady shut the door gently behind him and was gone.

An hour later McTavish found Mary sitting alone on the verandah.

"I hope you don't mind," he said, "but I gave that chap five dollars. He needs clothes, and I thought it was a dirty trick we played on him this afternoon."

Mary broke into a subdued laugh.

"George," she said, "don't make me laugh any more. I really can't stand it."

"Why?" The man was somewhat offended.

"Because . . . well, I gave him five dollars myself. He didn't want to take it."

"No," said McTavish. "It was a great business getting him to take it."

Mary nodded. They were silent. They were joined by Brooks. McTavish looked him up and down. His friend blushed.

"Well," asked the journalist. "How much have you given him?"

"Me? Why?" The scientist's face was a dark red. "Ten dollars. . . . He didn't seem to want to take it."

"No," said Mary, reflectively, "he wouldn't."

Chapter 7

Searching the Point

MacReady's performance was indeed somewhat unexpected, but hardly as illuminating as they could have wished. True, they had ascertained that Olive had returned; Olive, that dazzling beauty with hair that might have stood for a fashion plate and indeed had once done so; with a figure that, seen even at a distance, had caused men to follow her car all round Montreal's Mountain; with a heart—a heart that beat its sixty to the minute, no matter what happened to its owner, and with less variation than a chronometer, according to Mary's father, the eminent surgeon. "A chronometer has to be overhauled at the end of the voyage, but that pump of yours never needs overhauling. You're wasted, my lass, frittering away your time at parties and the University. You ought to be on exhibition at the Hospital Museum, sports car and all."

That had been eighteen months ago, when, after a particularly trying experience that kept her up all night, he had examined her for her physi-

cal fitness to join a hunting party in the Himalayas.

"Fit, my dear girl, you're outrageously fit. Don't be too hard on the tigers. Send me home a skin." She had!

Olive Paynter had returned! What heights she had achieved during that eighteen months' trip, they did not know. Of one thing McTavish reminded them. In the interval Olive's Aunt Phœbe had died, that Aunt Phœbe who owned most of Westmount, Montreal's fashionable suburb, together with other even more valuable estate in the business section. Aunt Phœbe had been public almoner to a host of polo playing, bond selling, Paynters of the lesser degree. Her death was regarded by a retinue of "Well Known Sportsmen" with feelings of expectation not unmixed with apprehension. The apprehension was fulfilled. The whole of Aunt Phœbe's unexpectedly large treasure on earth was deposited unreservedly in Olive's soft enough lap, with the express proviso that she was to do exactly as she pleased with it.

"I, Phœbe Paynter . . . being of sound mind . . ." give, in effect, everything to "my niece, Olive Paynter, with the stipulation that she shall continue such allowances out of my estate as she pleases . . . knowing that she will recognize those cases where I have been deceived, and rectify my errors of judgment." What Aunt Phœbe had said was that those young wasters had pulled the wool over her eyes, and that Olive would see they got what they deserved. But this Olive's father, the well-known lawyer, had positively

refused to incorporate in the document. "You don't want to make me any more of a laughing stock than you have done for the last twenty years," he remarked.

Thus it was that Olive had become an estate manager on a large scale, and a dispenser of mercy tempered with a double portion of justice to a train of impecuniously ornamental Paynters. This Olive it was whom Brooks had so nearly married. In spite of McTavish's rolling of the eyes at the thought of the real estate, Brooks had not ceased to congratulate himself on this outcome. Olive, then, it was.

But what was she doing? Why was she doing it? Where was she doing it from? To whom was she doing it? For twenty-four hours after MacReady's dance there was wordy speculation at the cottage. First, and perhaps most highly favoured was what McTavish called the jealousy hypothesis.

"You don't suppose", he said to Mary, "she is going to let you get away with a husband like Reggie, do you? Especially since he has attained more or less of a dizzy notoriety."

Reggie the promising young scientist was bad enough to lose. Reggie the interviewed, the successful, with offers of high-minded professorships coming every month—this must make Olive gnash at the mouth. So argued McTavish.

"Don't you see it's just what she wanted. With that money of hers she would have made you the King of Neurologists."

And, he argued further, if she can't get Reggie for herself, she will queer the pitch for Mary.

But this Mary would not have. "Don't you see, George," she said, "with all that money she will be able to get any husband she wants, except perhaps Reggie, who knows too much about her. She's a cold-blooded person, and I believe she's trying experiments in some outlandish way or other. It would be exactly like Olive to experiment on us here. As for the jealousy idea, how could those tricks possibly get my husband away from me here? Possession is ten-tenths of the marriage law, you know. Making the owl do stunts, and causing the knight to appear wouldn't help, as far as I can see. You can't break up a marriage by sending owls and knights in armour. It's silly. I think she happened on Martin and thought he would be a good subject for an experiment. Then she heard we were here, and thought it was a grand opportunity to pull our legs a little, especially as Reggie's supposed to be an authority on that kind of thing. What do you think, Reggie?"

That young man had been sitting very quiet. He appeared to be impressed with what each of the others had said. It was with some difficulty that they induced him to tell what was in his mind. Finally:

"I hardly know what to think," he said. "There's one thing I'm sure of, though, and that is that you two are not taking it seriously enough, either of you. That owl was murderous. Martin had to hack off its wing before it would let me alone. And remember

what happened to Martin when he started his performance. He was just like a maniac. Somehow or other, Olive has got hold of a method of doing something to people and doing it pretty damn hard. And she's got a motive all right—her pride. Pride!" He repeated the last word meditatively. "You remember why I . . . we . . . broke off our engagement?"

The other two thought for a moment. Quite unexpectedly, Brooks had caught Olive lying about a matter on which it had been very much Brooks's right to hear the truth.

Brooks was continuing. "She's a dangerous woman, is Olive, and she is *close to the American line.* She could do almost anything and hop off in an aeroplane, and be in South America in a couple of days. These things are easily arranged if you have money enough."

They looked at him very uneasily. Pausing a while, he continued:

"We really have seen more than enough to convince us that there's something dangerous. Five years ago the whole thing would have been ridiculous. Today it isn't, with our newer knowledge of the electric and other reactions of the brain—not quite ridiculous, that is. Excepting the possibility I have already mentioned, I know of nobody on earth who could do what Olive apparently did to that poor chap by turning a switch fifty feet away from him, but I have a notion how it might be done. The fellow I mentioned lived in Germany and wasn't allowed to leave it, and he's dead, anyhow. . . . And where she is

doing it from, that beats me. So much for method."

He paused, as was his habit. Then, very slowly and impressively:

"Make no mistake about it," he said. "Olive's a dangerous woman." He looked from one to the other. "She's a dangerous woman," he repeated, "and an unscrupulous woman, and she is capable of anything. That's why I wanted you both to leave."

"And that's why we wouldn't," said Mary, softly.

"I wish I could make you see how really serious it is," he said. "I don't believe you do."

Mary was looking steadfastly at him. He blushed.

It was the day after what came to be known as Nijinski. "Like Easter and Thanksgiving," said McTavish. Brooks proposed in the afternoon that they should search the Point.

"I haven't much hope that we shall find anything," he said, "but it's just possible. Anyhow, we ought to begin here first."

"What are you going to look for, Reggie," asked Mary. "Surely you don't expect to find Olive living on the Point in a cave or something? Olive wouldn't like a cave."

Brooks put his head on one side and looked at her with affection. "No, my dear, she's not living here. But she was here the two nights when things happened, and the afternoon when she kidnapped Martin. There's no need for her to be here, anyhow."

"Brooks," said McTavish, "you are going to be

exasperating. I can feel it on the breezes. I know you too well. Therefore, Brooks—*Out With It!*"

Brooks looked pained. "You have no manners, McTavish," he said. "Never had any," he added insultingly. "What I was going to say was that a lot of work's been done lately on the little electric currents that are continually going in the brain. A chap at Cambridge fixed up an apparatus so that he could see himself think on a screen, in a manner of speaking."

They looked very incredulously at him.

"Yes, I know it's incredible. That's what I was saying. But it happens to be true. Of course your brain's a mass of nerves," he explained apologetically. "When a nerve works, you can register an electric current from it. Apparently there is a kind of electrical background to your thoughts. Two men in the United States have analysed it into at least two kinds of current, but that doesn't concern us here."

They looked at him with intense fascination.

"Good old Brooks," thought McTavish, "he always comes through. I believe he knows what has done it."

"Of course", went on the scientist, "that doesn't explain what happens when you have a particular thought. I don't know enough to tell you about that yet, and before I came here I should have said that nobody else did either. But what we can be quite certain of is that every thought has its own particular electrical pattern."

He stopped, and looked at them once again.

"Well?" asked Mary.

"Well," he continued, "as I said before, electrical patterns might conceivably be started from a distance. Might, I say. In fact, distance makes no difference to them, if you've got the proper apparatus. If Olive has the proper transmitting apparatus at her end, she might impose any pattern she wanted on our brains here. The point to remember is that the body can not only generate its own electric patterns, as happens when we think because we want to think, but can have thought patterns forced upon it from outside. It's been done by rule of thumb for years, only we didn't know that the whole thing was electrical."

"Thought transference?" ventured McTavish, diffidently.

Brooks glanced at him, the light of battle in his eye. Then he shook his head.

"McTavish, I give you up," he said. "It isn't disproving a thing to call it by a name you don't like. Let me tell you something." He bent menacingly towards the other man.

"Down in Carolina they prepared a pack of cards each of which had any one of five designs stamped on it. One person turned over the cards, looking at each. The other who was not in the room noted down what he thought was being turned up. And. . . ."

"And what?" said Mary. "Put us out of our suspense."

"And the proportion he—or she, it might be—got

right was inconceivably large. No, it couldn't possibly be due to chance. The combined odds against that ran into billions of billions of billions to one. Shatteringly large. Enough to make the astronomers' figures look like the twice times table. *On one occasion this happened at a distance of two hundred and fifty miles.*"

They were staggered. There seemed nothing to say. Once more he looked round threateningly at them.

"Now, I ask you, McTavish. Was there or was there not an electrical pattern in the brain when the one person looked at his card?"

They freely conceded that there was!

"Was there, or was there not, a corresponding electrical pattern in the brain when the other person thought of the same design?"

They conceded again that there was.

"Was the one pattern caused by the other?"

Wearily, McTavish nodded.

"Well, that's enough for me. Call it Thought Transference if you want to." They could hear him pronounce the capitals. "Call it Telepathy, call it Extra-Sensory Perception, call it what you like. Only, I ask you, don't call it Hypnotism."

After a pause he went on again. "There's one other thing. The man in the street has to take scientific fact on the reputation of the people who have made the experiments, or who vouch for them. You and I never saw an experiment on the atom, McTavish, but if Lord Rutherford tells us in a lecture that somebody

has split one element up into two, or if Eddington writes in a book that atoms are getting smashed in the stars, then as far as we are concerned it is so. Now, George, you are a journalist. Of all the psychologists you have heard of, whose name is most familiar to the man in the street the world over?"

McTavish answered immediately. "Freud."

Brooks nodded. "And the second?" he asked further.

This time the journalist reflected longer. "McDougall, I suppose," he said.

"Well," said Brooks, "you will remember that the experiments I have just told you about were done in McDougall's laboratory, and he wrote an introduction to the book describing them. Freud has lately spoken as though it is possible that one mind can influence another at a distance. The two best known psychologists in the world. Probably the two greatest psychologists in the world. Of course, what I have added about patterns in the brain has nothing to do with these men's opinions. That was Brooks, not Freud or McDougall. But it follows naturally.

"And," he added, "if thought can be influenced at a distance by natural means, the same thing can, in theory at least, be done artificially. That is what scientific progress means, in many cases, doing under controlled conditions what has been done before by rule-of-thumb. That *is* scientific progress," he added meditatively, "at least in my subject."

He got up to go, as though the conversation were

ended. McTavish still seemed unsatisfied about something.

With a sigh, Brooks sat down again.

"I see you are not satisfied, McTavish," he said.

The man whom he was addressing looked uncomfortable. Finally:

"Well," he admitted diffidently, "these people you are quoting are psychologists, Brooks. Would the majority of biologists and other natural scientists agree with them? I mean, isn't it the fashion sometimes to think of psychologists as a little . . . well, tender-minded?"

At last roused to anger, Brooks looked the other man up and down aggressively. The blue eyes of the scientist seemed suddenly to have turned a cold grey. His chin protruded at a fighting angle. He bent over until his face was within a few inches of McTavish's.

"Damn you," he said. He glared offensively over McTavish's weather-beaten features. McTavish shrank away. But Brooks followed him.

"Damn you to the skies, I say," he repeated. "Last week, according to the Press, a belief in the possibility of influencing thought at a distance was publicly expressed by . . . by. . . ." He paused, still glowering at the other man, as though to keep him as long as possible in suspense.

"Tell us, quickly." It was Mary speaking.

"By Alexis Carrel, of the Rockefeller Institute. Carrel, biologist, the man who has kept a chicken's heart alive in glass for twenty-three years; Carrel,

medallist for cancer research, Nobel Prize winner, surgeon! Is he a psychologist, or is he a biologist? I ask you! Carrel says it, and you . . . and you. . . ." Words apparently failed him. "You *journalists*", he concluded, in accents of bitter scorn, "deny it because, apparently, you know more psychology than he does. Or", he added ironically, "is it more biology you know than Carrel? In any case, you give me a pain."

McTavish was silent. Brooks stalked over to begin the search of the Point. . . .

One hour. Two hours. They tramped over and over Willow Point until they felt that they knew every branch of every elm tree, every wild rose bush, every flower, every ant in every anthill. McTavish appeared impervious to scratches and bruises that came from crawling through the low bushes which the prolific rabbits had shorn off close in the spring. Even when they disturbed a wasp's nest in a hollow tree, he was apparently untroubled.

"They won't sting me," he said. "They recognize a kindred spirit. You must remember I served for a year on a tabloid paper in New York."

It was true. The wasps flew out in bitter rage, sniffed round the journalist, went on to Mary, and without harming her, made, as McTavish said, a beeline for Brooks.

"What did I tell you?" said McTavish. "George I know, and Mary I know, but who are you?"

Brooks had his coat over his head, and was sprinting in professional style away from the angry swarm.

"Call them off, you . . . you waspers!" he roared in a muffled voice.

Apparently persuaded that no harm would come to them, the wasps abandoned the scientist for home, leaving behind them Brooks, angrily muttering something about "a good dose of formaldehyde tonight".

"No you won't," said Mary. "Leave them alone and they'll leave you alone. There's going to be no killing round here that I can stop."

They gathered together, McTavish with face and arms scratched, Mary with a triangular tear in her slacks, Brooks with a rapidly growing sting on the back of his neck. They were in no condition to receive royalty. They sat on a granite rock to smoke.

"That's only half the Point," said Mary. "We still have the bay and the marsh to do. What about leaving it till tomorrow?"

"No," answered her husband. "We'd better do it today, while we are in fighting spirit."

The woman had searched with an almost hysterical energy, born of the secret fear in her heart.

"I wish you'd tell us what we are looking for," she said. "Do you expect to find Olive's compact, or some kind of apparatus, or what?"

"I'm really quite in the dark. I can't say I expect anything in particular. The only thing is that we should look pretty foolish if there was something in

our own back yard and we hadn't seen it. Let's do the bay. That's where I saw Olive."

Carefully, stone by stone, they searched the bay, keeping about ten feet apart. Behind a rock McTavish found a woman's satin handbag, which he was sure Olive had left. It contained nothing but a strip of Castleton bus tickets and a druggists' receipt for tooth-paste.

"George," said Mary, "I ask you. Can you possibly imagine Olive with that thing?"

She held it gingerly between her thumb and first finger. "It's five years old, and . . . well, look at it. That's been left by some farmer's daughter on a picnic. You couldn't *pay* Olive to carry it, even in a motor boat."

McTavish admitted she was probably right. "I defer to technical opinion," he said.

The search went on. About half-way down the bay, Mary turned something over with her foot.

"I don't know whether this is anything, Reggie," she said. "It looks like a broken radio tube. It's probably just as silly as George's bag."

Her husband took up the object she had found and examined it carefully. It was about three inches long and half an inch wide, sealed at one end and open at the other, where as Mary said, it had evidently been broken off. Inside the sealed end were several wires, fused into the head. On the glass were etched three capital letters.

McTavish was peering over Brooks's shoulder.

"B-E-G," he read. "Not 'bag', this time. Well, chuck it into the lake, and let's go and eat."

Brooks's eye was upon him. "No, my friend," he said quietly, "we've got something here."

"Isn't it a broken radio tube?"

"I don't know. But what I do know is that 'B-E-G' stands for 'Bogen Electricitats Gesellschäft', Bogen electrical company. I suppose in your ignorance, you have never heard of Bogen, of Berlin, who makes X-ray tubes to measure for your apparatus, just as the tailor makes your suit."

He hastily scanned the other man up and down. "No, I beg Bogen's pardon. He would never put out a job like those trousers of yours. He's damnably expensive, but he is absolutely first class. I can't often afford him. Anybody who had one of Bogen's tubes in his apparatus must have been doing a pretty fussy piece of work, let me tell you."

"Do you think Olive had a radio set, or something?" asked Mary.

"I can't say. It was certainly no ordinary radio. Of course, it may never have belonged to her at all. One of these yachts may have had a special radio equipment and thrown an old tube away. It would drift into here from the open lake with the prevailing wind. But the fact is, I don't know whether it's a radio tube at all. I've never seen one exactly like it. If only we could find the rest of it. It must have been all there when it was thrown away, or it wouldn't have floated."

But further search yielded nothing. Although every inch of the bay was covered, no other trace of electrical equipment was found, nor any track of Olive, save the mark on the rock where she had fired at Brooks. They returned to the cottage hungry and angry, except for Brooks.

"I didn't think we should find much," he said.

McTavish looked at him, shrugged his shoulders, and went into the house.

Chapter 8

McTavish Breaks His Code

After dinner, Brooks announced that he would run over to the mainland in the little motor boat. He wished, he said, to look up a few things in the University library, which was visible just opposite the camp, three miles across the water.

"Good God," said McTavish, "do you still have to look things up, Reggie? I thought you knew everything."

"Don't be silly," answered the scientist. "If you were to read sometimes, instead of writing all the time, it would improve what you please to call your style. And it wouldn't do you any harm to have a few facts to write about occasionally, which is what I'm going over for tonight. It's a beautiful evening, and I think the boat will be quite safe for that distance."

It was, as he said, a beautiful evening. The lake held hardly a ripple. The bright ball of the descending sun still hung high in the sky. From the mainland they could occasionally hear the faint hoot of a car on the highroad, or the clang of the great bells on

the shunting locomotives. The intense stillness was only broken by the lazy songs of the birds.

McTavish looked knowingly up at the sky.

" 'He says it is hot today, and it'll be hotter tomorrow, by Jesus'. That's something I *have* read, Reggie," he said. "Shall I come with you?"

"No, you and Mary stay here, and I'll take Martin. As a matter of fact, he asked me if he could go over tonight. He deserves an evening off. He's got to meet his own kind, you know. We aren't quite human beings to him. We should be back by ten o'clock at latest."

He glanced at his wafer of a platinum watch.

"Half an hour each way. That will give me an hour and a half to read. I'll tie up at the heating plant." He pointed to a chimney that broke the skyline on the mainland. Rising gracefully, he stood for a moment and looked at his young wife. Then he bent over and kissed her. She looked as though she were about to say something, but did not.

"Good-bye," he said. "I won't be later than ten."

They sat on the verandah and heard the two men's cheerful voices as they passed over the grass to the boathouse. Then a few splutters, followed by the regular hum of the motor. Almost immediately the boat appeared round the point, Brooks steering and waving to them with the other hand. Quickly the boat grew smaller, though they could still hear the motor plainly. For some time they watched it through the glasses, in silence.

"I wish he hadn't gone, somehow," thought Mary. "Though that's silly. He could swim to land if anything happened. He's often swum two miles. All the same, I wish he hadn't gone." Had she known what the evening was to bring forth, she would gladly have beaten her way to him over the rocks, through the water, through anything on earth, so long as the path led back to her man!

She looked at the distant dot that was visibly carrying her husband away. It grew momentarily smaller and smaller. A faint hum could still be heard over the water. McTavish was watching through the binoculars. The sun was rapidly sinking. They sat there for ten minutes, fifteen minutes, in silence.

"There they are," the man cried finally. The girl started violently at his voice. "They've just tied up." He handed the glasses to her. She could make out what seemed to be the boat, stationary against the white concrete wharf across the water. Were those two figures walking away from the dock? She could not tell.

Once more she was startled by the voice of the man beside her.

"What do you think about this business, Mary?" McTavish was asking.

"I don't know. But I feel uneasy about it tonight."

"There's one thing," said the man. "Reggie is so darned persistent that he'll certainly find out all about it now he has started."

"Yes. He may get his fingers burned." The girl

stopped short as though frightened at what she was saying.

Once more they were silent, looking over the lake, enveloped in their own thoughts. The sun was now hastening towards the dark rim of the land, touching in its path the edge of the grain elevator. The swallows flew busily round in search of their evening meal, and stretching themselves before another night of sleep. On the high trees at the end of the bay the crows clamoured as they settled for the night, greeting each new arrival with an outburst which the distance subdued to a melancholy plaint. An early frog croaked lazily in the marsh to the south. There was, they knew, no other human being within two miles.

"Blessed silence," said McTavish. "One's thoughts have room to grow." His voice was hushed almost to a whisper. The girl stared moodily across the lake. She did not answer.

> "*And Wisdom's self*
> *Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude. . . .*"

The man was speaking softly. Without turning her head, "Go on, George," she said.

> "*Where with her best nurse, Contemplation,*
> *She plumes her feathers and lets grow her wings*
> *That in the various battle of resort,*
> *Were all to-ruffled and sometimes impaired . . .*"

A last crow cawed languidly and sleepily. His hand

clasped hers. When their fingers had first touched, she did not know. So they sat for five minutes, ten minutes. He could feel the throb of her pulse.

Suddenly, as though it were an electric current, something had passed between them. He knew she felt it, for she drew away her hand slightly, infinitesimally. Unexpectedly, as though with a mental wrench, the girl stood up.

"George," she said, her voice quavering a trifle, "there isn't a cigarette in the house. I've *got* to have cigarettes on a night like this. Run over and hop into the car, there's a good man, and get me some at the village. You'll be back in ten minutes if you step on it."

The man winced, as though somebody had struck him. He stood also.

"You can get some Gold Flakes at the grocer's, if you knock at the side door," she went on, a little breathless. "You'll see a light in the window. Only hurry, hurry."

Almost feverishly she pushed him away from her, away from the platform of the verandah, down on to the grass. Stumbling slightly, he began to swing into the dusk, over the grass towards the stile. His retreating figure was half-way across.

"George, George," cried a voice behind him.

He stopped in his tracks and turned. A dark object described a jingling, twisting parabola towards him, and fell with a clatter of metal between him and the house.

"The keys! You forgot the keys." The girl's voice was raised almost to a shriek.

Startled, the man retraced his steps a few paces, bent down, and picked up the bunch of keys. Of the girl he could see no sign, though he could hear her steps in the house. As he started again on his journey, he heard the sound of a door slamming, and then what seemed to be the grinding and thud of a bolt. As he reached the stile, he paused for a moment to look back at the house, a hundred yards distant in the gathering darkness. Everything was quiet. The simple lines of the cottage stood out dark against the dull red of the western sky. Again he heard a door slam. Was that the faint sound of a woman's voice crying: "Hurry, George"? He did not know. His heart strangely troubled, he started the ancient car with a roar, bumped over the billowing path to the road and made with what speed he could to the east.

Arrived at the village, McTavish made straight for the grocer's shop where the Brooks family bought most of its provisions. At this unseasonable hour—it was drawing towards nine o'clock—the shops were all closed, and the village itself was beginning to assume the air of hibernation characteristic of sleeping time in the home of good digestions, good consciences and manual work performed with a will in the open air. The grocer's shop, was, however, an exception. As McTavish had been told, a bright light was burning in the hall at the side of the little house.

Along the passage he could see through the open kitchen door the white-haired mother yawning, and, facing her, Susie, daughter of the house, ex-school teacher, and now purchasing agent, chief saleswoman, book-keeper, and ruling spirit of the small business. Susie was sitting bolt upright with her foot on a rocking-chair which she pushed nervously back and forth. She was frowning intensely at the book she held in her lap. The book was small, and in a fancy binding. It was, McTavish decided, a Good Book.

McTavish knocked at the door, and the white-haired mother answered.

"Good evening, ma'am," he said, in the style which past experience had taught him was most effective in such situations. "I wonder whether you could let me have a packet of Gold Flakes? I'm sorry to bother you so late."

"That's all right. I'll get them for you. Twenty-five?"

McTavish agreed. The matron disappeared down the passage. Hearing a young man's voice, Susie came to the door, carrying her leather binding under her arm. With a thrill of satisfied expectation, he saw the name of Robert Louis Stevenson stamped in elaborately gilt lettering on the cover.

"A hot day," ventured Susie.

"And it'll be hotter tomorrow," replied McTavish. "That's the second time I've quoted it today," he thought. "Perhaps it's as well not to finish it this time. Might make a bad impression."

"I see you are a lover of Stevenson," he went on, looking at the book. Susie was good looking.

"Yes. But I don't have much time for reading in the summer."

McTavish could hear the old lady moving about in the store to the left of the passage. A very leisurely tread. Time has no meaning for Nelson Islanders. It is either summer, and you are hoping for your rest in the winter; or it is winter and you are hoping for the summer to pay your debts. Save for these elementary divisions, the Islanders approximate to Augustine's statement of the Divine mind. They stand above and beyond Time itself.

"I once knew an old man", began McTavish, "who was acquainted with Stevenson. They met in the Strand, the last time Stevenson was in England. My old friend was just out of college at the time, and was looking at a suit of armour in a tailor's window. It was labelled: 'Similar to the armour worn by John of Gaunt. Even if you are Gaunt, we can fit you'."

The old lady had appeared, and was holding out a yellow packet, her mouth gaping at McTavish's recital. He really ought to hurry, but the opportunity was too good.

"My friend," he went on, "began to recite Shakespeare.

" '*Old John of Gaunt, time honoured Lancaster*——'

"What was his astonishment to hear behind him, in a high voice:

" '*Hast thou according to thine oath and band,*'

"Not to be outdone, my friend replied, without turning his head:

" '*Brought hither Henry Hereford, thy bold son.*'

"Then my old friend was clapped on the back. Turning round, he saw it was none other than R.L.S. himself. So they went to a bar, and matched each other with alternate verses. My friend stuck at the speech: 'It follows then the cat must stay at home.' Thereupon Stevenson finished the act. Richard the Second, you know," he added patronizingly.

McTavish put his hand into his pocket and fished out a coin, holding it out to the old lady for the cigarettes. A flicker of doubt went over Susie's face.

"But," she said, " 'The cat must stay at home' is from Henry the Fifth."

McTavish took the cigarettes, and handed over the coin. "Well," he added somewhat belatedly, turning to his car, "that is what my friend told me. . . ."

The old car rattled and snorted as McTavish began his clattering journey home.

"That's the worst of school teachers," he said to himself. "They are always so darned literal." Acting on Mary's instructions, he stepped on the gas.

Arriving at the cottage about ten minutes after nine, he paused at the stile to look at the cottage, which was faintly visible against the sky. There was a light in the bedroom facing him, the one used by Mary and Brooks. He had forgotten the charged atmosphere he had left.

"She's gone to bed," he thought. "Tiring for her,

all this business. I wonder Brooks doesn't take her away. It's no kind of holiday for a girl." He felt a distinct pang of resentment as he approached the house. His soft shoes padded heavily on the verandah. At the bedroom window, which opened on to the verandah, he stopped.

"Here are your smokes," he called cheerfully, scratching with his finger-nail on the fly-screen. "Susie kept me talking. Shall I put them through the window?" He knew that she used the bed just inside the screen.

There was no answer. The light was still burning. The house was motionless.

"Perhaps she has fallen asleep," he thought. He peered round to see if he could catch sight of her. At the end of the bed he could make out two small feet, one of which stirred slightly as he watched.

"That's it," he thought, still somewhat surprised. "She's undressed and fallen asleep waiting for her smokes. That was with my talking so long to Susie. Poor kid. The rest will do her good."

He was dressed only in white trousers and a shirt. A slight breeze had sprung up. Shivering slightly he decided to go indoors to wait for the return of the motor boat. Opening the packet he took out a cigarette and began to smoke. The house was deadly still. In the dark he could just see across the room. His watch showed nine-fifteen.

There was a sound of someone moving from the bedroom, and the low-pitched voice of a woman.

"George!" it said.

"Hello, Mary. Sorry to be so long. Been asleep? Here are your smokes!"

"No, I've not been asleep. But I've undressed, George."

There was something in the intonation that made the man think. But he answered cheerfully:

"Good girl. Why don't you get a bit of a nap. They won't be back for over half an hour."

"No, I know. That's not long. Come here, George."

In some bewilderment he went to the door, holding tightly the cellophane-covered packet of cigarettes. His hand on the knob, he paused.

"Come in. There's nothing to be afraid of."

Gingerly, with fast-beating heart, he opened the door, still clutching the cigarettes. The light behind her, she was standing on the threshold, in a suit of diaphanous pyjamas. Thrusting the cigarettes at the dimly outlined form, he made to go, but not before she had thrown her arms round him.

"It's not the cigarettes I want, you old silly. It's you," she said.

McTavish's first feeling was that this was a practical joke. The wife of his college friend, Mary, the proud and shy beauty, with whom he had danced and flirted and swum and fished for as long as he could remember! With whom he had talked, of things sacred and profane, at parties and in parked cars until the small hours! Who, when, on a particularly

lovely night, he had once automatically proposed to her, had replied, quite unconcernedly:

"It's the moon, George, it's the moon. It's what Olive would call the proposal-reflex!" Mary to make overtures to him when her husband was away for a couple of hours, like a cheap suburbanite waiting for the five-fifteen to return from town! She was surely fooling! But he at once perceived that this was no practical joke, but that the girl was most seriously in earnest. Slightly withdrawing from her:

"This is so sudden!" he said.

Releasing him, she took him firmly by the hand and sat him on the bed which is just within the door. McTavish winced as he saw Brooks's silk pyjamas folded neatly on the pillow. Sitting next to him, she put a bare arm round him:

"Yes, George, it *is* sudden," she said. "Funny that all these years I never knew how much I liked you."

"But, Mary . . ." began McTavish. His eye went from one door to the other, and then to the woman's figure half-outlined at his side.

"Yes, I know, George. Your friend's wife. Only married a year. Simply adores her . . . nearly as much as he adores his guinea-pigs. Very nearly, George. That's a lot, isn't it? You are honest, George. Has it never occurred to you that he uses a lot of time thinking of his guinea-pigs when he might be thinking of me?"

The man turned his head away.

"You know it has. I shouldn't like you so much if

it hadn't. He's had his guinea-pigs for a year. I want you for . . . for . . . oh, so short a time, George."

McTavish felt himself blush. The girl moved closer to him. His heart began to beat faster.

"God!" he thought. "What'll I do?" "You're mad, Mary," he said aloud. "They may be back any time." He glanced at his watch.

Almost before he had time to look at it, the girl slipped her small hand over the dial.

"Time is finished. It's done. This half-hour lasts for ever. Kiss me."

Throwing her arms once more round him she kissed him on the mouth. McTavish's heart pounded in his ears. His senses were overwhelmed.

"How chaste she is, how damnably chaste," he thought tumultuously. "It might be her bridal night."

He must escape. But how? The girl slightly relaxed her hold. He seized the moment to lurch desperately away from her to an upright position, and through the adjoining door into the living room.

"Pray heaven she won't come out," he thought. "That was nearly too much for me. What on earth has come over her?"

He sat down in a rocking-chair, and felt automatically in his pocket for a cigarette. Of course, he had smoked the last that evening. She had them in the bedroom, behind the open door. He clasped his hands over his knees and rocked nervously to and fro. Five minutes passed. The room grew darker and darker. Seven minutes. There was no sound from

the next room. Everything was as still as though he were alone on the Point. Would that he had been! Suddenly he stopped rocking. Was that a stifled sob he had heard? He listened intently. A breath of wind came up from the lake like a living thing, whistled mournfully round the house, and died away. From across the water came the uncouth moan of a river boat. Still no sound from behind the door. The light streamed from the bedroom lamp throwing a yellow shape out into the open kitchen. They would want some coffee when they came back.

Suddenly a wave of anger swept over him against the girl in the next room. Brooks, his loyal and staunch companion, fooled as soon as he was out of the house by a bit of a girl who wasn't worth . . . wasn't worth one of his test tubes. His brilliant friend, with all the virtues and all the talents! Brooks's guinea-pigs! If Brooks had been a doctor in practice, or a lawyer or a business man, he would have been absorbed in his work. What did she want to make of the man? A Little Lord Fauntleroy with a belly and plus-fours, idling round the golf links with the other rotarians and returning to wash out the baby's napkins in the robin-blue bathroom?

"That's the end of that!" he said aloud. In an access of fury he stood up and strode to the outside door, letting the screen slam behind him. Hurrying down the steps, he almost ran to the shore of the lake. In front of him, over three miles of water, shone the lights of Castleton. The lamps of the cars passed up

and down the shore road. The brilliant arc-light of the University heating plant stood out, almost like a beacon.

Brooks at the College library, reading! Why did she do it? Was she just another wanton, like all women, according to the official cynics? Before they are married, they hold off. It's against the union rules to do something for nothing. It pays. That's the only reason they hold off—when they do. They can get a safer man. When they have got him, they do what they have been wanting all the time. That was what he could hear almost any day from the sleezy little photographer and the pimply little reporter at the Press Club. Well, it was apparently true.

He marched up and down the shore, over the limestone rocks bounding the lake. Across the water to his right he could see Hog Island, which lies between Nelson Island and the mainland. A light showed from a solitary cottage on the end. He looked up at the house behind him. The lamp was still burning in the bedroom. Everything was as peaceful and drowsy as he had found it—how long ago? He glanced again at his watch. Half-past nine. A good half-hour before they would be back, probably more.

His thoughts returned as though by an irresistible force. Brooks at the College reading, himself left in charge, and Mary. . . . He sat on the rock at the end of the path leading up to the house. The rock where they all sat and sunned themselves after bathing! But Mary couldn't have done that! It was impossible. She

didn't do that! He thought of her as a little girl at parties. One Christmas his father, the General, a bit of an old bore now, but a good enough judge of character, had told George:

"Watch that girl, son. She's a lot of spirit, but she's as straight as they make them. Does me good to look at her. If you don't keep an eye on yourself, she'll be out of your class pretty soon."

That was when she was eighteen. She had pretty soon grown out of his class, he reflected bitterly. That was just before he went to Oxford and met Brooks. He remembered coming home in the summer, eighteen months later, and seeing Mary surrounded by a group of young men in the country home, smoking, swimming, drinking cocktails with them, but at arm's length. There were sniggering stories told him by the boys of some of the girls, but never a word about Mary. It was not her own generation that was scandalized by her occasionally wild exploits. They knew her too well. It was the dowagers who would have preferred her to conceal her friendship with the janitor's son at college and her all-night motor race to Quebec against one of the young sparks of Montreal.

The breeze from the lake was stiffening. The persistent sound of the waves on the shore deepened the loneliness of Willow Point. Suddenly he started up, and stood undecided.

"What am I doing down here," he thought, "with

all this funny business of Olive's going on, and Brooks so scared of it? He left me in charge of his girl."

Even now Olive might be doing something fantastic in the cottage. Decision came. He began to walk hastily to the house.

He reached the steps, sprang up them and pushed past the screen door, which closed with a bang, shaking the walls of the wooden structure. There was not a sound. He listened carefully for a while. Should he peep through the open door?

The rustle of somebody moving came from the bedroom. She was there, then, safe enough! He walked through into the kitchen, took the top off the stove and began to build a fire. Soon the flame was racing merrily, and the kettle on. His watch said nine-forty. The bedroom lamp shining through the open door gave him all the light he needed.

The weather had been dry and the wood burned quickly. McTavish set out a tray with four cups on it. He thought desperately, to keep his thoughts away.

"It's a funny thing that one can't imagine Reggie setting a tray. A man's got to be born on this side of the water not to be self-conscious when he is setting a tray."

Nervously he paused and listened again. An unmistakable sob came through the open door. Peering into the adjoining room he could see Mary's form lying on the bed where he had left her.

"Poor kid," he thought; "perhaps she made a mistake marrying a man like Reggie. After all, she was

brought up over here. Perhaps. . . ." He thrust the idea resolutely from his mind. It was none of his business. The water was boiling. He made a pot full of coffee, poured a cup, and carried it into the bedroom. Mary was lying face down on the bed just inside the door.

"Would you like a cup of coffee?" he said, holding the cup out to her. She did not answer.

"Mary," he said, coaxingly, coming nearer the bed.

Still the girl lay without answering him. Then he saw her shoulders heaving convulsively.

"Go away," she said. Her voice was muffled by the pillow.

He set the cup at the side of the bed and turned to go. When he reached the door he turned back to look at her forlorn little figure. She was still sobbing.

He went back and sat down on the side of the bed.

"Mary," he said, "what is it? Can I help you?" She was still silent. Bending over, he kissed the back of her neck. She turned a tear-stained face towards him.

"George," she said, in a trembling voice, "you did love me, didn't you?"

"Mary!"

She was in his arms!

At a quarter-past ten, Brooks and Martin came back. The breeze had delayed them a little.

The lot of the man who has broken his code is a hard one. McTavish had broken his code. He had, he persuaded himself, seduced his friend's wife, when his

friend was not only away, but had given her into his charge. He had wronged his friend, and his friend's wife. He was an honest man, and did not try to excuse himself. According to his code, what he had done was inexcusable. The only thing to be decided was what to do about it.

This was the problem he tried to solve as he twisted on his bed that night. He saw the moonlight creep into his open door, on to the tufted quilt, and round to the other side of the room. He listened to the soft murmur of the water against the shore. Should he tell Brooks? That would be to betray Mary. Should he steal away without telling Brooks? That seemed to him melodramatic and almost as dishonest. On considering everything in cold blood, he decided that Brooks ought to know. It was not inconceivable that the whole incident was somehow connected with the strange events they had been witnessing on the Point. A power that could make a man dance with frenzy as he had seen MacReady dance, that could make three people see a knight-in-armour that wasn't there, that could make an owl launch a murderous attack on a human being, such a power could surely make two people of the opposite sex lose their senses for a few minutes. In that case, Brooks ought to know. It would be criminal to keep the knowledge from him. For who knew how the thing might develop? Was it to go on happening to whomever came to the cottage?

Suddenly he sat up, sick with horror at the thought that had come into his mind.

Would it be . . . *Martin* and Mary next?

The thought struck him like a thunderbolt. Mary and a *manservant*! No! No! He would not think of it! But he must.

That the author of the outrage, Olive—if it had been she—would be capable of even that, he believed. He remembered the girl's iron nerve, her almost superhuman pride. He remembered that she had broken her engagement with Brooks on an occasion when Brooks had detected her lying concerning her personal chastity. That she should take this revenge upon Mary, the unspotted, the fastidious, the fine, seemed to him only too consistent. But could Olive do this fantastic thing? He did not know. Only Brooks knew.

The moon set. He watched the black of his room slowly give place to grey. He heard the waters of the lake lull before the dawn. He heard the first crow—rook, Reggie would have called it!—wake its fellows with the derisive snort of the early riser for the lie-abed. Rising, he stole down to the water in his pyjamas, and strode hastily back. The memory was too recent. He lay down again. Brooks would have to know. He would have to be told that his friend McTavish had cheated him with his bride of a year. . . .

He fell asleep.

He was woken by Brooks, standing at his side. The sun was shining directly on his pillow. Brooks was his usual cheery self.

"I thought I'd better wake you, old man," said the scientist. "Slip on your pants and shirt, get a bit of a wash, and come to breakfast."

McTavish's heart fell within him. *Pants*? Brooks trying manfully to Canadianize himself!

"Good God, why does it have to be so ludicrous?" thought McTavish. Aloud:

"I'll be with you in a twinkle," he said. This was no time to tell, even though he had decided that Brooks must know the first instant he saw him in the morning. He dressed hastily, and went out on to the dining-porch.

Martin was hovering in his white coat. Brooks sat alone at the table. McTavish sat down. The sun was streaming into the porch. All around grew the trees which the former owner of the place had planted with his own hand. They looked out on to a world of green, dotted here and there by grey limestone rocks protruding through the grass. The two men ate in silence.

Brooks's skilful fingers were delicately spreading a piece of toast with honey.

"Mary's gone out for a walk," he said.

"*What*?" said the other man. He was startled into rudeness. "I beg your pardon?" he repeated.

Brooks looked at him with mild curiosity, holding his knife in mid-air.

"Mary's gone for a walk," he repeated. "I thought she was swimming, but her clothes are gone. She must have got up early and gone for a tramp. She

loves to walk round in the early morning. She's just like a wild thing herself."

"But, Brooks," protested McTavish. "Is she all right? All this business with Olive makes one nervous." He paused. "Oh, what a liar I am," he was thinking. "What a damned, bloody liar!"

Hastily he stuffed the rest of his breakfast. He had suddenly an insane desire to go and look for Mary. But that would not do. If she had gone alone she should be left alone.

Suddenly he knew!

"Brooks," he said, "I'm going to the village. There may possibly be a telegram for me." He told the lie with a heavy heart.

Brooks stood up, stretched himself, and regarded his friend with affection. McTavish turned his face away.

"Come on, then," said the scientist. "We'll take the car. Perhaps we shall pick up Mary."

McTavish knew they would not.

Brooks drove the car into the village, over the rough grass, through the gate, which McTavish opened, over the little bridge, up the ridged limestone hill. "Like going upstairs", as a child had once put it. The sky was clear and blue, the water sparkled in the breeze. McTavish moodily kept his silence. "She's gone. She's gone," he repeated continually to himself. "I ought to tell him, but she ought to tell him in her own way."

Brooks drew up at the grocery store. Out

rushed Susie with two white envelopes in her hand.

"She's written to me as well," thought McTavish rapidly. "I must leave him to it."

He quickly opened the door and jumped out of the car.

"I'll slip over to the telephone office," he said over his shoulder. Without a glance behind him he ran up the road.

Five minutes passed, ten minutes. McTavish was in the telephone office, leaning over the counter in the room that had been made over in the old frame house, talking frantically to the operator.

"How much is a person-to-person call to Los Angeles?" he heard himself ask the astonished girl. "Is it any cheaper in the evening?" At one time he must have told her a story, for, to his surprise, he suddenly found her laughing immoderately with him, while she held her hand over the hanging receiver. Finally, to her bewilderment, he said he thought he ought to be going, touched his hat, and slouched out of the room. Standing up to watch through the curtains as he crossed and passed along the street, the girl saw an unshaved, middle-aged man, sockless, in shirt, trousers, and old shoes jerking along the quiet thoroughfare like a puppet.

When McTavish reached the car, Brooks was sitting in the driver's seat, looking into space, a letter on his lap. Brooks was pale. Fresh lines seemed to have come into his face in the last fifteen minutes.

Without speaking, he handed McTavish an unopened letter. Mary's writing! The letter was short.

Dear George,

Don't worry yourself thinking you seduced me. You never could, you silly. Olive may have been responsible. Reggie will find out. I have to go away to collect myself. What was that you told me about "Wisdom's Self"?

With love, from

MARY.

PS. Show this to Reggie if you like.

He handed over the letter to Brooks without a word. "Wisdom's self, oft seeks to sweet retired solitude," he thought. ". . . She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings." Brooks was holding out the letter to him. He took it. Brooks started the car and drove back without speaking.

When they reached the house, Brooks took a letter from his pocket. Tonelessly: "You ought to read what she said," he told the other man. It was the first word either of them had spoken since they started the car to the village. McTavish took the letter to his room.

Mary's letter to Brooks was longer.

Darling, my own Darling,

I cannot stay and tell you, and I cannot go away and not tell you. When you begged me to leave the

island, I should not have believed that this unspeakable thing was possible, or that I must humble myself to make a wife's ultimate confession to her husband. I did not think that there was anything in the world I could ever want to hide from you. I cannot understand it, for I love you more than I have ever loved you, and you occupy every thought of my mind. One thing, however, must be said. Dearest, believe me when I tell you that George was completely and utterly innocent, and that your wife used every unworthy woman's device.

Oh my darling, I am so frightened for you. Won't you leave this dreadful island?

Always and forever,

Your MARY.

He looked at the letter written in bold, honest writing, on cheap linen notepaper, and evidently with a scratching pen. Poor kid, he thought. She would have borrowed pen and paper from Susie. He thought of Mary writing such a confession on Woolworth stationery in Susie's parlour, all alone. He sat for a long time on the bed, holding the envelope.

He was aroused from his reverie by a knock on the door.

"Come in!" he answered.

Brooks entered. He had the appearance of one whose every past expression has been obliterated by a great cataclysm, and whose features have not yet had time to settle down into their new cast. His face

was red, puffy and seamed. The swollen cheeks gave the impression of a prize-fighter just returned from the ring. The man had been shaken by a primeval convulsion. Involuntarily McTavish reflected on the terrific force of character that lay before his eyes exposed and unprotected.

Brooks put his hand on the other man's shoulder.

"Well," he said, "we've got to live."

McTavish stood up. "Yes," he said. "But I'm sorry it was me."

"I know you are."

Brooks walked from the bed to the corner of the clothes cupboard, and from the clothes cupboard to the bed. Thus he went, backwards and forwards, for perhaps fifteen minutes. His head was bowed, his gaze was on his feet, as though he were picking his footsteps in the darkness. His hands were clasped behind his back. His knees were bent. His eyes were half-closed in pain. He never turned his head towards the other man. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight he marched. . . . One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. . . . One, two, three, four . . . McTavish closed his eyes. One, two, three, four . . . McTavish began to count. . . . Would the man never stop? Once Brooks went to the door, paused, and looked for a moment out on to the grass. McTavish could see his fingers working. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. . . . One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. The same rhythm. Why eight? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. He must stop. McTavish was

near to shrieking. Why didn't he stop at seven. He *must* stop at seven! McTavish made ready to shout to him.

"You must stop at seven, Brooks! 'Thou shalt not commit adultery'. Eight is 'Thou shalt not steal!' You *must* stop at seven, Brooks."

But the treading had resumed. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. One, two, three. . . .

The treading had stopped. McTavish looked up and saw Brooks before him, holding out his right hand, the fingers closed, but with the thumb and first finger extended.

Silently McTavish passed over Mary's letter.

Taking the letter, Brooks went to the door, opened it, and went out. The bell rang for lunch. Martin had made an Irish stew. . . .

It was the same afternoon. The two men were sitting on the verandah. The sky had clouded over, and there was a light mist over the lake. The towers of Castleton University and of its hospital on the lake showed grey and dull. No word had been exchanged between the two men on the subject that lay heavy on both their hearts. McTavish looked over the water. Only two days before, in the brilliant sunshine, Mary and Martin had been with them on the verandah, and Martin had staged that grotesque scene. It was incredible. Now Mary was—where? He had as yet scarcely asked himself the question. She had gone to her own place in her own way. He remembered

the lament of the Greeks whose young men had been killed. "The spring is gone out of our year," they said. He looked at Brooks, sitting moodily in a rocking-chair.

The spring had gone out of their year.

He saw that Brooks was watching him. Suddenly the scientist spoke.

"The thing we have to find out", he was saying, "is why did it happen?"

McTavish hung his head.

"Look here, George," he went on. McTavish's heart leaped within him. It was the first time Brooks had used his name. "Look here, George, it's no use beating about the bush. You've read both her letters, and I believe her. It may be a little hard on your . . . your pride, but there it is."

McTavish flushed a deep red. In his heart, man would prefer to be the seducer rather than the seduced, even when the event concerns his friend. He said nothing, but a curious tightness surprised him in his heart. Brooks was regarding him gravely.

"George," he repeated impressively, "we've got to find out why it happened."

They spent the rest of the day fishing and discussing trivial matters. Several times McTavish noticed Brooks regarding him carefully, as though he were waiting for something.

Chapter 9

Flight!

Breakfast the next day! An onlooker might have said that the two men had almost recovered their mutual equilibrium. They treated each other as two friends on a fishing trip might. Nothing more had been said concerning the disappearance of Mary, and of its cause. McTavish had spent a bad night in the process of coming to terms with himself. On thinking things over in cold blood he had admitted to himself that Mary was right. She had been responsible for the whole disastrous episode. He had been a puppet. When he remembered how he had run from the house and tramped up and down the shore in anger, he wondered how he could ever have persuaded himself that he had taken any of the initiative.

"Don't worry yourself thinking you seduced me. You never could, you silly."

He shook his head, and burst into laughter.

Brooks laid down his knife and fork and regarded his friend searchingly.

"Come on, George, out with it," he said.

But McTavish still held back. Brooks continued to regard him. After a time, with a great effort:

"As a matter of fact, I was laughing at . . . at my ever entertaining the idea that I seduced Mary."

A broad smile spread over Brooks's face, the first McTavish had seen for thirty-six hours.

"That's what I have been waiting for," said the scientist. "You're the only person who can tell me what I want to know, and it's no use starting until you begin to be honest about it."

"But Brooks . . ." he protested.

"I know. One doesn't talk about these things." He was the complete gentleman, completely rational, completely detached. He looked at his friend almost benignantly.

"That's the code," he went on. "But the code won't do. We've grown out of it, nowadays." He was more than the gentleman. He was super-civilized, too highly glossed, too urbane, almost.

McTavish felt that little constricting tug surprisingly reappear.

The two men looked at each other. McTavish tried hard to meet the even gaze of his friend, but found himself fidgeting uneasily. Suddenly, from nowhere, a wisp of anger flitted over his mind, flaunted itself openly for a moment, and was gone.

"The code?" he heard himself asking. To his surprise, there was hardness in his voice. He felt his eyebrows lift themselves in a gesture of impertinence.

"Yes, it's the code, isn't it?" the other man repeated, somewhat puzzled.

McTavish felt his face set obdurately. He clutched the table as though for support. As though from a great distance he heard himself say hurriedly to himself: "Yes, we're civilized now. We don't live in the days of marriage by capture. That went with the stone age." He opened his mouth to say it to Brooks. But his lips were set like a stone mask. Then, astonishingly he heard himself speaking.

"No, it's not done among the best people. That's what you learned at your dear old housemaster's knee at Eton."

A wave of darkness seemed almost to blot out the sunshine from his eyes. Had that cheap sneer been McTavish's?

Brooks's face was suddenly scarlet. He was clearly controlling himself by a tremendous effort. Bending over: "Yes, that's what I learned when I was educated as a gentleman," he said. "A gentleman doesn't talk about an affair he has had with a lady. 'Affair' is the right technical term, isn't it?" He was glaring menacingly at the other. "You should know, George McTavish!"

McTavish was silent. Brooks went on.

"Still less ought a gentleman to discuss an 'affair' with the . . . er . . . outraged husband." His voice had fallen to an expressionless tone. It was as though the words were cut out of marble. He thrust his chin across the table and smiled insolently.

"God, how I hate him when he does that!" thought McTavish. Suddenly passion burst its bonds in the journalist's heart. A storm of furious anger swept him. His face flushed purple. His hands clenched and unclenched. He glared at the man facing him with eyes full of passionate hate. He stood up and shook his fist before the other man's eyes.

"You damn swine," his voice rasped, "what do you want? I'll knock your dirty teeth into your throat!"

Brooks remained sitting, his chin still thrust out, the same mocking smile on his lips.

"Swine? Swine? Well, I wonder." As he sat, his eyes ran in offensive inquiry up and down the furious figure before him. "I wonder now," he concluded, after a pause.

His voice drawled. He was Eton and Oxford. He was the Top Hat of Piccadilly. He was the Superior Person of Harvard. He was Caste talking to a Colonial.

Black fury took McTavish. Back came his fist. With all his strength he hit at the grinning profile across the table. A practised flick of the head before him! Brooks's face was still there, still unharmed, still smiling that slight and mocking smile. The man had used a boxer's feint!

"Don't worry yourself about killing me," he heard the drawling voice intone. "You never could."

At this McTavish's Celtic tongue broke its leash.

"You filthy prig!" he cried. "Listen to what we

think about you over here! You come into this country, you take a job, and you sit on your beam end and look down your nose. Whose pay do you take? Old McDuffie's, who sweated and swore and spat on the sawdust, hacking his money out of the forest for forty years! Did anybody ever see Professor Charles Reginald Brooks spit on the floor? Oh no! It isn't done at Eton and Balliol. It isn't even done at Harvard! There are a lot of McDuffie's habits that would grieve you, you swine."

McTavish's voice rose. He went on rapidly, without looking at Brooks.

"McDuffie sat in his shirt-sleeves after dinner at night, and used a toothpick. Did anybody ever hear of Charles Reginald Brooks using a toothpick? Oh, no! It's not done. One doesn't meet a fellow like that!" McTavish's voice rose and fell mincingly.

"But Charles is glad enough to draw McDuffie's money and sit in comfort in McDuffie's chair, and wave visiting celebrities round, with an old Etonian manner. 'McDuffie does us very well here,' you simper. I've heard you. Let me tell you something."

He paused. The two men were sitting face to face, neither looking into the other's eyes. McTavish held his clenched fist on the table, and was bending menacingly across. Now somewhat pale, Brooks faced him, looking above the other man at a point on the screening, and saying not a word. Behind the house they could hear Martin, ploddingly chopping wood. McTavish lowered his voice to a tone of cold ferocity.

"Let me tell you something, Brooks. You aren't good enough. You aren't a good enough man for this country. McDuffie in his backwoods was worth two of you. You are a good enough scientist, for all I know, though you do manage to advertise yourself more than most. You are a good enough athlete. At least, you were once. But you aren't a good enough man. You aren't human. If you got hit on the nose, sawdust would run. You bring a lot of mannerisms over here, and you think they are manners. McDuffie's manners were better than yours. He'd earned them. He'd earned the right to spit where he wanted to. You haven't earned anything, from your platinum watch to your Etonian accent. You're meretricious. Your biology is nothing but a monkey's trick, and stale at that."

He paused for a moment, as though to gather breath. Still silent, the other man tapped nervously on the edge of the table.

"You spend your time mucking about with your filthy experiments, hacking up cats and dogs to see how they work. They are better than you, Brooks, because they trust life. You don't trust life. You aren't whole-hearted about anything. It's bad form to be whole-hearted. That's what you call The Englishman's Reserve. You're proud of it. But I've seen you call a dog to be chloroformed, so that you could do some unspeakable thing to it. You called it. *It came*, Brooks, *it came*, without any reserve, and you did it in! But you never did anything without reserve in

your life. No, not even your damned science. You would not let it pass the limits of good form. 'After all, there's no reason why a scientist should not be a gentleman.' I've heard you say it.

"And it's this kind of butchery you play with all the time in your mind. You smash and kill and then you wonder why you don't understand how the body lives. You kill to find out what life is, and when you have killed, life has gone. That's why your damned experiments never tell what you want to know, and that's why you have to cudgel your brain at nights wondering why they don't. You're not a good enough man, Brooks."

He paused once again, as though almost hesitant. Then, with concentrated scorn, he added:

"You're not a good enough man to hold your wife. She's gone. Don't you know she won't come back to you? . . . Or have you been reflecting about your guinea-pigs?"

At this final insult, Brooks jumped to his feet in a paroxysm of fury. His face was livid. His voice was thick.

"McTavish, there are limits!" he gasped. "I'll kill you!"

He lurched round the table as though he were drunk. Murder was in his eye and his gait. "By God he *is* going to kill me!" The fleeting thought crossed McTavish's mind. The fact that he was nearer to the door probably saved his life. Quicker than he had thought it possible, he had slipped through the screen

door on to the grass, and out towards the bay, with the other man in furious pursuit. For his first few steps Brooks staggered drunkenly, in the blindness of his anger. This gave McTavish a start of a few feet. Still, the journalist knew that he was no match for the trained athlete behind him. "Hell, why didn't I run the other way," he thought. "Martin is chopping wood at the other side of the house. God, he's gaining! I suppose this'll be the end." His legs worked automatically. His mind felt strangely free. In the final emergency McTavish's mind was useless. It had handed over McTavish to McTavish's bone and muscle to save him . . . if they could! During those few seconds, he felt no trace of fear, merely a mild curiosity. Were those his legs sprinting—his arms waving?

Then, while he was running for life, with Brooks gaining every instant, he was struck by the absurdity of it all. Running away, with Brooks running after him, to kill him! Brooks, his college friend, who had lived for two years on the same stair with him at Oxford. Brooks, the respectable Professor of Neurology with murder in his heart, chasing a journalist over the grass! Gaining on him, too! He could hear Brooks's panting breath, and the swiftly accurate fall of the runner's feet. Didn't Hercules chase a robber, somewhere in a Latin book he had read at school? Yes, Cacus, the robber. Hercules had caught him, tied his feet together, and carried him home head downwards, slung over his shoulder on a pole. Would

Brooks do that to him? No, he would kill him when he caught up to him. And it wouldn't be long. How absurd! Cacus had got off. Cacus had laughed as he hung by the feet from his pole. Hercules had asked him why. Cacus answered that his mother always told him that one day he would meet a man with swarthy legs, who would be too much for his youthful arrogance. As he hung from the pole, Cacus observed the *nigerrimas nates* of his captor. Swarthy thighs, his form master had feelingly translated it! Hercules had laughed and let him go. Ah, well! This was the end of life. His friend Brooks! Breath was precious, but McTavish laughed out loud.

He could no longer hear the rapid steps behind him. He ran a few paces more, wondering whether this was a trick. No. The steps had stopped. Still running, he turned his head.

Brooks was walking slowly and dejectedly towards the house. McTavish stopped and gasped for breath.

"Black Bottom," he said to himself. "We used to dance it five years ago."

He stumbled over the rocks between him and the shore, sat down and vomited violently.

He had run for forty yards, and for not more than four seconds. He felt as though he had been running all his life. . . .

Wearily he stood up and plodded along the gravel shore, past the willows, past the boathouse where Brooks had seen Olive. Olive! Was she at the back of it all? His weary brain refused to consider it. Almost

unconsciously he headed for the limestone heights overhanging the willow-lined bay. Lying down on the spongy grass, he slept. . . .

It was not for long. He was half roused by two crows quarrelling from neighbouring treetops.

"Why can't they let each other alone?" he thought in half-woken consciousness. Then he woke with a start. He and Brooks had quarrelled. Brooks had rushed after him to kill him. Ridiculous, but it was true. Two civilized people! And it was McTavish who had forced the quarrel. Why had he done it? With utter indifference to his human presence, the crows cawed their harsh obscenities across him. Were they male and female, he wondered? No, the quarrel was too senseless. They were two males. The one on his right seemed to be shouting the other down. No, the bird on the left was answering even more raucously. Why hadn't Brooks answered him when he said all that nonsense? Why had he said it anyhow? But why hadn't Brooks answered it?

"McTavish," he ought to have said, "now you've finished that tripe. . . ." No. Brooks wouldn't say "tripe". "McTavish, now you have finished, there are one or two things you ought to hear. I don't talk about people, as you know. It's not my job. I've got something better to do. But I'm going to talk about you.

"I didn't come to this country because I specially wanted to. In fact, you know very well that the Master of All Saints said I was an obstinate young

fool to turn down their Fellowship. But I came here because I was told that there was nobody on this side of the water with just my qualifications. I was told that the McDuffie trustees would be honoured if I would accept a position in the new institute. You know that, McTavish, as well as I do."

Worsted, the crow on the right fluttered its wings in preparation for flight. Its enemy confronted it, making the afternoon hideous with its coarse cry. The other bird rose slowly on its great wings, and, with a last defiant rasp, sailed across the bay, leaving its late foe in undisputed possession. The air was still again. There was hardly a ripple on the lake. McTavish lay on his belly, looking out over the willows. His heart was heavy within him. Almost lovingly, he went on with his self-reproaches.

"What sort of people were the McDuffie trustees?" Brooks should have gone on. "Canadians. You know that, McTavish. Then if you didn't want me in this country, why did you ask me? You wanted me because I have the sort of training that you can't give over here. Because from the time I was ten, to the time I was twenty-six, I worked solidly with only six weeks off in the year. Vacations, McTavish?" he would have said. "Of course. But vacation tasks as well. Discipline, all the time, in work and sport, when you were fooling about shingling roofs for labourers' pay. That's how I earned my job, McTavish. And if you had earned it better than I did, you would have got it.

"As for that cheap jibe about athletics, I may say that I earned my title at the Olympic games by beating two Canadians. You know that, too. And if you think I'm not man enough for my wife, and you are, why didn't you get her? You tried hard enough, but she turned you down.

"And why don't you come and knock my head off, McTavish? What would McDuffie have done if I had talked to him like this? He'd have knocked my head off, and you know it."

Brooks ought to have said all this, and more. Why didn't he?

McTavish lay and looked over the still lake. What could have come over him to talk like that to his friend, who had been so rational? These were entirely new thoughts that had come to his lips, thoughts that had sprung up from nowhere. But were they? In his mind, he began to go over the accusations he had thrown at his friend. A sudden flush of shame brought him up sharply. This was not new, nor that. He had thought it all before, but had dismissed it from his mind until that fatal afternoon. The realization came like a flood of shame. He had been jealous. Jealous of the man's success, of his money, of the quality that had won him his wife!

He must see his friend and tell him! Now!

Springing to his feet, he started to run down the slope leading to the beach. He heard the sound of a motor boat quite near, on the still water round the point. He was urged from within him to hurry.

Puffing, he ran to the top of the point. A powerful launch was just under way, about fifteen feet from the shore. In it stood a leather-breeched woman with goggles. At the stern sat Brooks. McTavish saw Brooks say something to his companion, and point towards him. The launch turned slightly in, and came parallel to the shore at the point where he stood with mouth agape. As it passed, the woman waved a gauntleted hand to him.

"Good-bye, Mr. McTavish," said a mocking feminine voice. "I'm sorry we can't take you."

Rapidly the launch made for the open lake, leaving McTavish standing on the little headland, his jaw still dropped. . . .

In shame, with head sunk almost to his chest, he plodded once again to the house.

McTavish was alone on Willow Point, save for MacReady. The man was methodically lighting the fire, quite unconcerned with the fact that murder had nearly been committed on the Point, and that his master had disappeared. Wearily, McTavish began to question the events of the afternoon. Why had Brooks gone? Had he gone against his will? Clearly not. Brooks had been entirely at his ease in the launch and apparently on excellent terms with Olive. It had been Brooks who had called Olive's attention to himself. This was not an abduction. Besides, the very notion of Olive's abducting Brooks was absurd. Brooks was not the sort of person one abducts. He

must have gone of his own free will. McTavish decided to question the manservant.

"I see that Dr. Brooks has gone away."

The man was busily stuffing newspapers into the kitchen grate. He answered without standing up, hardly turning his head away from the job in hand.

"Yes, sir."

"Will he be back for supper?"

"No, sir. He said not to worry about him. He might be late."

MacReady appeared reluctant to speak. McTavish determined to find out what he was holding back.

"How did he come to go away so suddenly?"

"I don't know, sir. He just came and said, quite sudden like, he would have to go, and not to bother about his supper. He said for me to make you an omelette."

An omelette! Then Brooks had expected McTavish back! Nearly murder a man, and order an omelette for his supper! That was like Brooks!

"It's pretty sure", thought McTavish, "that if he had got his hands on me there wouldn't have been any omelette necessary. He'd sobered down, and I suppose he knew darned well that in a few hours I'd sober down as well." Then aloud to MacReady:

"Who did he go with?"

"I don't know who it was, sir." The man was ostentatiously clattering with the fire-rings. MacReady was clearly showing his disapproval of the cross-examination.

"The code, again," thought the journalist somewhat bitterly. But he had to get what information he could. Suddenly a bright idea struck him. Olive had taken Brooks off, and perhaps MacReady was involved with Olive in some mysterious way!

McTavish feigned a casualness that he did not feel. Turning away, as though to leave the kitchen:

"It'll probably be his secretary. He told me yesterday she was coming over for him on some business." McTavish lied glibly, but with beating heart. "Not one of your best efforts, my boy," he told himself. But he *had* to get round the servant's laborious discretion. All trace of resentment had left him. There remained only an intensely vivid recollection of Brooks's saying:

"She's a dangerous woman, and an unscrupulous one."

As he himself later put it: "I didn't feel at all like a near-victim. I only wanted to find out why the dear old boy had rushed off like that."

Poor though the lie to MacReady was, and little though it would have deceived a more knowing person, it evidently brought great relief to the man.

"Yes, sir," he said, straightening himself up for the first time and looking his questioner in the eyes, "that must be it. The doctor was down on the shore, and I heard a motor boat come in, and there was a lady's voice. The doctor seemed a bit surprised to see the lady, though," he added doubtfully. McTavish said nothing.

"About an hour later, he came in and ordered your omelette, sir."

MacReady's voice had the sound of finality about it. Relieved in his turn, "This correspondence must now cease," thought McTavish. He went into the dining-room and waited for his omelette. There was a grim smile on his face. MacReady was uncomfortable because he had suspected McTavish of prying into Brooks's extra-matrimonial affairs! The manservant was still entirely unconscious of the fact that he himself had been abducted by Brooks's visitor a few weeks ago! Like the wise woman she was, Olive had taken care to keep away from the house. Certainly MacReady was honest, and apparently knew no more than he had told. So far, so good. He finished the excellent omelette in silence, ate his bread and cream-cheese, and drank down his coffee. Why had Brooks gone away with Olive? His reflections were interrupted by the ubiquitous servant at the door.

"What will you be wanting for breakfast, sir?" asked the reedy voice.

McTavish told him, and walked down to the shore. For an hour he paced the limestone shelf which borders the north side of Willow Point. Round the corner into the shingly bay he did not go, but walked backwards and forwards over the quarter mile of rock. Three miles away lay Castleton. He saw the lights on the promenade road suddenly flash out, when the switch was touched by some sorcerer's apprentice in

the power house. He watched the powerful headlights of the cars moving up and down the highway. The lake was roughening, and a dark mass of cloud was surging up from the south-west. Slightly to his right, towards the north-east, he saw a point of light glowing from a solitary cottage on Hog Island, a mile away.

"Pretty lonely out there in the winter," he thought, "with nobody else on the island, but divine in the summer."

Two hours passed. He turned towards the house, where he saw Martin had lit a lamp. The riddle was still a riddle. Why had Brooks gone? Perhaps he would be back in the evening. If not, McTavish had decided what to do.

As we know, the journalist had not slept well the last two nights. So he decided to go to bed with a book. The house looked uncomfortably dark and desolate as he plodded up the rocky little path.

"I hope to God Martin doesn't have another fit tonight," he thought. "It wouldn't be much fun alone in this place with Olive doing her stuff around. But she won't bother with me now, when Reggie's with her." The last thought was comforting, but not quite comforting enough.

He got into bed, and opened his book. Then, struck by a sudden idea:

"Martin," he called. "Martin!" The manservant came in.

"Get me a whisky, will you? What they call a

double whisky in the bars." McTavish swallowed his drink.

"Makes one feel warmer," he said with approval. He lay for a while looking at the ceiling. Finally:

"To hell with Olive!" and went to sleep. . . .

When he woke, he could see that the sun was high in the sky. Jumping out of bed, he went into the kitchen, where the faithful man was already cooking breakfast.

"Did Dr. Brooks come back last night?" he asked in a tone as indifferent as he could assume.

"No, sir."

McTavish's heart sank. Everything would have been so much simpler if Brooks had returned. As things had fallen out, it had fallen characteristically to McTavish to do the uncomfortable work. . . . He ate his breakfast moodily and ruefully.

When a man has been seduced by a woman, has persuaded himself that he has done the seducing, has re-persuaded himself that he was a fool for entertaining his first persuasion; when he has confessed all this to the husband of the lady in question, and the husband has received the confession with sympathy for the confessor and continued love for his wife; when the man has provoked the husband by a fit of temper into an attempt on his life, and the lady has left for an unknown and solitary destination in order to be away from them both—then is surely not the appropriate moment for the man in question to invade the

lady's solitude to tell her that her husband has lately spent the night with an attractive rival. Yet this is exactly what McTavish had decided he must do.

Yesterday's was, he felt, a new turn in the complex series of events. It concerned them all, but most of all, he decided, it concerned Mary. What she would choose to do about it, he had no means of telling, nor how it would affect her. Nor again, how she would receive him as the incongruous messenger of bad tidings. But seeing that Olive was what she was, a wealthy and beautiful woman, with some uncanny power of working on the hearts of men, McTavish felt that this new event was Mary's business. She had a right to know. He had no right not to tell her.

"It's not the code," said McTavish to himself. "I ought to keep it from Mary, I suppose. But these people are my friends."

He started the car and drove to the village. Martin was now alone on the island.

Chapter 10

George and Mary Again

Where?

Where had Mary gone? It was not difficult to find how she had reached the mainland. The tow-headed boy at the village garage told of taking her over in a motor boat at seven o'clock the day before. Would the tow-headed boy take McTavish over right away? He would. On the way over, a matter of twenty minutes, McTavish learned that she had carried a small black, "pattent leather" suit case, and had seemed very tired. McTavish squared his shoulders. She was going to seem even more tired when he had told his news.

Had the tow-headed boy any idea where she was going?

The boy did something to his engine, altered the course of the boat a trifle, and spat into the water. McTavish waited for an answer to his question. None came. McTavish put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a dollar bill, which he started to edge over to the steersman. The boy drew away.

"You can pay me when we reach Castleton," he

said. McTavish could have kicked himself. "Quite right," he thought. "The boy's dead right. I shouldn't have tried it." This conspiracy of discretion was annoying, all the same. It was going to make difficulties. They passed Spruce Island, set off by the Government as a public park, and rising high out of the water with its watch-tower built a hundred years ago against invasion from the south.

"There are worse things to watch for than Americans," he reflected. "But I'm getting prosy."

Hog Island was behind them, to the left. They were rapidly approaching Castleton. On the right, to the east, McTavish could see the grey buildings of the barracks and the military college. For Castleton is a military centre of some importance. The town stretched to the west, picturesque in the sun with its grey town-hall, two cathedrals, and black-grey grain elevator. A bright splash of red to McTavish's right marked the temporary cemetery of eighteen or twenty lake-going grain boats, laid up by the depression. The launch reached the wharf. McTavish paid his two-dollar bill, climbed up the ladder and was on the mainland.

Where was Mary? How could he try to find out without shutting people up like mussel shells? If anybody knew where she was, it would be a calamity for them to suspect his motives. Suddenly the inspiration came. Entering the nearest public telephone booth, he called a friend at his newspaper office in Montreal, a hundred and seventy-five miles away. Half an hour

later he was at the post-office, asking for letters.

"No letters, but there's a telegram just come for you."

McTavish seized the yellow envelope. "Mrs. Reginald Brooks, Care of George McTavish, Esq., General Post Office, Castleton." Opening it, he read:

"COME IMMEDIATELY FATHER DANGEROUSLY ILL PNEUMONIA."

MOTHER.

McTavish set his mouth in a grim line.

"Good old Bill," he thought. "Pneumonia is good. The old man'll get a shock if ever he hears."

He stuffed the telegram in his pocket with satisfaction. It was his passport against suspicion.

"Funny I have to tell a lie in order to be respectable," he thought, as he ran to the wharf where the motor boat had arrived. Leaning against a car was a fattish-looking man with a red face, looking like a retired bookmaker. As a matter of fact, he was the caretaker of the local Baptist Church, until he had decided that there was more money to be made in the restaurant business. Since then for five years or so he had been sole proprietor of the "FERRY SNACKS NIGHT AND DAY". Since the depression he had likewise been sole proprietor, cook, waiter, telephone clerk, general touter and news-gatherer-in-chief of the same Snacks. There was some speculation as to whether he ever slept. There was not much that he missed at the wharf. McTavish knew this. Bearing

the telegram in his hand, he approached the rubicund one:

"I wonder whether you can tell me anything about Mrs. Brooks?" he asked in tones as neutral as possible.

The rubicund one looked McTavish up and down, from his straw hat to his brown shoes.

"Eh?" he asked, suspiciously.

McTavish hastily opened his telegram, and passed it over.

"That has just come for her." The red-faced man looked at the missive, grunting first at one corner, then at the other. McTavish watched his lips moving laboriously. Finally, still a trifle suspicious, the man gave back the piece of paper.

"She come to me yesterday morning," he grudgingly told McTavish, "and asked where could she hire a car to take her to Lake Terrill. I sent her to a young fellow, who used to work for me, and he took her up."

"How far is Lake Terrill?"

"About thirty miles."

"Is there a post-office?"

"No, there's nobody there in the winter, and as far's I remember, only one summer cottage. She said she was going there for a little peace and quiet, and didn't want anybody to know where she was."

McTavish nodded his head wisely.

"Thanks very much," he said. "I'll have to get this to her somehow."

"Would you like me to get Frank to take you up?"

asked the red-faced man. "Then if she wanted, she could come back with you."

This is what McTavish had been hoping for. Frank would know the way to the cottage. Some of these lakes are many miles long, and he might spend half a day looking for a secluded cabin.

"I'd be glad," said McTavish.

With a powerful hand the snackman heaved himself loose from the mudguard on which he had been leaning, waddled across the road and disappeared down a step into his restaurant. McTavish followed and waited at the door. From within he heard the confidential, low monosyllables of a telephone conversation. The talking ended. A minute later there appeared a smart car, driven by a weedy young man in a chauffeur's cap. McTavish noted the three yellow stars, a remnant, he supposed, of pre-depression glories. He got into the back seat and slammed the door. The car moved up the street. The ride had begun.

It is said, with what truth one may not know, that Wolfe County, Ontario, contains twelve hundred lakes, some of which have never been fished in. Certain it is that the county stretches north from Lake Ontario over an area of more than twenty-five hundred square miles and that the lakes are innumerable. McTavish was a native of Canada, and fairly familiar with this part of the country, but he could not pretend to know even the names of them all. Of even the existence of Terrill Lake he had hitherto been ignor-

ant. He supposed that Mary or some friend of hers had a cabin there which was used for holidays in the summer and duck shooting in the autumn. He found later that this surmise was correct. The place belonged, as a matter of fact, to a school friend of Mary's, who had asked her to go and have a look at it if possible, as it would not be occupied again for the rest of the season.

McTavish drove up the squat main street of Castleton, past the picturehouses, past the monotonously repetitious purveyors of drugs and cigarettes. The shops were just beginning to give way to private houses, when he suddenly stopped the car, got out, and returned shortly afterwards with a bottle of milk and several other packets.

"Food," he explained. "We shall have to eat when we get there, even if people are dying."

The driver nodded appreciatively. It is an unwritten law not to arrive foodless at such cabins. They sped past the outermost of the elaborate filling stations, and were in the open country, on the arterial road.

"You may hurry if you like," McTavish said to the weedy young man. The young man hurried. They crossed the railway track, appropriately near the cemetery, in view of the number of drivers who succeed each year in hitting the Toronto express. Soon after, they left the main road, drove for a couple of miles on asphalt, and then diverged once again, this time to a rougher side-road. They were reaching the

region of the lakes. The country was flattish. Every now and again from the height of some small hill they caught sight of water. This, the driver assured him, belonged to one large lake, about fifteen miles long. Their direction was steadily north. Two or three times they passed small villages, on the whole very ugly and of a depressing sameness—filling station, general store, post-office, telephone office and one or two rather pretentiously ugly residences. After they had left one of these villages, the driver turned suddenly to the right along a narrow way, bearing the signpost "Terrill Lake, 5 Miles".

The way became rougher and rougher, and the country wilder. The chauffeur slowed down to eight miles an hour, and they began to climb. The trees nearly met over the road, and the track—for into a track it was degenerating—wound round and round to avoid the great limestone bluffs that overhung them. They reached an imposing cliff round which the car must turn. Just before the turn the young man stopped short and walked round the corner from the car. McTavish followed him and saw that the road had crumbled away on the right, so that an unwary driver might have precipitated himself into a forty-foot chasm.

The weedy young man jerked his thumb contemptuously over his shoulder at this perversity of nature.

"Rain," he said laconically, sticking a cigarette into the corner of his mouth. "Come down in torrents last night."

McTavish did not ask how he knew. There had not been a drop of rain in Castleton or on the island for several days. They entered the car together. This time McTavish sat in the front seat at the side of the driver. His respect for the weedy young man was rising.

They drove cautiously on, still climbing slowly.

"We must be getting pretty high up," ventured McTavish.

"Two hundred and fifty feet," answered the weedy chauffeur. Again McTavish did not ask how he knew. "You'll see Terrill in a moment," continued the driver.

They went cautiously towards what seemed to be a leap into nowhere. They reached the top. McTavish gasped.

Beneath him lay a lake entirely blue in colour, a mile wide, perhaps four miles long, and with a single woody island exactly in the middle. All round the lake the woods pressed in, reaching right down to the water's edge. Only at the foot of the little hill which they were descending a sandy beach stretched for about a quarter of a mile. A few pine trees stood at the end of the beach, and beyond them was a single log cabin with smoke slowly curling from the chimney. In the water by the cabin sat a woman in a bathing costume, the only human being in sight. The woman was lazily washing a pair of stockings.

Mary!

The chauffeur had shut off his engine and was slowly coasting down. She had not heard them.

"You stay on the road, will you?" McTavish asked the driver. "I've got to . . . to break the news."

The man nodded. McTavish went silently out of the car, through the little wicket-gate and through the pines along the winding path on the sand. Through the trees he could see the girl still sitting at the edge of that incredibly blue water. Even yet she had not heard them come.

It is surprising how difficult it is to make a noise as one walks on dry sand. McTavish tried every way he could think of as he walked over the forty yards to the shore.

"What a fool I am!" he thought. "What a bloody fool! I can't do it."

About ten yards from the water he stopped and looked at the girl sitting there. Her back was turned to him, and she was facing the lake. She had on a bright scarlet costume and no bathing cap. He could see her body and arms browned by the sun. The low-cut costume showed the play of her muscles as she bent over to dip a stocking in the water. One pair hung over her left shoulder, apparently already washed. Her dark hair showed even darker against the white of the fine sand. McTavish stood for perhaps five seconds.

"No, I can't do it," he thought. "Intruding on her like this. It's impossible. . . . I'll have to go away again."

He turned, and began to retrace his path, as silently as he could. As he walked back from the

shore all the noises of creation seemed now to conspire against him. His heart beat furiously in his breast, his feet met the sand with a heavy thud. Soon he would regain the shelter of the pine grove. Now he was at the edge of the sand. He would tell the chauffeur to start his engine and drive as fast as possible up the hill. Mary would never know who had been so close to her. He would bend over in the car so that she would not recognize him. He began to run on his tip-toes.

Suddenly he stopped. Surely that was a woman's voice? No matter. He ran faster. "I've run away from both of them now," he thought. "First her husband and now her."

He was nearly up to the little wicket-gate beyond which stood the car. The driver was not in sight. Suddenly he stopped again. There was no doubt about it. That was Mary's voice coming from the lake, clear in the still, warm air.

"Come back here, George," it said. The tones were peremptory. Sheepishly the man obeyed. Turning once again, he went down towards the beach. The girl was walking up from the lake. Before they met, while there was still twenty feet of sand separating them, he blurted out his news.

"Reggie has gone away with Olive!"

He saw the girl's face set into firm lines. He was level with her. Now he was walking with her towards the log cabin.

"Tell me what happened," she said in a strange,

impersonal voice. "Excuse me first, for a moment."

She disappeared into the cabin and came out a moment later clad in a scarlet wrap.

"Sit down, please." She indicated a bench facing the water. She herself sat in a deck-chair that stood a little in front of the bench. He told his story. Even had he wished, he could not have seen what effect his words had upon her, for her expression was hidden behind the canvas of the chair. That gave him a measure of relief. She preserved an absolute silence until he had finished. For perhaps a minute neither of them spoke. Then, abruptly:

"You have told me everything?"

He had, including the quarrel and the last details of what he said to Brooks. He had not spared himself.

She was silent again. Then, almost viciously, but with an infinite weariness in her voice:

"You lashed him with that tongue of yours, you told him he wasn't a good enough man for his wife, and then you ran away from him. You had to run pretty fast, I imagine," she added grimly. She turned her head slightly towards McTavish. For the first time he could see the marks of suffering on her young face.

"Then Olive came," she went on, "and you let him go away with her. Are you sure that is all?"

McTavish was silent.

"You drove him to her," she almost whispered.

There was still nothing to say.

Once more she turned away towards the lake, so that he could no longer see her features.

"No wonder he thinks you are a bit of a fool," she said. . . .

Suddenly the girl stood up and faced directly towards him.

"Did you keep your taxi?" she asked.

"Yes," the man faltered.

"I will be ready in about ten minutes," and she made to go into the cottage.

Encouraged by a slightly less icy tone in her voice:

"What are you going to do, Mary?" he faltered.

She looked incredulously at him, as though the question had been entirely superfluous.

"Do? Why I'm going after my man, of course."

She went into the house. McTavish went to the car, found the chauffeur, and shared lunch with him. The chauffeur's great-grandmother, McTavish learned, had been of pure Indian blood.

In twenty minutes Mary appeared, carrying a black patent leather suit case. They drove back to Castleton.

At half-past three they were back at the cottage. McTavish had left at seven-thirty in the morning. To reach Castleton, find Mary, drive to Terrill Lake, and bring her back to the island had taken him six hours. During the drive back, he had sat in the front seat with the chauffeur, Mary seeming to expect this. On arriving at Castleton, she had told the man to take

her somewhere to get a cup of tea, and had then insisted on paying for George's double trip.

"If you will pardon me, George, I will pay for the taxi. My husband would prefer it."

"So he would," reflected McTavish. She paid and dismissed the driver.

What her plans were, he had no means of telling. But after they had drunk their tea she announced that they would take a motor boat right away to the cottage and not wait for the ferry.

"We have", she remarked, as they stepped from the motor boat to the shore, "four hours of daylight."

It was the first word she had spoken since they started to cross from the mainland.

McTavish looked at her questioningly.

"Four hours for what?" he asked, hesitantly.

"First we have to search the place. I don't propose to have any more monkey tricks happening round here."

"But didn't we search it pretty thoroughly before?"

"Yes, we did. That will save us so much trouble. We will begin where we left off."

McTavish looked at the girl with some astonishment. She was pale and self-possessed. She had no make-up on. There were dark rings round her eyes. She was dressed quietly, almost primly. Her face was set in lines of utter purpose, her eyes looked through the man, as though her gaze were fixed upon some perfectly clear but distant object, and the here and now were invisible.

"I know he expected to find some kind of apparatus or machinery somewhere round," she stated curtly. "We'll start from that."

She led the way along the willow bay where they had found the broken radio tube. When they were half-way around the bay she stopped suddenly.

"Go and get Martin," she commanded. "Three are better than two. And", she added, "tell him to bring the axe."

Martin and McTavish and Mary walked to the end of the willowed bay together. The girl had taken charge of the expedition. Martin was told that someone had been tampering with the property, and that they were to look for any marks of digging or anything else unusual. The man seemed surprised, but did as he was ordered. The girl led them to the bluff on which McTavish had slept the afternoon before. Could it be only the afternoon before?

"But this doesn't belong to the property?" protested McTavish, "It belongs to Oglethorpe on the next farm."

"I don't care who it belongs to. We're going to search it."

McTavish remembered that whenever Olive had been seen, except yesterday, it had been in the bay, and that the broken radio tube had also been found in the bay. If it was not on the cottage property, what they were looking for must be nearby on somebody else's property. The girl was right!

They minutely examined the bluff, about twenty-

five feet high, at the top of which McTavish had slept. Not a sign of any agency save that of disintegrating winter! A broken chair lay at the edge of the lake, washed from a passing passenger boat. Three half skins of grapefruit had apparently floated in from the same source. Otherwise there was no sign of any human being.

Taking off their shoes and stockings they waded along the shore through water about a foot deep to the place where the bluff ends and the limestone slopes gently down to the surface of the lake. Here the rock is covered with soil to the depth of about ten inches, and wild flowers grow to the water's edge. Round this soil they searched for perhaps half an hour. The sun was sinking. Mary was obviously growing impatient. From time to time McTavish could see her tap her foot impatiently. She was clearly growing annoyed at this second search, but not a line in her face relaxed, nor did she for a moment lose that look of distant purpose.

McTavish moved up the slope, to the place where stood the ruins of an old brick house. The foundations were almost all that was left. These and a few pitiful stubs of walls three or four feet high testified that here human beings had once lived and hoped and loved. The ruins were visible to those passing on the road above, and only the fact that a thick growth of prickly bushes barred the way had prevented Mary and Brooks from examining them before now at close quarters. To scramble round the foot of the bluff as

they had done today had hitherto been impossible in ordinary clothes. But the dryness of the weather had lowered the level of the lake during the last few days.

It was with some interest then that McTavish walked down into what had apparently been the low lying kitchen of a farmhouse. Grass and flowers covered everything. The ubiquitous catmint, beloved of household pets, grew in the crannies of that floor which had once been a housekeeper's pride. There was an air of desolation about the place that chilled Mary's heart. She shuddered slightly as she stepped over the lintel.

In contradiction to her mood, McTavish was slowly recovering his spirits. He had kept severely away from Mary during the search.

"The farmer's wife . . . and her cat," he thought. "Here's the catnip."

Pulling a root of the fragrant plant he held it out to Mary, who was bending over the ground a little lower down. MacReady was out of hearing.

"Here's something you can try on Olive," he said. "Maybe she'd jump at it if you waved it at her."

Mary started up in some annoyance at his inopportune boisterousness. McTavish stood there unshaved, his hair tousled, a pipe in his mouth, his eyes bleary and his shoes dirty. He was bending forwards, offering her the stalk of mint in mock-chivalric posture. One hand was on his heart, the other held the offending herb. As he bent, she could see in the bright sun-

light the slightly bald patch on the top of his head. A flood of anger shook her.

"You ridiculous foo . . ." she began.

She never finished her sentence. For out of the doorway to what had been the dining-room, with easy steps, with the swing of the athlete, came—Olive!

The girl checked herself, and opened her eyes wide in amazement. Was she imagining?

She rubbed her eyes vigorously, incredulously. Yes, her rival was there! It was Olive right enough!

But not Olive as Brooks and MacReady had seen her, Olive of the motor boat, with corduroy breeches, leather gauntlets and goggles, but an incongruously, a ridiculously transformed Olive, an Olive of the Montreal dinner tables, of the Governor-General's-reception, of the Hunt Club Ball.

"Evening", a fashion writer said, "is the one time you should be dramatic." Olive was! Quite automatically, Mary rapidly assessed the dress.

"Stylized evening gown. Princess front. Full skirt gathered at the sides. Cord drawn under the flanged collar. Moiré silk."

The full-contoured arms were covered to the shoulders with white buttoned kid gloves. Her fair hair was as though it had just left her very capable coiffeuse. Her eyebrows and eyelashes had just received the finishing touch of an expert hand. Her complexion showed that radiance which nature unaided gives to girls when they are sixteen and never again. Her

gloves were white as no fuller could white them. Olive out to kill! It was superb! A flawless performance!

Mary gasped, then sighed involuntarily. With the easy grace of the out-of-doors, Olive moved towards the transfixed Mary. No, thought the latter. Not a flawless performance! Sparkling in the sun were two diamond ear-pendants. Once more, quite automatically:

"A trifle too large," said the girl to herself.

Without saying a word, Olive passed between the two of them, smiled sweetly to McTavish, and stretched out her white gloved hand for the stalk he held.

"Olive!" cried the astonished girl.

But ignoring her as completely as though she were not there, Mary's rival continued to stretch a gloved arm towards McTavish.

"Olive!" cried the exasperated girl, stamping her foot, "what is this foolery?"

She might as well have been talking to a statue. With the delicious gesture of a queen first shyly entering her royal home, Olive stood with her arm outstretched for the herb.

"Don Quixote and the Princess." The thought rapidly crossed Mary's mind. "She's got my man. He's not got a chance."

Suddenly a wave of terrified wrath overcame astonishment. She sprang towards the other woman, to beat her, to mar that exquisite skin with her nails. But Olive had seen her. Gently the girl in evening

dress turned away from McTavish, shot at him a dazzling smile, and moved with the same easy grace to the door. A moment later Mary was at the lintel.

Where was Olive?

Olive had disappeared, vanished completely! There was no trace of her!

Mary saw nothing but catnip growing out of the cracks of the floor through a carpet of flowers. A startled squirrel dropped its nut, jumped on the mortar of the exposed chimney, and fled. . . .

With feelings mingled of incredulity and amazement, the speechless girl returned to the other room, where she had left McTavish. Him she found gazing at her in bewilderment.

"What is it, Mary?" he asked, looking anxiously at the girl. "What were you saying about Olive?"

"She's not there!" she answered.

The journalist looked strangely at her. His voice rose with excitement as he spoke.

"Olive?" he repeated, rubbing his hand over his forehead.

"Yes, Olive! She's vanished."

"What do you mean, she's vanished?"

"You saw her go through that door. Well, she just disappeared!"

As she spoke, the girl saw the young man look at her in incredulous alarm. Then, quietly, he came up to her, and looked her straight in the eyes.

"Mary," he said earnestly, "I don't know what to

make of it all, or whether it's part of this hell's business. But, believe me, *I have no idea what you are talking about.*"

It seemed to be beyond cavil. Mary had seen a woman appear, smile at McTavish, and walk out of the picture into . . . nothingness. McTavish had been looking on, and had seen . . . nothing. Not a trace nor a sign of the lovely lady that had graced the ruined cottage. Not even a hint. He had heard Mary say something about Olive and foolery, and, lacking other explanation, had taken the rebuke on himself.

But he had seen nothing.

They stood for a moment and looked at each other, each half-doubting the other's good faith. Finally:

"Well," said Mary, her voice still shaking, "that . . . that proves it." Her tone gathered decision as she went on. "That only makes it all the more necessary to find what is hidden. I believe we are close to it here. We've never seen anything in daylight before. We've *got* to find it before dark."

The girl shivered slightly and looked at the fast sinking sun.

McTavish knew what was in her mind. They could not spend another night in the cottage with that unknown power playing over them. God only knew what might happen. Almost shyly:

"You could go and sleep in the village," he said.

She looked at him squarely, and spoke. Determination and courage were in her voice.

"I have to get my husband back. We have to begin

here and break up whatever unholy thing has been at work. Tomorrow we'll start to look for those two people. I'm not going to leave the Point until we know it is harmless."

Had she known what was in store for them during the next hour, even her magnificent courage would hardly have held her to her resolution!

They went on with their search, their hearts quavering and with catching breath. Martin was called. He had apparently not seen anything. They did not question him. . . .

They had searched three rooms of the ruined house, inch by inch, turning over the soil for any trace of human kind, but to no avail. A bank of cloud swept over the sun, and a chill breeze crept out from it over the lake. Darkness was falling. They were beginning to find difficulty in distinguishing colours. In their search, their backs began to ache. Still the girl kept them to their task.

"We must stay here until we find it," she replied, almost absently, to McTavish's suggestion that they should return early the next morning. Find what? They did not know. They lifted rocks, they craned under blackberry bushes. Every now and again a pair of crows sailed over them from the neighbouring island, cawing lazily in anticipation of a night's rest. The sky and the little glen grew darker and darker.

Suddenly, almost in a panic, Mary turned to McTavish.

"George, it's no use looking here any longer. There's nothing in the house. We'll go to the top of the cliff."

McTavish was uneasy at the touch of hysteria in her voice.

"All right," he answered reassuringly. "I'll call Martin."

He looked round, expecting to see the familiarly humble figure on its knees, poking a jack-knife into the ground. But Martin was not there.

"But where is he?" whispered the girl apprehensively. "What has happened to him?"

"He's probably gone to pare the potatoes for supper." The man's unconcern rang false, even to himself.

"No, we've got to find him. God knows what may have happened to him in this place." The girl shuddered. "Come along, George." She put her arm in his. Together they walked up the gentle slope in the dusk, arm in arm, dimly afraid of what they might find.

Before them they saw the remains of a building, shadowy in the half-light, but apparently all that was left of a stone barn or outhouse of some kind. It was perhaps twenty yards up the slope. Towards it, by a common impulse, they walked. Suddenly McTavish's heart began to beat tumultuously. He could hear the girl at his side breathing in little short gasps. Just before the stone wall of the building, they saw a dark form lying. Was it? . . . McTavish jumped forward and bent over.

"Here he is," he cried in a voice of relief. "He's all right. One of his fits I. . . ."

He did not finish his sentence. For out of the sheer rock at the side, ten feet from them, a man's voice began to laugh. A deep, bass voice, such as one might hear from the fat belly and the good conscience of a Falstaff. But this was no laugh from the depths of a merry heart. It was an evil snicker, the soft chuckle of obscenity. It held all the depravity of man and woman within it. Lowly it continued, almost caressing in its unctuous titter. It was the voice of Pandar, of the scarlet-clad priest at some unspeakable rite, of horror slickly done behind barred and velvet-curtained doors. For perhaps half a minute the intolerable sound continued. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, it ceased. Once more there was silence, save for the gentle splash of the water beating on the shore beneath them. Only the flat rock seemed to glow redder and more evil in the setting sun.

McTavish wrenched himself free as from a nightmare. Quickly he ran over to Mary. The girl was trembling.

"What was it, George?" she gasped. "Did you hear it?"

He nodded and placed his arm on her shoulder.

"Come away, Mary," he said, making to lead her down to the shore. "You must come away from this." He could feel her quivering like a frightened animal.

"But there's Martin," she gasped.

"Damn Martin," he replied. Placing his arm round

her, he turned her about and began gently to lead her down the slope.

They did not take a step. For even as they turned a terrific guffaw sounded from the flat rock. If the other sound had been a titter, this was a roar. Where the other had been silkenly suggestive, this was coarse, bloated, bestial. From . . . from nowhere, on the smooth face of the rock beside them, rang out peal after peal of inhumanly leering laughter, the swinish bellow of a Gargantua. It was the cry of one who had wallowed in the filth of the body, who had looked back through the ages to the time when men were less than men, and had practised with those foul forbears of our race unutterable lecheries. It was the contemptuous exultation of hoggish vice, the scornful jeer of the reins of man over his heart, of primordial lewdness over spirit.

Away! They must get away!

McTavish threw his arms round the shrinking girl to drag her away. He could not move! An irresistible force held him there with her, his arm about her. He had to stay. . . . They had to stay. . . . Their feet refused to move them! The lecherous guffaw roared on, over them, round them, welling in great waves of sound out of the limestone gap where the man and the woman stood. The cliff towered twenty feet over them. The western sky was still touched with an evil red. There was no man there, only the intolerable cry from the sheer rock.

"God, if they hear it at the farm," McTavish

thought. "Oh God, oh my God!" He straightened himself. He must not give way.

Once more, the laughter stopped. Silence again. A respite! McTavish supported Mary before leading her away.

But no! No respite! The Voice began, the Voice to which the laughter was but a prelude. The unutterable corruption of the Voice! At first McTavish hardly noticed what it was saying, so suave it was, so richly bass, so obscenely suggestive. It was blessed relief to be free of the laugh. Then he felt the girl stiffening in his arms. He recognized that it was at him the Voice was booming in those leeringly corrupt tones.

"So here are our two little lovebirds," it was saying. "Well, well, well! The loyal friend and the loyal wife! Arm in arm, head on shoulder! There he is! George McTavish, Esquire, college friend, boon companion, and loyal admirer. Oh, how loyal he is, and how much he admires his friend! Everything in common with him . . . even his wife! Don't we have sport?"

McTavish wrenched at the shuddering girl beside him. Or did he? If he did, his effort had no success. The man and the woman stood there, as though made of stone, a figure of cowering shame, unutterable horror in their hearts.

"Sport! Sport!" the loathsome voice was roaring, coarse in its nauseating huskiness. "Don't we have sport? First Friend Brooks goes away, for just a little time, and then he stays just a little longer. Oh, that little

more, and how much it is!" The Voice paused, and ended on a low chuckle, that seemed to rise out of the archaic slime and to echo from a vast distance along the great corridors of man's brutish past. McTavish could see that the girl was white as marble, and that her eyes were turned away from him.

"She can move her eyes, but not herself. So can I, so can I." He struggled desperately to keep control of himself. The girl was rigid as a corpse.

"Sport! Sport!" the terrible cry rasped on inexorably. "When friend husband goes away, then we have Sport. First we walk down to the shore, and then we come back and make some food. Food and Sport! That's what makes the world go round! Food and Sport!" A huge roar of foul laughter succeeded, and died down to an inaudible chuckle. Still they stood motionless, powerless. Their time to go was not yet! McTavish could hear his heart beating furiously within him. Five, ten, fifteen beats he counted, desperately holding on to himself. Twenty. . . . Twenty-five. . . . Still the Voice was silent. If only it would begin again! Even that nauseating cry was better than this paralysed stillness. Thirty beats of his heart. Thirty-five! The little glen was dark. The last rays of twilight had gone. They stood there locked in each other's arms, waiting, waiting. . . .

Suddenly it began again, in a higher, mocking, even more odious tone.

"And there's the other little lovebird," it mocked revoltingly. "Mary Raiche Brooks! So dainty, so high-

minded, so pure. Pure as the driven snow. But she must have her sport, too. When friend husband is away, she will play. 'You do love me, George, don't you?' Of course he loves you, in those shimmery, flimsy, silky, greeny things friend husband bought you. Naughty, naughty Mary Raiche Brooks." The sound went up and down in a horrible leer, as though some monstrous finger were being wagged. "Naughty, naughty Mary." Silence again.

With an obscene gurgle, the sound tittered off, as though retiring to the infinite depths of the cliff beside them.

Had it ended at last?

No! Once more, now echoing cavernously as though from the very heart of the earth, it began again.

"You pair of lecherous adulterers, you sneak-thieves, you dirty dogs! Of course you wait until the man goes away, and then . . . and then. . . ." There followed terms of abuse so revolting, so unutterably foul, that McTavish, by a supreme effort, forced his free hand over his ear. Words such as small boys whisper, words such as drunken stevedores hurl in drunken frenzy, tumbled over each other in a torrent of foul invective, words culled alike from the past, and the foul argot of twentieth-century bar-room and brothel of a thousand seaports!

Would it not stop? It must stop! This creature, whatever it was, of God or Devil, this filthy-mouthed miasma must stop! Humanity could bear no more!

With a great wrench McTavish shook himself free of the girl and dashed at the insensate bluff, hammering it with his fists until the blood ran.

"Stop! Stop! I tell you!" he cried hoarsely. "Stop, or I'll blast you to hell."

A loud shriek rose behind him, the shriek of a despairing woman. He turned back to see Mary insensible on the ground.

Suddenly the Voice had finished. Like a benediction, there was quiet, peaceful silence . . .

Over the high land to the east the great red moon slowly nosed its friendly shape. In its light a glint of metal sparkled in the old stone outhouse. Along the shore of the bay crept the man and the woman in shame, bruised and silent, like Adam and Eve before the flaming sword, hanging their heads.

Chapter 11

What McTavish Found

At two o'clock that night, McTavish was sitting up in his bed, looking at the moon streaming into the open door of his room. . . . The yellow moon, high up in the sky. From far away came the distant wail of a night bird. An occasional cricket sang its early song out on the grass. His hands clasped over his knees, McTavish sat as he had been sitting since ten o'clock. The night was warm. The man looked out towards the trees of Willow Bay, dark and sombre in the moonlight. Between them he could see patches of silvery water.

Suddenly he bent his head attentively. What was it he saw? The moonlight sparkling on a broken bottle, perhaps, about half-way between the cottage and the bay. People should not leave broken bottles around. He would go and pick it up. One might as well be moving about as sitting up on the bed. Perhaps a little action might bring blessed sleep.

Cautiously he rose, crossed the room on tip-toe, and in silence unlatched the hook of the screen door.

He must not wake the others. Martin, strange lad, had returned apparently none the worse just after they had come in, had called a cheery good night, and gone to bed. He could hear the man snoring. Whether or not Mary slept, he did not know.

He crossed the grass in his bare feet, and picked up the shining object. Yes, a broken bottle. He walked round to the back of the house to throw it into the refuse box. Half-way there, he suddenly stood still in his tracks, and slapped his thigh.

"By golly!" he said.

A moment's pause only. Then he began to run. Throwing the piece of glass into the box, he made straight for the little toolshed at the rear. His step was suddenly purposeful.

"By golly, yes," he repeated, almost cheerfully. "I wonder whether he brought it in," he said to himself half aloud as he walked. He fumbled over the dark shelves of the shed. The moon shone straight in over him, casting a deep purplish shadow on the wall.

He was becoming excited. "He must have brought it," he said to himself. "He never leaves anything out of doors overnight."

Suddenly McTavish gave a smothered exclamation of triumph. A moment later he was running over the grass, axe in hand, towards the ruined cottage. He knew what he had to do. Thoughts raced through his head like the whirr of an alarm clock.

"I knew that man would bring back the axe. The

perfect servant. The axe is just what I shall need. Aristotle says all virtue depends on habit," his thoughts whirred on. "Martin must be the most virtuous man in the world. His habits are cast-iron. If he had been present at the miracle, he would have made a speech saying he was glad to see they had picked up twelve baskets of fragments, but he was sorry to notice some fish bones still lying about."

McTavish had reached the bay.

"I wonder how he came to leave that piece of bottle lying on the grass? It's a good thing for me he did. It put me on the track. . . ."

He was half-way along the bay, still running, picking his way over the gravel and rock with ease in the bright moonlight. There was not a cloud in the sky. The night was perfect.

"Yes, it put me on the track all right," he thought. He was becoming puffy, and slowed his pace to a walk. "No use being all fagged out when I get there," he thought. "I may not come back anyhow, but one might as well have as good a start as possible." He walked quite slowly. Perhaps he had better be cautious.

He made his way through the water and entered the glen. Carefully he moved up the grassy slope towards the old cottage, half creeping, half walking, as though stalking a wild beast. The walls of the old house glistened white in the moonlight. There was no sign of life, save for the desultory call of the ubiquitous and solitary cricket. McTavish passed the house

without special interest, giving it a nod of mental recognition. As he crept, he swung the axe.

"Taking one's life in one's hands, I suppose," he thought. "Life, or what else?" he wondered. It was surprising how little it seemed to matter. He had come to destroy.

He went up the slope to the outhouse, at the entrance of which they had seen Martin lying in a faint. He passed the bluff on which he had so lately bruised his hands. As he passed, he dealt the cliff a vicious back-handed blow with the head of the axe.

"I'll have to use the dull end," he thought. "They had it sharpened the other day." At the entrance to the outhouse ruins, he stopped for the first time, and cautiously peered inside. There it was, still shining in the moonlight! A glitter of metal! What he had come after! The broken bottle had brought it to his mind. Was it a ring? He would soon know.

On hands and knees, he crept forward, fury in his heart. Yes, it was a ring, iron, blackened, but apparently scraped by accident at one place. Venomous hatred rose within him. He lifted the axe to smash the ring and the stone in which it was embedded. Suddenly he dropped his hand.

"What's come over me?" he asked himself sheepishly. "If I break the ring, I shan't be able to smash the rest."

Standing up, he carefully took hold of the ring and pulled. It lifted quite easily, but heavily. To his surprise it carried with it a board about three feet square,

on which grass and bugloss were apparently growing. Camouflage! That was why they had not seen it before. Clever! For a moment, he stood with a certain apprehension, supporting the ring and its heavy attachment.

Suddenly he dropped it and stood up. Even though he half knew what to expect, he was startled, when it came.

The voice! It boomed over his shoulder, past him, at him!

"HA! HA!" it cried. "PRETTY DAMN SLICK WORK!"

The moonlit silence was shattered!

Only half-surprised, the man gazed round him. He could see as far as the lake. There was nobody there. The water lapped disconsolately along the gravel bay.

"Pretty damn slick work!" The great gruff sound seemed this time to come from under his feet, like the roar of some great half-playful beast.

Almost wearily:

"You cut that out!" he heard himself say. And without raising his head: "I've got a job of work here."

He lifted the trapdoor once more. As he raised it, he thought he heard an abysmal whisper as from the depths of earth itself, a sound like the delicate flutter of an earthquake, a meek, uncouthly hollow sigh.

"Yes, cut it out. Here is a job to do."

Whether he heard it, he never knew, or whether he imagined it. For he was astonished at what he saw beneath the lid.

There met his eyes rows and rows of what looked like the heads of inverted test tubes, apparently about four inches high and half an inch in diameter, and nearly touching each other.

Within each tube there was a rapid pulse of bluish green light, forming an almost continuous coruscation, yet throbbing visibly. The pulse of light ebbed and flowed at the same rate and time in all the tubes, as though in veins controlled by some central heart, and giving to the whole the appearance of a silent, quickly breathing organism. In one corner was a solid wheel of whitish metal, revolving noiselessly and slowly. Next to it he saw a black box, made apparently of xylonite or other insulating material. Fascinated, McTavish crouched over the pulsating machine, the axe upraised in his hand, ready to strike. One, two, three. . . . He found himself counting the rows of tubes. Almost automatically, he estimated the number. Two hundred. . . . Yes, there must be about two thousand in all! Two thousand of these tubes! Good God, what a power! It must be smashed! Poising his arm higher to strike, he was about to bring down the head of the axe in an irrevocable crash.

"Don't do it!"

A silken voice addressed him from over his shoulder. Astonished, he stayed his blow and stood up straight. Once more, there was nobody in sight.

"Of course," he said aloud. "You again." What he meant, he hardly knew. Exasperated, he raised his hand. Once again, he bent over the machine at his

feet, the axe poised to strike. As he did so, he started up with amazement.

A ripple, a delicately flittering pattern, ran over the shimmering tubes, so rapid, so evanescent, that it was gone almost before he was aware that it was there, a flicker like the momentary rustle of the trees or the quiver of the water when a breath of wind has touched it. Though it was not a spreading ripple, but an infinitely labile tracery that sped over the pointed surface of light before him and was gone.

"You must hear me out," said the voice, silken as before, and from behind him. This time McTavish did not raise his head, but watched the wonder at his feet. For as the words came, delicate, lacy patterns of light sped and vanished, crossing and recrossing each other in fantastic filigree, yet each keeping its own form, each undisturbed by the other. Almost immediately they died away, and there was nothing before him save the rhythmic throb he had first seen.

McTavish heard himself speak.

"Hear you out?" he asked.

Once more, as he spoke, a delicate pattern sped over the surface before him, crossing and intercrossing in intricate brocade, speeding in all directions at once, inter-penetrating and passing in eccentric nodes, like a scintillating pentagram flashed upon the wall by some latterday magician. Once again, turmoil was succeeded by the quietly pulsing flicker. Still McTavish held the axe above his head, ready to strike. Then he lowered the weapon slowly, reluct-

antly almost, as realization came to him of what was happening.

It was a picture of his own thought he was watching there at his feet! The mobile working of his own mind was being subtly transformed into patterns of living luminescence, like the figures on a television screen. Somehow, Olive's apparatus—for he knew that it was Olive's apparatus—registered and intensified the interlacing patterns of his own thinking, until a wish became a torrential desire, a half-spoken thought the crashing hallucination of a voice, the self-reproaches of uneasy conscience the thundering accusations of a cosmos! What he and Mary had heard that afternoon had been what he and Mary had thought, half-consciously—what their Unconscious had thought, or their Super-Ego, as the psychoanalysts would say! There flashed into his mind the memory of Brooks's dissertation—the poor old boy loves dissertations, he thought—upon the way we perceive the world, and the electric patterns in the brain. Thought patterns, electric waves, radio-amplification, it was all here. McTavish was watching himself think and stepping his own thought up to an unheard-of intensity. This was a Psycho-analytic Machine!

How much of all this he thought to himself, and how much he shouted out aloud, he had no means of telling. His thoughts had taken on themselves the quality of hallucinations, so that he could not distinguish between what he said, what he imagined,

and what passed silently in his mind. Everything was exaggerated into jagged outline and clear-cut relief. The inner world had become the outer world.

"For what is within, that is without us," he quoted the German poet. The words went crashing and echoing from rock to rock of the little glen, enveloping the trees, rising upwards to the clear sky in a great volume of sound. Or did they? He did not know. He never knew. The axe had fallen to the ground, his nerveless fingers playing aimlessly over the shaft.

Suddenly he pulled himself together. He had come to destroy. He must destroy!

Could he? Could he smash a thing of such beauty, of such living finesse?

He watched the luminous mosaic before him. In one corner there was a shapeless patch of light, swelling and shrinking momentarily, putting out angry little streamers towards a more clearly defined shape half-way across the other side.

"Perhaps I'd better compromise," he thought.

Simultaneously the second shape slowly moved towards the opposite corner, as though retreating as far as possible from the threatening darts. Slowly the two patches of light grew brighter, more clear-cut and better defined. Yes, he must smash this infernal machine! The two confronting shapes on the illumined surface spurted tentative-looking shoots of light each towards the other. Suddenly, with an almost instantaneous flick, the warring flashes coalesced into a single figure which spread milkily over the whole

surface, forming a single pattern with two centres. This hung precariously poised for a moment, radiating pulsations which passed indistinguishably from one centre to the other, like the pictures he had seen of lines of force connecting two poles of a magnet.

"I'll leave it for now, and talk it over with Mary tomorrow," he said, or shouted to himself. Yes, he would compromise!

But, as he watched, the first angry patch he had noticed first seemed to grow more intense, and to gather strength from some unseen source of energy. Brighter and brighter it grew, and within it a clearly marked circle of hard, clear light developed.

"A hard, gem-like flame," he thought.

A delicate tendril of phosphorescence passed over the plate and was gone. The nucleus grew clearer and clearer, it began to dominate the picture, it drove the compromise pattern slowly and relentlessly to one side. The whole surface began irresistibly to assume the appearance of the setting sun throwing streamers over the landscape.

"I can't let this thing stay here after what it has done."

His resolution hardened. The streaming nucleus was spreading irrevocably over the whole, the compromise pattern had vanished. Only a dim radiance remained of the other pole. Then, quite suddenly, the pattern became single. The battle of the lights was won! All trace of conflict had disappeared. In the one corner glowed a steady focus, from which

eddied living wisps over the whole surface, spreading it with a lovely scaffolding of soft green pathways.

"I had better hit pretty hard, as there must be some sort of second layer underneath, like chocolates."

A new configuration appeared, independent of the first, and then subtly blending with it. Now there was not one single pattern, but two, one dominant, the other dependent and apparently drawing its light from the hard nucleus in the corner. McTavish could see light travelling in ripples from the nucleus to this new, smaller centre, never the other way round.

"Motive," he thought.

"'*'Tis the motive good or ill that doth the deed inspire*'."

The rock above bellowed the doggerel at him!

He shut his eyes and lifted his hand to strike. . . .

Five minutes later there remained only a welter of shattered glass, wires, lead plates, and wheels. Among them lay the axe, the steel head gently effervescing in acid. In his fury, a fury whipped up by the machine itself, McTavish had hacked through and through the plates of the storage batteries beneath.

Chapter 12

The House on Rainbow Island

McTavish slept that night, what was left of it. At about nine o'clock, he was startled into consciousness by Martin, standing at the foot of his bed and announcing that breakfast would be ready in fifteen minutes. Hurriedly dressing, he went out on to the eating-porch. Mary was already there. The girl looked tired but rested, as though some great load had lately been taken from her. To tell what had happened during the night did not take long.

"And so", concluded McTavish, vigorously stirring his coffee, "I busted up Olive's little contrivance. God forgive me, but I busted it as completely as I have ever busted anything. Better, in fact."

"Why God forgive you, George?"

"Because it was such a beautiful thing. If you had seen those patterns chasing each other across that plate, like . . . like snow flurries at the edge of a drift, and then that steady light burning from the corner and consuming everything before it, I don't believe you could ever have had the heart to do

it. But thank God I'm not an artist, so I busted it."

Mary looked at him with clear eyes.

"I don't know about not being an artist," she said. "In any case, you've got a lot to learn. Don't you know that women are far more ruthless than men where their affections are concerned? Beauty just irritates them when it stands in their way. I'm glad you smashed it. That's the first step. The next is to go after Reggie. That's why I had to have Martin call you."

The man looked gratefully at her. "Thank you," he said simply.

In a quarter of an hour they were in the old car, billowing over the grassy hummocks like a ship in a breeze. All trace of the mutual shame of the night before had left them. They spoke together with a perfect naturalness. McTavish drove.

The plan was to put the car on the ferry, to go over to Castleton, drive to Little Quebec, and thence to take a motor boat to the Thousand Isles. For Mary was convinced that it was among the Thousand Isles that Olive had her retreat, and that, somehow or other, she had enticed Brooks there.

"What'll you do when you find the place?" asked McTavish in some trepidation. "Olive's a dangerous woman."

He shuddered at the thought of attempting to snatch Olive's prey away from her.

Mary's lips set in a thinnish line.

"Don't worry about me," she replied grimly.

"I'll find something to do when the time comes."

He felt she would! He reflected that he was glad he had brought Mary along.

"Well, how are you going to find the place?" he asked. "Olive's not likely to leave her address with the local Chamber of Commerce."

"I'll find out, George," she replied sweetly, and was silent.

They turned down the slope to the ferry boat, puffed on board, and started five minutes later to Castleton, sharing the cargo space with a load of hay, a pile of sacks full of flour, two horses belonging to the hay waggon, a racehorse being taken over for a work-out on the local track, two other cars, bright and shiny, with American licence plates, respectively from Wisconsin and Connecticut, three plaintive calves, and most forbidding of all, a returning undertaker's hearse. How the mate had managed to stow this variegated cargo into the available space remains to this day an unsolvable mystery to McTavish. The journalist's part had been to obey orders minutely.

"Go forward three inches. . . . Stop! . . . Turn your wheel round this way (an insulting direction!). . . . Back a little. . . . Forward this way. . . . Stop. . . ." The miracle had been accomplished, and they sat in the car, gently swaying on the tyres in time with the oscillation of the ship's engine. McTavish watched his companion, who was still silent.

"I wonder whether you have noticed it?" he asked at length.

"Noticed what, George?"

"How much freer we seem to be than at any time for years, since we were children, perhaps. With each other, I mean."

The girl nodded. "Yes, I have noticed. You wouldn't expect it after what happened last night, either."

McTavish was silent for a while. "It has occurred to me", he said tentatively, "that it may be because of last night."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I've always been attracted by you. You know that. But I've tried to be a decent person, and since you got married, I've pushed away any thought of you."

The girl nodded, silently and sympathetically.

"Now, I'm only an amateur psychologist," he went on, "but I believe the psycho-analysts would say that I've been repressing all this, pushing it down into the Unconscious. But all the same, it was there. I know it was." He was silent again.

"Well, here's this beastly machine of Olive's. Last night I watched it responding to my own mind, and sending out some kind of influence that amplified my thoughts. Reggie talked about electric patterns in the brain, you remember. What the thing did was to pick up the electric patterns in my brain, and send out some power that amplified them. Like a re-transmitting station for wireless, reinforcing the signals it receives," he added apologetically. "Of course I

don't know any science," he hastily reassured her.

"Look, there's Hog Island," he pointed. "The place where one farmer lives by himself all the winter."

They looked to the west, where the low shores of Hog Island lay half a mile distant across the blue water. Evidently the ferry was not stopping that morning, for they kept on the direct path to Castleton.

"Go on, George, I'm interested." The words brought McTavish out of his reverie.

"Well, as I see it, even a repressed thought must have some kind of electric pattern in the brain," he continued. "Or else it wouldn't be a thought. That night, when . . . when. . . ."

For the first time, a trace of embarrassment lurked in his voice. But he went on, firmly:

"When we were alone, Olive's infernal machine amplified this unconscious pattern, so that your attraction for me got out of control." He stopped.

"Our attraction for each other," she said gently.

"Our attraction for each other. Yes." He gazed at the shore of Castleton, which was rapidly approaching.

"Then, of course," he went on rapidly, "all our habits and training, all our decency rose up and reproached us. We both felt terrible. We called ourselves all kinds of vile things, things that we didn't admit calling ourselves. But we both tried to excuse ourselves, saying we were civilized people and it didn't matter anyhow. We repressed our self-reproaches."

He looked inquiringly at her. She silently agreed.

"All this repression got mixed up with all the muck we have ever heard and tried to forget. Then we got too near Olive's machine, and the flood burst its barriers, muck and all. That's why we feel better. Olive's contrivance worked like a psycho-analytic machine."

The girl looked at him bravely.

"Mental purging," she said.

He nodded. The boat was drawing into Castleton. They extricated the car—a needle from the haystack—and set off to Little Quebec.

The drive from Castleton to Little Quebec takes half an hour if a good car is driven illegally. In the ancient chariot in which they were travelling, the journey required forty-five minutes. On the way, little was said, for there seemed little to say. Surprisingly enough to McTavish, Mary spent most of the time applying a rather elaborate make-up—eyebrows, eyelashes, lips, powder, rouge, received meticulous attention from a little box out of a blue handbag.

"A trifle garish, it seems to me," thought McTavish. "But I suppose she knows her business."

Indeed the girl looked garish. Not quite the Mary he had known, but somewhat . . . well, *exaggerated.* Like a wise man, however, he said nothing.

On arrival at Little Quebec, she demanded, to his surprise, to be taken to the telegraph office. He won-

dered why she had not telegraphed from Castleton. Again he held his peace.

They entered the office. A youth of sixteen came forward to the counter from the ticking hive behind. The youth gave one glance at Mary, and McTavish knew that he would never be the same lad again!

Mary leaned over the counter, and shot a smile at the wretched boy.

"I wonder whether you could give me some information?" she asked, in a low, husky voice.

"Yes, ma'am . . . that is—no, ma'am," answered the boy. "We aren't allowed to give information about customers."

Mary smiled again at the lad. McTavish could see him slowly blush.

"Of course not," she said brightly. "That was tactless of me, wasn't it?"

"Er. . . ."

"You see," Mary went on brightly, "one of my friends has a place on one of the islands, and I have mislaid the address. I've only a day here, and I must see her. It's my holidays."

She looked at the boy piteously. McTavish began to feel annoyed. It wasn't fair. But he had no time to interfere.

"She sends a lot of telegrams to Germany," the girl was going on.

Almost before she had finished her sentence, the boy broke in:

"That will be the lady from Rainbow."

But Mary caught the word from his lips, and almost simultaneously:

"Rainbow Island. I've got it," she cried. "I knew I would remember! How much does it cost to send a telegram to Rainbow Island?" She smiled sweetly at the youth, as he told her. "I'll bring it in later," said Mary.

They left the office.

"That wasn't hard," said the girl, as they walked down the street. "I'd hate to get the boy into trouble, but I don't think I will. Nobody heard. I took care of that. It'll do him good. Now, if you would hunt up a motor boat, I can be ready in fifteen minutes. Find a middle-aged man, not under forty-five, at least, and take the boat for the day. Get a boat with a silencer if you can possibly find one."

She went off in the direction of a waterside hotel. McTavish watched her enter it.

"I wonder what she's up to now," he asked himself.

He walked along the riverside to the place where he knew he would find motor launches for hire. There was one man only who answered to Mary's request, a tough-looking, weather-beaten person, with a tattoo mark on his wrist, who assured McTavish that he knew every inch of every island. The man wore a sweater with the words "Lady of the Isles" worked upon it. This McTavish took to be a good omen. The sweater-wearer had a cast in one eye, which, for some

unaccountable reason, also comforted McTavish not a little. He walked back to the hotel to meet Mary, while the boatman went home to bring what he called a "lunch" for himself. As McTavish approached the building, she came down the steps. He gasped when he saw the change in her appearance. The vamp, the stylized seducer of youth was gone.

Instead, McTavish saw Mary once more, Mary the wife of his friend, Mary his old flame, sweet and rather like a latter-day madonna of Fifth Avenue or Regent Street.

"You didn't think I would let Reggie see me like that, did you?" she asked him. "Or", she added, "even the boatman. The boatman may be useful."

They walked down to the boat, which was already churning the water, and told the man to take them to Rainbow Island.

To McTavish, who had never before visited the islands, the memory of that extraordinary journey presented itself later as a succession of climaxes and anticlimaxes of confused astonishment. It is said that there are seventeen hundred islands in all. McTavish believes they must have passed all of them. There were islands of all conceivable sizes, shapes, states of populousness and decay. There was the large island with the pretentious, plate-glassed baronial mansion —hundreds of them. There was the little island, just large enough to hang a clothes-line, or so it seemed and with what looked like two school teachers lying in the sun on the rocks. Hundreds of these, too. There

were the uninhabited, small islands, consisting of a few boulders, half a dozen sumach bushes, and a bird's-nest. There were the imitation Castles of Chillon, the imitation Log Cabins with, he was sure, imitation French-Canadian names. There were imitation Pagodas, with imitation Indian names. There was, he felt, imitation everything else, except that he missed the Taj Mahal—though, as he remarked later, it must be there somewhere.

They passed, according to the boatman, who grunted names at laconic intervals, Quarry Island, Tidds Island, Jack Screw Island, Pork Island, Gordon Island, MacDonalds Island, Stave Island, Float Island. They saw the palace which the lawn-mower magnate had built for his daughter, who had run away with his chief salesman and founded a rival firm, and had never been forgiven. The place had never been lived in. They saw the Swiss Cottage put up by the young dentist for his bride, who had died the day it was completed. The dentist had lived there ever since, a white-haired man with a memory. According to their guide, the dentist "won't do no business, except in an emergency, like". The guide warmed up as the trip went on. They saw the Heidelberg Barrel, made large enough to hold fifty dancing couples, and the Bayreuth Opera House, made small enough for a gilded child to play to an audience of twelve children. They passed the place where the muscalonge took a trolling bait that a young couple were rash enough to tie at the stern of their canoe.

The great fish, according to the man in the sweater, made for the open water, trailing the canoe behind it. The young couple had to swim for the shore. They passed Ash Island, Deer Island, Wallace Island, Club Island, Grenadier Island, Idlewild Island, Whisky Island, Slim Island, Hemlock Island, Oak Island. They saw the Isle of Seven Bridges, the six islands with five bridges, and the shortest international bridge in the world, with one end on the Canadian side the other in America. They saw much that was on the regular tourist trip, and much that the ordinary tourist was never shown.

The sky was blue and cloudless, the sun was hot, the guide steered them from one half-submerged bare rock to another, through narrow channels bounded on both sides by granite cliffs, past low masses of tree-covered rock, mirrored in the blue water. Once they clattered under a long, slender, arching bridge, fantastically camouflaged in the primary colours, another time under a slim Japanese rope bridge. Names and facts now flowed from their steersman like an unending stream. Laconic though he apparently was by nature, the prodigality of it all was more than he could withstand. The lavishness of Nature and man working together were too much for one who knew, sitting in a motor boat with two who did not know. The sphinx itself would have been turned into a showman. There were islands—islands—islands—islands of fantastic names, islands of no name at all. There was Everybody's Island, and the island which

some departed Greek scholar had christened "Oudeis" —Nobody. Always islands. . . .

Suddenly the motor stopped. Unnaturally quiet, the boat came to rest in a largish bay, apparently uninhabited.

"Here's where I have my lunch," said their demonstrator. "Rainbow's over there."

They looked half a mile away towards a low, rocky shore above which sat a low, squat house, with two or three outbuildings. The house was apparently fifty yards from the shore, and a drive led up to it. They could see an enormous dog at the edge of the water, apparently taking a drink. They had arranged to leave the guide while they themselves paid their visit. This was a miracle of Mary's, who had persuaded the man to let them have the boat to themselves for a while. They saw him fifty yards down the shore, methodically unpacking his meal.

The historian tells us that the corsair Hannibal, beaten from pillar to post by the obstinacy of the Romans, wandering for years up and down the country which he could not subdue, once came at night on horseback to the city walls of Rome, looked sorrowfully at those massive gates, and rode sadly away. McTavish was no scholar, but the incident occurred to him as he looked across that half-mile of water to the grey stone house that held—what did it hold? He did not know, nor what he would do when he got there. On the whole, McTavish felt that he envied Hannibal. Disappointment, he reflected further, is

less uncomfortable than embarrassment. Was he to be sent on his own to this formidable siren, to take his hat off and say:

"Please give me back my friend to his wife?" Or: "Please give me back my friend's husband?"

Or was he to go to Brooks, who had nearly killed him two or three days ago, and say to him:

"Please come back to the wife I seduced last week. I am asking this as a special favour, because you nearly killed me the day before yesterday."

In either case, he felt he would be told, in masculine or feminine terms, as the case might be, to go to hell.

The situation savoured very strongly of farce, and farce is uncomfortable to the principals. On the whole he decidedly envied Hannibal. If he could have ridden away with dignity, he would have done so!

He saw Mary looking at him with amusement.

"It's all right, George," she said. "I'm not getting out. I'm coming with you."

In spite of himself, he heaved a sigh of relief. Still, he felt he should protest.

"But look here, Mary, there may be danger."

The girl looked at him pityingly.

"Of course there will be danger. That's why I am coming. You don't suppose I'd leave you to interview Olive by yourself, do you? Why, she'd . . . she'd. . . . Well, I hate to think *what* she would do to you. You haven't a chance with Olive, and you never had. You know you haven't. And, to tell the truth, I've been

waiting for you to push the launch off all this time. Won't you?" she smiled at him.

He pushed off the boat. In five minutes they had tied up at the dock of Rainbow Island.

McTavish was the first to climb up to land, followed by Mary, to whom he gave a helping hand. There was no sign of the large dog. They walked up the driveway, as though they were paying a casual visit. McTavish's heart was pounding in his breast. The girl was pale, but her step was determined. They had come half-way up the drive, and there was still no sign of life, not a movement in the house, not a wisp of smoke, not a sound of the ubiquitous kitchen utensil. The long stone place must hold twenty rooms, thought McTavish. It was solidly built, evidently with fireplaces in a number of rooms, for they saw two rows of smokestacks. But everything was deserted. McTavish noticed, however, that the path was tended, and there were no weeds on it anywhere. This single sign of human beings made the quiet seem even more unnatural by contrast.

They came to the front door, at which they stopped. There was an iron scraper and brush at the side and a rubber mat. The door was a massive affair, enamelled a brilliant, shining red. The two strange visitors paused before it. They could see themselves in the highly polished surface, McTavish in his straw hat and grey suit, Mary a head shorter in a light summer dress. At the right-hand side, let into the door frame,

was a mother-of-pearl push-button. Almost automatically McTavish's hand moved towards it. One felt that it would summon a butler, and everything would be well. But before he could press it, Mary laid her hand on his arm.

"Don't be silly," she whispered. And at that she put her hand on the brightly polished door-latch of brass, pressed it down, opened the door, and walked into the house.

Rather sheepishly, McTavish followed. They found themselves in a large hall, oak-panelled and with leaded windows. Round the hall were several great chests, and three or four chairs. Standing on the floor, in the corner, was an old-fashioned engraving. McTavish bent down and looked at it curiously. He began idly to read the title at the foot.

" 'Oh, what can ail thee, Knight'. . . ."

"Look!" he whispered, pointing to the picture. "The Knight-at-arms!"

But the girl hardly paid attention. Like a mother with an insistent child:

"Yes!" she said. "I saw it!"

She was looking round, up at the wainscoted ceiling, up the broad stairs that wound on each side to the upper storey, out into the room through the half-opened door opposite them, silently searching and listening.

McTavish made sure that she had not understood.

"Look," he repeated, under his voice. "The Knight!"

"Yes, I know," answered the girl, a trifle impatiently. Placing her finger on her lips, she tip-toed to the open door, beckoning him with the other hand to follow.

But not even here was there any sign of life. It was a conventional living room in which they found themselves, rather well though solidly furnished, with leather armchairs and a leather divan. A log fire was laid in the grate, but not lit. Mary walked to the long polished table, of the type called in the catalogues a "Library table", ran her finger over its polished surface, and looked at it in the light.

"Done about a week ago," she said under her breath, a touch of disdain in her voice.

They looked round the room, gradually losing their first air of excessive caution and silence. Soon they were speaking naturally, though still rather quietly.

"Magazines!" said McTavish, and walked over to a table in the corner of the room. "Here's last Sunday's *New York Times*."

The day was Wednesday. There must have been somebody in the house at least on Sunday. He turned over the bulky, acrid-smelling bundle, as though it might afford some clue concerning the inhabitants of the house. There was no paper dated later than Sunday. It was on Monday that Brooks had left Willow Point.

Finally they had completed their inspection of the room. There was nothing that would give them a

further hint as to how long it had been since anybody had been there. They went back into the hall, and stood undecided for a moment. Suddenly Mary darted forward, McTavish after her.

"The kitchen!" she said. "The kitchen will tell us!"

By some instinct or other the girl pushed her way past a swing door and came directly into the kitchen. Against the outer wall stood a rather elaborate oil stove, at which she sniffed, and shook her head in a dissatisfied manner. In the corner opposite, and back to the inner wall, was an ice-box. McTavish eagerly opened the ice container. There was no ice. In the food chamber were two unopened tins of Borden's condensed milk.

"There's one thing about that," said the girl, as he closed the door. "They weren't put there by either Reggie or Olive."

McTavish nodded. He knew what she meant. They had too much brains. In any case, no biologist could put unopened tins in an ice-box. It would go against the professional grain. He would rather put them on the floor.

They walked over to the sink. There were two taps, labelled hot and cold. Mary turned on the hot one and ran it for a while. It ran cold.

McTavish's heart began to sink within him. What if this heroic undertaking, this contemptuous trespass, were a fool's errand? All the girl's courage and energy would have gone for nothing. That she could start out

upon another quest he doubted. Hesitatingly he spoke.

"Perhaps the birds have, so to speak, flown." He felt like the hero of one of the sillier novels.

She shook her head and did not answer him, but continued to look about the room. Nothing! The bright sunny kitchen showed no sign of human beings. They looked through the window at the smooth lawn outside. There was nobody there. And yet here, as in the living-room, was the indefinable atmosphere of human beings.

With a sigh the girl led the way back to the hall, and walked directly upstairs. Without hesitation she walked into the bedroom directly facing them. Like the rest of the house, the room was furnished simply, but a little more in the modern style. There were twin beds, of mahogany. On the elaborate dressing-table were the paraphernalia of a lady's toilet. Scent bottles, and so on, McTavish judged. Mary picked up an elaborate hair brush and examined the monograph carefully. "O.P." he read, looking over her shoulder. Olive Paynter. Then it was her room! The girl went to the carefully made beds and examined the pillows. McTavish could see her flush at the indignity of what she was doing.

He saw her lips set straight as she turned to go out of the door again. Just before she reached it, she hesitated, and then went straight on, her head a little more erect than before. As he passed, he looked to see what she had glanced at. Brooks's coat hung on the chair behind the open door, hung carelessly as

only a man can hang it, the inside pocket showing with letters bulging out.

They went down into the hall. Brooks was here then. But where was he?

McTavish felt that something was demanded of him.

"Here", he said, "is where we have lunch."

He took up the wax-covered packages which he had bought in Little Quebec, and which were resting on one of the hall seats beside his hat. Even in the extraordinary circumstances in which he was visiting the house he had automatically removed his straw hat in the hall. Side by side they sat on the oak seat—some kind of Flemish work it apparently was. They ate their ham sandwiches, their doughnuts and their apples, and when these were finished they went into the kitchen, found tumblers and washed down the meal. Still there was no sign of any other human being.

"We might as well go through the other rooms," said Mary, "though I don't feel that it's going to do any good. Anybody in the house would have heard us talking and come out long ago. That is", she added, "anybody who wanted us to see them."

Search showed the other rooms much the same—empty, but not neglected. Only two or three of the bedrooms were ready for occupation, the others contained bedsteads and mattresses without bedclothes. Everything was solidly bourgeois, not, as McTavish remarked, what they had been expecting to find in Olive's hiding-place.

"I thought it would be something very exotic, rugs and palms and period furniture, and that sort of thing," he said. "Oh, and incense burning," he added. "In censers."

Mary shook her head sadly. "That shows you don't understand Olive," she said. "Don't you see, Olive's interested in only two things. One of them's Olive, and the other is . . . well, *Olive*. Her science was never a passion, as Reggie's is. It is a means to feed her vanity because she didn't have much success with men."

The girl made the statement in an entirely matter-of-fact voice, without any emotion or rancour.

"Olive's science is derivative. That's why it used to annoy Reggie so much. So is her affection for Reggie, derivative. I suppose that's why it offends *me* so much. It's really aimed at me and always was. She will have inherited this house with all this good pre-war solidity, and never bothered to have it done over. Can you imagine Olive on a divan, with an eighteen-inch cigarette holder and an incense pot?"

McTavish agreed that there was little of the Queen of Sheba about the girl who had sent home to her relatives five tiger skins—one of them removed from its first owner by her own hands!—and who had shot at Mary's husband. This was not an Emotion they had to deal with, but a hard Intelligence, encased in a beautiful and selfish body.

Suddenly Mary looked at her watch.

"We've got to tell the guide he can go," she said.

"It's three o'clock, and we promised he should be home by four-thirty."

"But, Mary," protested McTavish. "What about . . . about finding Reggie? Shall we have to come back tomorrow?"

She looked at him steadily.

"No," she answered. "We shall not have to come back tomorrow."

"But. . . ."

"We're here . . . and we'll stay here, or at least I will, until I find him or make her tell me where he is."

He began to protest again. She waved him to silence.

"It's no use. I don't know what Olive has up her sleeve, or where Reggie is. I don't know whether she is away by accident, or whether she is purposely keeping away from us for some beastly reason of her own. I don't know, and what is more, I don't care. I'm going to stay, now I am here, until this thing is settled. In any case, if I don't get Reggie, it doesn't matter much what happens, does it?"

She looked at him sadly but searchingly.

"And I'm afraid you're going to say you'll stay here too," she went on. "I won't try to persuade you. Well, you know as well as I do that she will stop at nothing. Something bad may happen. I don't believe you fully realize it. It may not be just death but. . . ."

Her voice was lowered so that he could not hear the last word.

McTavish's blood ran cold.

"But what?" he asked, his eyes glassy, staring past her, as though he dared not look into her face.

"But madness," she answered. . . .

They walked out of the house by the way they had come, and down the drive. The boat was as they had left it. They untied it and went over to the other island where the guide was impatiently awaiting them. They told him to come to Rainbow Island at ten o'clock the next morning, in order to see whether they wished to be taken off. He was to bring some provisions. With heavy hearts, and silently they crossed the channel once again. Mary climbed up the wharf, McTavish helping her. The motor boat started. For nearly ten minutes they watched it gradually becoming smaller, and smaller, heading against the slight south-west wind that had arisen, bobbing cheerfully up and down, their only link with the world. The boat entered a channel between two islands. It was gone. Simultaneously they both turned away.

Once more, they walked up the drive to the house.

The rest of the estate had to be searched. Rainbow Island, they had learned from the guide, and as they could see, was not more than four or five acres in extent, and it did not take long for them to cover it. Not that they expected to find anything, but it had to be done for form's sake.

There was a boathouse with space for three boats.

In it they found a high-powered boat. Whether it was the one in which Olive had visited Nelson Island they had no means of telling. The key to the ignition was there, but it was not turned on. Were they being left a means of escape?

Were Olive and Brooks still on the island? They had no means of answering the question. Everywhere they found the same evidence that the place was not neglected, but nowhere did they see any human being. In a sheltered place on the rocks, down by the water, they found cigarette stubs and match ends, about a dozen of each. With the air of a somewhat discouraged Sherlock Holmes, McTavish examined the stubs.

"The same cigarettes as Reggie smokes," he proclaimed. "Imported from Oxford." Probably Brooks, all right, they decided. But that was all.

Once they were startled by the scurry of feet above them as they walked at the foot of a bluff on the far side. McTavish scrambled to the top as best he could and saw two rabbits scudding away.

"They must have come over on the ice in the winter," he thought. "They're afraid of us, and we're afraid. . . ."

What were these two human beings afraid of? If only they knew what they were afraid of, they wouldn't be so much afraid. He had to confess it. In silence they went back to the house. They had expected to find nothing, and they had found nothing.

The sun was approaching the horizon, and they

began to feel hungry. They went into the kitchen and took the two cans of condensed milk. With his pocket-knife, McTavish made two holes in each. They sat one at each side of the deal table and sucked at their tins, like any two school children. It was, as McTavish remarked, a good thing that the tins were the large size.

Again they waited, still with the sense of waiting somebody's pleasure. They had finished their smokes and were reduced to sitting in the leather armchairs, talking in a desultory manner about politics, about Oxford, about the merits of different motor oils. They talked about anything save the purpose in hand. About it there was no need to talk. The dusk began to fall. McTavish got up and switched on the electric light.

"I wonder where the battery is?" he enquired. They had seen no sign of a cellar in their search through the house.

Ten o'clock. Ten-thirty. The house seemed to grow stiller and stiller. The mere sight of the figures on their watches seemed to make them uneasy.

"I don't mind telling you I don't like this," said Mary.

McTavish nodded.

"Nor do I," he answered.

It was a mutual confession they would, perhaps, not have made before. But since the dreadful scene at the ruined cottage, they felt that everything could be said, and that nothing need be said. They had set

back the psychological clock. Adam and Eve after the Fall had become Adam and Eve before the Fall. All inhibition and restraint had evaporated from their hearts, and with astonishment they found that they were as little children. In the amazement of the discovery, they sat thinking.

The sky had clouded over, and the world outside was black. The evening breeze rose fitfully, and they could hear the plaintive splash of the waves on the granite shore. The great empty house creaked around them, stone though it was.

Suddenly came the unmistakable pad of something moving without. Not a human being, but an animal. With suddenly trembling heart, McTavish went to the window and looked out. He recoiled from what he saw.

Standing with its front paws on the window-sill and emitting a low growl at him was the ferocious figure of a huge dog. The Great Dane! Somebody must have let it out. Somebody must be on the island!

Whether they wished it or not, they could no longer leave the house!

As the man watched, the growl deepened into a ferocious, low bark, which echoed its threatening rumble through the empty rooms.

As though this warning were enough, the dog took its paws from the sill and made off into the darkness. They could see its eyes moving erratically over the rocks, two points of malevolent green light.

Eleven o'clock. In spite of their apprehension, they

were growing drowsy. McTavish had been stifling yawns intermittently for an hour. Suddenly Mary stood up.

"George," she said, "I don't know what's going to happen, nor if anything's going to happen. And I don't know what we're going to do when it does happen. But I don't see that anything is to be gained by sitting up all night. I'm going to bed, or rather, I'm going to lie down."

It was a magnificent gesture! He looked at the girl with astonishment and admiration. She was right. She looked exhausted. There were dark violet rings round her eyes, and her body drooped. There was no point in denying sleep when nothing was happening to keep them awake.

At the door she paused, a trifle reticently.

"You wouldn't care to come up and sit while I have a nap?" she asked.

"Of course!"

Together they went to the door, and McTavish turned out the light. A vicious growl from somewhere outside the house told them that their move had been noticed. There was no doubt of the charge that had been laid on the dog. They were not to leave the house!

They walked up the broad stairs. At the top, Mary made for the room in which they had seen Olive's toilet articles and in which hung Brooks's coat. Surely she had some sentiment! And would not Brooks and Olive come in during the night and find himself and

Mary in their bedroom? Wasn't that a tremendous tactical advantage to give away at the outset? He said nothing. Saying nothing had become a habit.

Without a glance at the coat, the girl crossed the room, sat on the side of the bed, and took off her shoes. Then she lay at full length on the farther of the two beds, and closed her eyes. A moment later she opened them again.

"George, wake me up if anything begins," she said, closed her eyes once more, and apparently went to sleep.

McTavish settled himself in the easy chair, which he had placed so that he could, at the same time, see the window, the open door, and Mary on the bed. The light was on in the passage and off in the bedroom.

Eleven-thirty and still nothing, except that at intervals he heard the watchdog rattle its collar round the house. Once he thought he heard a puzzling sound like the noise of something being dropped under the foundations of the building. But the building was built on granite, he knew. There could be no cellar, nothing beneath the foundations. He dismissed the noise as coming, in all probability, from the outside door, slammed by the wind.

Twelve o'clock. Twelve-thirty. Mary was fast asleep, her even breath sounding peacefully against the occasional gusts of the lake breeze. McTavish waited, drowsily watching the door.

Suddenly he jumped up, rubbing his eyes. Was he

dreaming? No, he was not dreaming. Mary was coming into the room! She was wearing slacks, and had on what seemed to be a blue blouse. He recognized it as one which he had seen her wear at the cottage. Quite naturally, and without taking any apparent notice of him or of herself on the bed—he could only think of it thus—she sat down on the edge of the other bed, and began to take off her shoes.

Astonished, he rubbed his eyes, and looked at the sleeping Mary, and then again at the waking one. Then, remembering his promise, he walked rapidly over to the sleeping girl and shook her shoulders.

"Wake up, wake up!" he whispered. Sleepily the girl opened her eyes, and looked round the room. Her gaze fell on the other figure, and she gave a great start.

"Why, it's me, George!" she cried in astonishment. "Or am I still asleep?"

He had no time to answer her. Mary-across-the-room was sitting swinging her bare legs, seemingly quite oblivious of the fact that she was being watched by herself and another person! She was facing them and the window, apparently looking straight at them, but not seeing them. The man and the woman sat, gaping in astonishment, speechless. It was McTavish who first thought of a practical test.

"Do you suppose it's an actress?" he whispered to Mary.

The girl shook her head.

"No," she answered. "That's no acting. That's me. But go and try, if you like."

Very gingerly, McTavish walked over the hardwood floor and up to the girl, who was still swinging her legs and looking right through him. Mary, the real Mary, craned forward in intense interest. Surely the maddest event in the history of any human being! A girl sitting on the bed, waiting for her *alter ego* to be pinched by a young man to see if her *alter ego* were real!

McTavish approached slowly. When he reached the figure, a wave of shyness came over him, and he stopped. This was a miracle! It was a real figure sitting before him on the bed, as real as any woman's he had ever seen. He saw the slow rise and fall of the girl's breast as she sat looking through him with great dark eyes. He saw the delicate nostril quiver as he had many times seen Mary's quiver. A delicate fastidious lady sat before him, apparently unconscious of him, looking past him, at her own thoughts, it seemed. He saw a single white hair in the dark, carefully tended tresses, and sighed involuntarily. Pinch this lovely living thing? It was an impertinence! He could not. And yet, it flashed over him, it was absurd to be reticent. This was no living person, it was an image, a simulacrum. He must! He put his hand out, finger and thumb outstretched, and immediately withdrew it abashed, looking shamefacedly across the room at the real Mary, who sat with lines suspiciously like laughter beginning to dimple her face.

Where to pinch? He felt he ought to ask the owner of this . . . this body where it ought to be pinched.

That seemed only just. With unsteady eyes he questioned Mary. The event suddenly assumed the atmosphere of farce.

Mary was regarding him with open amusement.

"The knee, George, the knee," she said, laughing aloud.

Shutting his eyes, he pinched the swinging knee. It felt exactly as any other knee, solid to the touch. It went on swinging exactly as before. Opening his eyes, McTavish pinched again. There was no vestige of change in the expression. Irritated, McTavish grabbed at the swinging knee and held it. It stopped swinging. When he left hold of it, it started again. Still there was no change of expression. The girl did not see him. And yet he knew that this was no actress. It was Mary. And Mary sat on the other side of the room, on the bed!

But did she? For a moment the shadow of a doubt crossed his mind. Perhaps the figure on the bed was the wraith and this was the real Mary. Which was which? For that matter was either of them real? Puzzled, he looked over at Mary on the bed.

"It's all right, George," she answered. "This is really me. I couldn't have come over from the cottage dressed like that, could I now?"

McTavish looked doubtfully from one to the other.

"Come over here and see what happens," said Mary.

Obediently he went and sat on the bed beside her, watching the figure. Suddenly the swinging stopped.

The girl by the door stood up, as though she had just come to a resolution. And so she had!

Quickly her hand went to her waist. A shake of the hips, and the slacks had fallen to the ground. The girl was bending over to step out of them and take them up from the floor.

"Here, you mustn't do that!" There was outrage in the voice McTavish heard beside him. He turned his head away.

"You'll have to look at the real me, George," said Mary. "It's too much like a bedroom farce. I don't care what it is, it's *me.*"

McTavish sat and waited, his head turned towards his friend's wife, while the ghost of his friend's wife undressed herself. There was no noise. That was one remarkable feature of the whole episode. All these actions took place without the vestige of a sound. That was what gave them their uncanny quality, he reflected. One hardly recognizes how much noise the ordinary actions of everyday life make until one sees them without sound, as they used to be seen on the films in the smaller theatres when the music had stopped.

The undressing did not take long. At one stage he heard the interested girl beside him give a gasp, of annoyance or astonishment, he could not tell which. A second or so afterwards:

"It's all right, George. She's ready for observation."

He turned his head. The Silent Girl was lying on

the bed. She had on the double chiffon pyjamas!

Mary was watching him.

"She got them from under the pillow," she said. "She just put her hand out, and they were there!"

She spoke, as they were both speaking now, in her normal voice.

"What's going to happen?" asked McTavish. "And what's the point of it all? Surely Olive doesn't think that she can scare us any more by this kind of thing."

Mary shook her head doubtfully.

"I wouldn't want to say what Olive would do," she said. "But I have a suspicion that it is all going to have a point."

The girl they were watching still took no notice of them or their conversation. She lay on the bed, looking at the ceiling. McTavish noticed that her chest was heaving slightly, as though she were under some excitement. She seemed to be listening for somebody, or something. Her feet were hanging over the edge of the bed.

"If you think it's going to annoy you, let's go," said McTavish.

"I'm not going to run away from Olive's parlour games," said Mary, a trace of contempt in her voice.

As a matter of fact, had she known it, that was exactly what she was going to do!

Suddenly, the Silent Girl sat up, inclined her head as though hearing somebody, sprang to her feet, and went towards the door. They could see her lips move.

Then, quite quickly, round the corner of the door, noiselessly, appeared . . . George McTavish!

A gasp of speechless astonishment went up from the man and the girl. This was too much. They *must* be dreaming! But no! It was George, right enough. They were both there, George, and his friend's wife! McTavish's heart sank for a moment. He gazed with intense interest at the second figure, this simulacrum of himself.

The newcomer was dressed in white trousers, and a shirt. He had on white canvas shoes. In his hand he held a cellophane-covered packet of cigarettes. His bearing was sheepish and uncomfortable, dismayed, even. He looked like a schoolboy caught stealing the doughnuts; like a dog found on the drawing-room sofa!

The sight of that forlorn, hesitant figure was too much for McTavish's frayed nerves. Forgotten was the fact that he was seeing, by some scientific miracle, a duplicate of himself, a Doppelgänger, moving and talking; forgotten the danger to life or reason that might lurk in this incredible display of some terrific, shattering power of Mind, or Mind-in-Matter. All he saw was McTavish . . . that pathetic, Don Quixote of a figure, that stumbling Lothario, that . . . amorously adolescent journalist.

"I never looked like that!" The words burst from his lips. In senseless anger he started from the bed towards the figure, as though to do it some uncouth violence.

But Mary prevented him, holding him by the sleeve.

"Wait a while," she said.

Grumbling, muttering, the man obeyed her, and sat down again.

They saw the man by the door almost push the cigarettes at the girl facing him, and make as though to escape, by whatever means. He was not allowed to escape. The girl's restraining arms were thrown impulsively round him. They saw her take him by the hand and sit him on the bed.

"Pretty cheap business," McTavish heard the girl mutter. There was distaste in her voice.

McTavish's face suddenly grew red. He stood up again. He grasped Mary's arm, as though to force her from the room.

"That's enough," he said. "It's . . . it's indecent."

Mary turned to look at him. Once more there was a hint of amusement in her eyes.

"Yes, George," she smiled. "Isn't it? But we'll not go yet."

Perforce, McTavish sat down again.

The figures began to talk. They could see the look of dismay deepen on the man's face as he sat and glanced fleetingly first at the glamorous shape within his grasp, then at the door. The silk-pyjamaed figure drew closer, the man turned away. She was expostulating, pleading. They could see his fingers nervously grasping and letting go the coverlet. On the other bed, across the room, McTavish sat, swinging his legs viciously, biting his lips. Next to him sat Mary, now

looking on at the whole performance with an interest of almost technical benevolence!

The man's figure they were watching assumed an absurdly pained expression.

"He looks grieved, so to speak," said Mary. "It was too bad of me. I really oughtn't to have done it. . . . It didn't do you any harm, though," she added reflectively.

Across the room, they saw the man grow gradually more uncomfortable, more ludicrously fidgety. The woman was becoming impatient. Suddenly they saw her throw her arms once more round him, at which he stood up, tore himself away and rushed out of the room.

McTavish heaved a great sigh of relief, and flung himself up as though to go. Absurdly like his semblance, Mary thought.

"That's finished," said Mary. "End of Act One." She laughed aloud. "I wish I had a drink to go on with," she added, almost brightly.

"But you're not going to watch any more?" McTavish's voice was horrified. He jumped up and looked at her in amazement.

"I certainly am. Olive or no Olive, I haven't enjoyed anything so much for a long time. You *did* it, didn't you? And so did I! You can't alter it by looking at it, can you?"

"I don't believe I acted like that. And even if I did, I don't like to watch it."

He lowered his voice, and turned his head away.

A gust of wind howled round the house. Or was it the dog outside?

The girl looked at him curiously.

"Well", she said, "it seems to me that all this has something behind it. I want to find out what it is. Personally, since that scene by the ruined cottage, I feel I can be quite objective towards it. What we have just seen doesn't belong to me, nor to you either."

"Well. . . ." he began, ineffectively.

She cut him short, pointing across the room.

The girl's figure, on the other bed was stirring! It sat up, listened, and then lay down again. Mary and McTavish went on with their conversation like any two casual playgoers between the acts, as though no figure were there.

"I have a notion", went on Mary, "that Olive is trying to make me feel I have hopelessly disgraced myself. 'See what a nasty little person you are; you surely haven't the face to go after your husband now!' You see the point? She always was a little *elementary*, you know, in spite of her brains."

McTavish was doubtful. He felt uneasily that the girl was under-estimating her opponent. But he held his peace.

"In any case," the girl continued, "I'm going to stay to the end. I'll be quite all right, if you want to go downstairs and wait for . . ."

This time it was McTavish who interrupted her. For the girl over on the other bed suddenly started

up again. She jumped to her feet and walked a few steps. From nowhere a small bottle of scent appeared in her left hand. With the first finger of her right hand, she touched the top of the open bottle, dabbed the lobes of each ear, went back to the bed again, and lay down.

"You'd better go quickly, George, if you want to," said Mary grimly.

McTavish went.

How long he sat downstairs waiting in the hall, he never knew. It could not, he decided afterwards, have been for more than ten minutes, though the thoughts of many lifetimes seemed to run through his brain. There was no sound from the room above, except that once he thought he heard Mary drum her foot on the floor.

The fitful wind had died down, the lake was suddenly calm. The house was wrapped in stillness. The man sat, his head between his hands, in confused shame. Perhaps he slept a moment or so. He never knew. Should he have left Mary upstairs alone? It was an uneasy question. He sat and pondered it. It was then that he thinks he may have dozed for a few minutes. . . .

Suddenly, out of the air, a disconcerting, a terrifying thought struck the half-sleeping man. This had been a ruse to get him out of the way while some unspeakable thing was being done to the girl in the bedroom. Sweat burst out over his body. Once more he had betrayed his friend and his friend's wife. Fool,

fool that he was again! He stood up and rushed across the floor. He must get her out of there—he would drag her away! Already his foot was on the lowest step. What a fool he had been!

Even as he ran, he thought he heard the sound of a woman's voice in distress. He reached the foot of the stairs. Startlingly, a cry of unutterable horror curdled the stillness of the house. Mary! The cry was repeated. There was the sound of running footsteps. The bedroom door slammed, shaking the stairs with the shock of its vibration.

"Oh! Oh! Stop, you beasts!" he heard her cry in a shriek of terrified revulsion.

The girl came running out, her eyes wild and glassy, terror in her looks, horrified sobs shaking her. She ran right into McTavish in the passage. Recoiling for a moment to recover her balance, she saw who it was. Her cries broke out afresh.

"Go away, you beast!" she shouted in ungovernable abhorrence. "Go away, quick, I say!"

For a moment McTavish stood in incredulous astonishment. It was a moment too long. Turning on him a look of unutterable loathing, the girl struck him in the face with the palm of her hand, and pushed past him down the stairs to the front door, the man following her. Desperately she fumbled at the latch.

The man was too quick for her. Thrusting her aside, he planted himself with his shoulders square against the massive door, facing her.

"Mary, Mary," he cried. "You can't go out! The Great Dane!"

He might as well have expostulated with the wind. Desperately the girl shook the door as he stood with his back to it.

"Let me out, let me out of this place, you!" she cried.

She pounded on the wood with her bare hands, she shook the latch like a wild animal. Only she neither touched nor looked at McTavish. Once when McTavish caught sight of her eyes he saw in them a look of such withering detestation that his own eyes fell. But he still stood against the door. Then quickly, before he had realized what had happened, she had darted away and was through the swinging door leading to the kitchen. The back door! He had not thought of that. Rapidly following her he reached the kitchen soon enough to see the door slam back against the table. Mary had already gone. He could spy her white dress rapidly moving over the grass to the beach.

Without thinking what he was doing, McTavish ran out after her. He must at all costs protect her from the great dog! It was too late! A terrifying growl burst from the shadows. A great dark shape leapt at the girl's throat. McTavish shut his eyes. This must surely be the end of everything! Blindly he ran on.

As he ran, he thought he heard her shout. He opened his eyes.

It was unbelievable, but it was true!

She was standing talking in gasps to the dog, which was cowering away from her, its tail between its legs. She was apparently reproving it. Her fear had apparently left her. She was catching desperately for breath.

"It's Olive's Cæsar," Mary gasped. "I've known him since he was a pup! I haven't seen him for years. Why didn't I think of it? I think I'll sit down."

She hung her head as she gasped.

She sat down, MacTavish at her side. Little by little her breathing became easier. Soon it was nearly normal. The girl was healthy. Despite his anxiety to know what had happened, McTavish left her to recover without questioning. At least she was safe. At least so far, this incredible night had left them unharmed!

He heard a loud panting noise in the dark behind them. Turning round he saw the dog Cæsar standing in the shadow, pumping his great tail up and down.

Cæsar was licking her ear!

"What did you do to him," he asked tentatively, almost humbly.

"When he jumped at me I recognized him, and told him to get down. Then I scolded him!"

As she spoke, recollection seemed to come again. Danger or no danger, this was the man whom five minutes ago she had struck in the face and reviled. Shyness rose momentarily between them.

"I'll tell you about it . . . later," she stammered. "It was horrible, horrible."

For a few seconds she hid her face in her hands.

"When Cæsar came at me, it seemed to jerk me to myself."

She sat and looked over the dark water. Dimly in the distance, they could see the island where their guide had eaten his meal. Their guide! Could it have been only twelve hours ago?

She turned and looked at him.

"Olive's shot her last bolt," she said quietly.

Still McTavish asked no question.

Still they sat by the shore. The night was warm. By his watch McTavish saw that it was a little later than one o'clock.

After a while she began to talk. She told the tale quite simply. It seemed that after the real McTavish had left the bedroom, the pseudo-McTavish had come in, carrying a cup of coffee, as might have been expected. At his entrance there had seemed to be a subtle change in the atmosphere. It gradually became more and more unpleasant until it was almost unbearable. The figures by the door had, by degrees, developed into indescribably disgusting caricatures of herself and McTavish.

"It was us, George, but it wasn't us. I looked like some filthy old beldame out of . . . of a brothel, and yet it was me. You were like a repulsive old roué, smacking his lips and simpering. And yet, really George, it was exactly you. I don't know how she did it. It was just like a clever but horribly cruel cartoon, done on the movies, and . . . you saw! . . . looking

solid, with colours and everything. Even the colours were tortured in some horrible way to make us look like—oh, perfectly disgusting people. I stood it as long as I could. But finally. . . ."

The girl stopped her story. McTavish said nothing, but looked out over the water, silently pitying her.

"Finally. . . ." the girl began again. "Finally I, that is, the figure representing me, made such an obscenely revolting gesture, that I couldn't stand it. My nerves gave way all at once. I had to get out. Of course, I can see now that that was exactly what Olive had been planning. So I ran from the room. And, do you know, George, the figure representing you was standing by the door, and I walked straight through it."

Once more she was silent for a while.

"You can see her plan now. She shows that loathsome . . . show . . . to Reggie. No man could stand his wife another moment after seeing her like that. It was too much like me." She paused. "Especially", she went on, "when there was some foundation for the whole thing, and when Reggie knew that. And especially when the other person looked . . . as you looked. No decent woman would . . . would go in the same room with him."

"After she had exhibited us to Reggie, it was my turn to see the show. She knew I would stay to the end, or, at least for a good long time. It may have gone on after I left, for all I know. It may still be going on."

She glanced up at the house. Everything was dark, save the light in the hall.

"She showed it to me", the girl continued, "so that I might know what Reggie had seen, and so that I would run away. She thought I would run away for good. But suddenly, when Cæsar jumped at me and I knew it was Cæsar, I knew she hadn't any real brains. A woman who forgets that a dog remembers people, hasn't any brains. I expect she has trained the dog to jump but not to hurt people. Or she may have been intending him to maul me. I don't know."

She ceased talking. McTavish looked at her curiously.

"What are you going to do now, then?" he asked.

"I'm going after my husband. Men are like animals."

She stopped speaking. Prompted by some impulse or other McTavish glanced up at the house. Gently plucking the girl by the arm, he pointed over to the building.

"There's somebody moving about," he said.

The light in the hall was on. They could hear two voices, a man's and a woman's.

Mary rose and stretched herself.

"We might as well get it over," she said.

They walked up to the house.

Chapter 13

Olive!

Opening the front door, they walked into the hall. There was nobody visible, but they heard the same voices, issuing, they could now hear, from the living-room. They went to the door. The voices stopped. McTavish laid his hand upon the handle and paused for a moment, turning round to Mary. Suddenly he turned the handle and walked in.

Olive and Brooks were sitting upon the two large upholstered chairs over by the wall. They were smoking. Olive looked up.

"Hello, George," she said.

He paused to look at the woman who had been the cause of the strange and disturbing happenings of the last few weeks. He had known her during the period of her engagement to Brooks. That was two years ago. Since that time, the Bright Young Thing had grown into an incredibly finished, incredibly surefooted, incredibly grown-up person. There was a look of power about her that he did not like—physical and mental power. He was reminded of Doctor Raiche's advice

to her, Mary's father, who had examined her when she went to hunt in the Himalayas. "Don't be too hard on the tigers," he had said. She had the hard efficiency of the tiger herself. From a woman-in-society she had changed to a woman-of-the-world. She had always been beautiful. Now she was superb. She had always been competent. Now she was masterly. She had always been a trifle condescending. Now she was gracious. Even McTavish's inexperienced eye was able to appreciate the extreme perfection of detail, from the beautifully done hair and the quietly manicured nails, to the simple-looking but expensive frock and the custom-made shoes. "It's money does it, every time," thought McTavish. "Money and adventure. Did he who made the lamb make thee?"

As he looked at her, she turned her bold eyes upon him. He hastily turned his head away. She was speaking to him in a deep voice, that sounded as though it might have rung through Tibetan passes.

"Hello, George. It's quite a while since I saw you. Hello, Mary!"

She waved them to a seat with a gesture of magnificence.

"Have a cigarette?" she said, indicating a silver box on the arm of her chair.

They sat down.

"This", thought McTavish, "is going to be terrible."

Mary had been right, he admitted ruefully. This was no situation for a man to handle by himself. He

wondered what Mary was going to do about it. Would she appeal to her husband, who sat apparently regarding with great care the curling smoke of his cigarette? Or would she plead with Olive, the inscrutable beauty sitting opposite her, looking as though she were not looking at anything in particular? No word was spoken for a while. McTavish watched the two women facing each other—Mary dark, French, suddenly vivacious-looking (how had she managed it?), intuitive; Olive, slightly contemptuous, Nordic, dazzlingly fair, with that animal power concealed beneath her grace. He remembered that at school, and after, Mary had shocked the elders, but had in reality always been singularly simple in her tastes and habits; Olive had envied her friend's reputation for irregularity, and had never been able to achieve it herself.

"The blonde skin and the dark skin, I suppose," he thought. "Like boys at school. People never will believe that a dark boy has washed his neck, and a fair boy never has to. . . . Not Angles," he reflected further, "but Angels. . . ."

He looked over at Brooks's flaxen, curly head. But Brooks still sat immovable and did not meet his eye.

The cigarettes were burned a third down. Still no word was spoken. Perhaps he ought to say something. Perhaps Mary had not quite bargained for this.

He looked over at her. Her expression surprised him. She was regarding Olive with a singularly

passionless expression, as though the other woman were some strange, lowly form of life, that she could not decide just how to destroy. He was reminded of Bellini's picture of St. Michael and the dragon. St. Michael is slowly killing the great snake. He shows no vestige of emotion, but acts like a surgeon mildly interested in the technicalities of the slaughter. In spite of himself McTavish shivered slightly. To his surprise, he found himself feeling for a moment rather sorry for Olive. And yet that was of course absurd, he reassured himself as he looked at the confident figure in the arm-chair.

Once more, he decided that this was no business for him!

It was Mary who first spoke.

"You might as well give it up," she said, turning to Olive.

A grudging look of admiration flitted over the other woman's face.

"You're straight to the point," that low voice answered. "I must concede you that." She smiled round the room with proprietory arrogance. Possession, thought McTavish, is here nine points of the law!

Mary looked at her like St. Michael looking at the dragon, carefully, assessingly, as though she were deliberating where to strike with the least effort and the greatest effect. McTavish saw Olive return the gaze with a careless swaggering lift of her long, fair eyelashes.

"Do you really want me to tell Reggie about you

in front of us all, or are you going to send him back without any unpleasantness?"

Once more a reluctant gleam of appreciation momentarily lit Olive's face. It was succeeded by a slightly puzzled flicker, which turned to a brilliant smile. Olive said nothing.

McTavish saw that Brooks had been growing uneasy.

"Don't you think", said the scientist, looking from one woman to the other, "that I might have something to say about it? Or has it never occurred to either of you?" It was the first time he had spoken.

It was Mary who answered.

"You had better keep out of this, Reggie," she said. "This is women's work."

McTavish pushed his chair a trifle away from the two women, and towards Brooks.

"My God, yes, it is!" he thought. Surprisingly to himself, he heaved a sigh. Still more surprisingly, he saw the gaze of both women turn upon him for a moment almost with a tinge of compassion, as though in pity of the non-combatant whom necessity has manhandled.

Then, very sweetly, Mary went on.

"The trouble with you, Olive," she said very deliberately, "is that you have no brains."

Was it a flush of anger on Olive's cheek, resting for a moment on those patrician features and then gone? At any rate, it was with a sweetly disarming smile that the answer came.

"That may be so, my dear. But what *about* Reggie? You're surely wandering from the point. Perhaps it has never occurred to *you* that he might prefer to stay with me?" The deep, cool voice allowed itself the slightest edge of accentuation, as though regrettably descending to the level of personalities.

Mary inclined her head almost imperceptibly, as one admitting a point. Then, almost indifferently:

"He won't when he hears about you. And he's interested enough to want to hear."

She turned slightly towards her husband, as though for confirmation. Brooks drummed nervously with his fingers on the arm of his chair. He said nothing. With the casual expression of one who has overcome a routine obstacle, Mary turned again to Olive.

"You don't imagine I don't realize that he finds a beautiful woman like you attractive, do you? Of course he does. He wouldn't be a man if he didn't. You've got everything that can attract a man. Wealth, beauty . . . why, those legs alone! . . ." Her eyes flickered for an instant over Olive's silk stockings.

McTavish noticed Olive offer an almost imperceptible gesture of pulling down her skirt and check herself instantaneously. "This isn't like Mary," he thought. "But I suppose it's fair enough. That skirt was perhaps a trifle. . . ."

He saw that Mary was settling down in her chair. The battle had begun in earnest!

"But", she was going on, "you don't really think.

So life hits back at you where you don't expect it. It's going to hit you now."

McTavish saw Olive glance at her handbag, which had fallen on the floor from the arm of the chair. He sprang up and gave it to her.

"You needn't have done that, George," said Mary. "She keeps her little pistol in it."

"Thank you, George," said Olive, ignoring Mary's interruption. "Yes!" she turned to Mary. "There's a pistol in the bag. I shot a mad woman with it out in India—I'll have to tell you about it some time," she added brightly.

This was a little grim, McTavish thought. He glanced covertly at Olive. He was interrupted by Brooks. There was an edge to Brooks's voice.

"Mary," he said, "I hate to intrude on this, what was it?—yes, woman's work, but you ought to get this straight. You don't know yet how I came here, and you ought to hear. George and I had been pretty excited, as you probably know, and we said a good many things to each other that we wouldn't have said in cold blood. Among other things he told me what he thinks of me, as an Englishman and a scientist. I know perfectly well that he doesn't believe now that he thinks it at all. But the point is that he said it, and it's what a good many Canadians think, and other people as well. It was *vox populi*. You have thought it in the past, yourself!"

Mary nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I have," she said.

"Then", Brooks resumed, "along came Olive. Olive was born in Canada, but she isn't a Canadian —a typical one, that is—and she's a scientist. So I came along with her. It seems to me that we have to settle this thing quite apart from any of our vanities."

He looked at Mary, who met his gaze without flinching. There was silence for some seconds.

Suddenly, to McTavish's astonishment, Mary threw out her hands in a little gesture of defeat, looked over at McTavish like a wife collecting her husband after a party, and made to stand up.

So Olive had won after all! Or rather, Brooks had won, by this ultra-sober statement of fact. Mary's confidence had been a bluff. She had not been able to go through with it!

He felt astonished that the whole thing had ended so lamely.

Obediently, McTavish stood up. His hand was on the handle of the door. He had lost no time reaching it! On the whole, he felt greatly relieved.

Had Brooks said no more, there is little doubt that Mary and McTavish would there and then have left the room together. Olive would have gone off with Brooks to some foreign climate, and Mary would have obtained her divorce. Mary would have been miserable for a few months. And Brooks?

Brooks shudders to think of it!

But Brooks did not leave the situation alone. There must, as McTavish told him afterwards, have been some wish to justify himself before Mary, and

some pity for Olive. And in Mary there must have been the thought that she could not let Brooks bring this on himself. At any rate, while Mary was in the act of rising, and was mechanically going through the motion of putting on a glove that wasn't there,

"And this about Olive not having any brains is absurd," said Brooks.

Mechanically, Mary sat down again. Mechanically, McTavish returned to his chair and did the same.

The struggle was reopened!

Brooks's voice rose a trifle. "It's absurd," he repeated. "Olive can't very well defend herself, and say: 'Oh yes, I have brains, and you know it.' She can't do that. But you know as well as I do that she took a brilliant degree at college and that she got to the top committees in all sorts of things in Canada by sheer personality. You can't do that without brains. And you know perfectly well that she's been working in her own way all the summer for what has happened tonight, and that she's done it all with amazing cleverness. Hardly anyone else in the world could have done it. It's astonishing, I tell you, what she has done. It's an absolutely new application of the principle of cerebral action patterns. It's . . ."

The man's voice warmed with enthusiasm. McTavish's heart sank. The end of it all was going to be a lecture by Brooks! There was a certain bathos about that! Mary's eye took on an affectionate gleam. Only Olive looked weary for a moment, and then attempted a becoming modesty.

But suddenly Brooks stopped, as though remembering something.

"Yes," he went on, speaking to the room at large, "we've been calling her a dangerous woman all the summer, and she has put the fear of God into us, well enough. I admit I was angry with her and frightened of her. But she was quite justified in making trouble between Mary and me, if we're honest about it. After all, if it hadn't been for Mary Olive and I would have been married."

Both Mary and McTavish started forward in their chairs to speak. Both of them restrained themselves.

"We've got to be rational human beings," Brooks continued. "If George hadn't got angry and told me all those things—and he was quite right to tell me—I would never have come with Olive. But she talks my own language, and so I came," he concluded, rather lamely.

McTavish looked at Olive, who, by an extraordinary feat, was managing not to look self-conscious. There she sat in the long chair, with the inimitable ease of the physically fit, the power of her shapely limbs concealed by their grace; her fair skin was touched by the just-becoming shade of tan, her exquisitely dressed hair glistened in the light, her whole demeanour showed that trace of insolence which comes from physical superiority and the sense of peril faced and half-contemptuously overcome.

"Good heavens," he almost gasped aloud, "the woman is beautiful! I can't say that I blame Brooks

altogether. It's a pity a man can't have two wives. I wonder what Mary is going to say to that!"

But after her first near-defeat, Mary had apparently recovered the situation completely. She had resumed her first attitude, and was eyeing Olive once again with the careful, emotionless scrutiny of one who wonders just how to finish the business with the maximum of expedition. The Lord, one felt, had delivered Olive into her hands. How, McTavish could not guess. But she was speaking.

"Reggie", she was saying, "you're wrong. You know you're wrong. Your manner betrays you, apart from the fact that you called us back to tell us all this. 'Qui s'excuse, s'accuse.' You know perfectly well that it isn't Olive's brains you are interested in."

Once again her glance stayed for a fraction of a second on the long silk stockings resting so gracefully on the other chair.

"If anything, Olive's brains rather dismay you."

For the first time her husband stirred uneasily.

"Such as they are," she added. "But, as I said, they aren't real. They're shoddy. She has method and memory, but not brains. In spite of her looks, she is a highbrow. That's why she was so unpopular with everybody, and that's why you were so relieved when she broke off the engagement. You did break it off, didn't you, my dear?" she asked sweetly.

A slow flush spread over Olive's face and was gone. The engagement had been broken because Olive

had lied concerning her personal chastity! This everybody in the room knew! Once more Olive's face took on that expression of slightly contemptuous radiance.

Mary went on: "She is a highbrow because her interest in life is not real, but second-hand. It's derivative. She's interested in herself. Why did she bother with a degree at college, and go onto committees? She knows, and she could tell you if she were honest. It was because she wasn't popular with girls, and she wasn't popular with boys. I went to school with her, and I know."

A momentary eagerness appeared on Olive's face, as though she had discerned a vulnerable point in the attack. She opened her mouth to speak. But she was anticipated by Mary, who raised her hand.

"I know," Mary put in. "You need not talk about logic. You were always unpopular because you were a highbrow, and you were a highbrow because you were only interested in yourself. And that's why you were unpopular."

She turned again to Brooks.

"Do you suppose she would have done all this hocus-pocus on the island, or anywhere else, if her vanity had not been hurt when you married me? And do you suppose she would ever have broken off that engagement if her vanity had not been hurt? You know as well as I do that you were becoming, let us say, a little bored with the beautiful Miss Paynter and her old-maidish science!"

"Mary! Hush! There are limits." The interjection came from McTavish.

She turned sharply on him.

"Are there limits to telling the truth? Are there limits to setting a vicious dog on two people, or to making an obscene caricature of a woman for her husband to see? Are there limits to causing a wife to commit adultery with her husband's best friend when she has half an hour's opportunity, like some cheap post-war novelist, and then showing a picture of it?"

She turned back to Olive, who, by some superhuman effort, still preserved the look of a benevolent hostess listening to her guests.

"My God!" thought McTavish. "That is magnificent. Mary must surely have got under her skin that time."

As he looked at Olive, a wisp of uneasiness crept into his mind. That well-drilled smile—it was unnatural. Had she something in reserve? He wished she would answer.

Unheedingly, Mary went on:

"I said old-maidish science," she said, "when George interrupted me, and that's what I mean. Your science never came to grips with things. Like yourself, it was afraid of reality. It was always routine. You obeyed the rules and learned what you call facts, but you never looked beyond them."

She looked round the room. Brooks interposed. There was heat in his voice.

"What do you know about Olive's science?" he

asked. "And what is the point of this tirade?"

"I know about Olive's science because I have heard you say it many times." The man bowed his head slightly. "But I must admit I never knew what you meant until lately. Olive gets her science from books, not life. I suddenly knew it for myself when she set a dog I knew at me."

Olive sat up with startled interest and tried to catch Brooks's eye, but without success. She set her mouth into a thin line.

"I'm sure she *has* something up her sleeve," thought McTavish, with growing apprehension. "I wonder what it is." He watched her carefully, and noticed her give a tiny shove with her foot to her chair, pushing it backwards.

"I don't like the look of her," he thought. "She's a damn sight too acquiescent." His alarm was growing.

"And", Mary was going on, "I know it because it never occurred to Olive that her infernal machine would work the opposite way from her plans."

The other three sat up and looked at her. At last Olive was undisguisedly interested. What was coming? They did not know, but McTavish guessed.

"It worked on George's mind and my mind so that we lost control of ourselves that night when we were alone. It worked on us, when my husband was away, so that we thought we heard the most disgusting reproaches hurled at us. She may have intended this. I don't know."

Brooks was leaning forward in his chair, as though he could hardly wait for the next word. Olive lay back, her lips tight, as though coming to a resolution. She had now pushed her chair back into the corner of the room until she was away from the other three, who confronted her as a group.

"But", Mary went on, "I'm quite sure she didn't intend it to clear up all emotion and all tension between George and myself. But that's what it did. So that the two of us were able to work together with no feeling of sex or memory of what had happened, just like two children. And so we came straight here, which we could never have done without the co-operation of your apparatus. So when I saw that filthy caricature of us, and knew Reggie had seen it, it only shocked me for a moment. There were no hidden memories, or sore spots for it to touch. You had psycho-analysed them all away with your machine. I could behave quite rationally about it. We both could."

Her voice took on a touch of scorn it had not before held.

"The fact is, Olive, you had not thought out just what effect your apparatus would have. So Nature hit back at you, as Reggie says, though I prefer to call it Life. You can't catch life by reading books or hiding behind rules, however much you try."

Once more she looked around her. Nobody said a word.

"Of course you have courage," she went on. "Of

course you have power. Of course you are ruthless . . . in the matter of your own vanity. Otherwise, you couldn't have done all this. You are a dangerous woman, and you would stop at nothing. But, like most other women, you aren't interested in science. That's why you have made yourself into a bore, as Reggie will admit if he is honest with himself."

Brooks pulled himself together with a supreme effort. His gaze was directed midway between the two women.

"But Mary," he said soberly, "even to have done as much as Olive did is extraordinary. It's a scientific achievement of the first order. There's nobody else in the world that could have done it—except one fellow in Germany, conceivably," he added thoughtfully.

Again Mary looked her opponent up and down, as though deliberating where the final thrust should go. Then, quite quietly, and with no trace of malice in her voice:

"That's the whole point of it all," she said. "Did you make that machine, Olive, or did you buy it from somebody who deals with that Berlin Electrical Company?"

There was no answer. Was Olive going to capitulate after all?

Smiling softly to herself, Mary turned to her husband.

"You see," she said, "she doesn't talk the same language as you, after all."

The four sat silently. Finally with a collecting glance at McTavish and Brooks, Mary rose.

"I think that's all," she said, and turned to go.

Once more, McTavish half-rose in his seat. It seemed to him that Brooks had done the same. They were interrupted by Olive's deep voice.

"Oh no, if you will pardon me, it isn't all," she said. "In fact, it's just beginning. Won't you sit down?" She had herself under superb control.

With the most gracious gesture of her head, she motioned them back to their seats.

"I promised to tell you about that Indian woman," she said. Her voice was low, like the sound of silk on silk. "There's not much to say, really."

They settled down to listen, wondering why the story now. Mary visibly registered impatience and glanced at the door.

"A leopard had carried off her twin babies. She went crazy and ran out into the jungle. Just by accident she came across my party. For one reason or another, she thought I was the leopard."

McTavish shuddered and turned away his head.

"So I had to shoot her. Her right eye . . . but I will spare you the details." The silken voice was silent for a moment. McTavish looked at her. What was that in her hand? With a start, he saw it was a revolver. She was in the corner of the room, facing them all, in such a position that any of them who moved could be instantly covered. Simultaneously the others had seen it.

So that was it! She had heard them out, had listened to them like a cat playing with a mouse, and then—out came the revolver!

"Words can never hurt you," thought McTavish. "Sticks and stones may break your bones!" Insults! She could afford to sit and smile and be insulted! They were with this woman five miles from anywhere, and she had the revolver pointed at them. Two twists of those shapely fingers, three perhaps, and tomorrow she would be in South America, next month in China or Tibet or Peru. Fear had gone. Fear had been flogged to death. He watched her fascinated. She had shot the madwoman. She was going to shoot them!

She was speaking again!

"I thought the story might interest you," she was saying, easily. "And, while I am speaking, there are one or two other things I should like to tell Mary."

She held the revolver significantly on the arm of her chair.

"Of course," she went on pleasantly, "I could quite easily shoot you, Mary, but that wouldn't do me much good. It's not good enough." She spoke judicially, as though assessing the situation. Then it was apparently not to be shooting! McTavish's heart was chilled. He saw Brooks's face suddenly harden.

"Believe me, I have made arrangements to get away over the border and down—oh, a long way from here!—before I could run into trouble. But the fact is, that wouldn't help much. Or . . ." she turned

a cruel, critical look up and down the shrinking figure of the other girl, "instead of killing you, I *think*—I *think*—I could disfigure you. It would be taking a chance, of course, but you can't do anything in this world without taking chances, can you? Say, a bullet sideways in one of those cheeks, and another in the knee. When I think of that woman I had to shoot, and her eye. . . . You wouldn't have liked it."

Like the others, Mary was sitting very white and still. McTavish noticed her eyes stray for a moment to her husband. Still the woman with the revolver eyed her up and down, with watchful contempt. Seizing the moment, Brooks made a movement towards Olive.

Almost lazily, and with an amazing and grim accuracy, Olive had shifted the revolver a fraction of an inch, so that he moved towards it.

"Please don't, Reggie. You'll only get hurt," said Olive's smooth voice.

His face still grim, Brooks subsided into his chair. Olive turned almost imperceptibly to Mary.

"Did you really imagine you could come here and talk me out of what I want? You little fool!"

She looked at the other woman with contempt now undisguised. Suddenly the jungle flashed from her eyes.

"*You little fool!*" she repeated savagely. The words tore like claws on warm flesh. "*You've brought it on yourself. . . .*"

Just as suddenly the mask of politeness descended

again. She smiled at her enemy. The jungle had come and had passed!

"You see," she continued in the same even tones as before, "you have said things to me that can't be said by one woman to another. I must admit that many of them were true. That only makes it all the worse."

"I know perfectly well that men don't run after me as they do after you, although I have a better body." She eyed Mary with distaste.

"I know perfectly well that I have not been successful as a woman. That is why I have taken to men's pursuits. I'm not as good a scientist as Reggie. That is because, in many ways, he thinks like a woman. It's true of most scientists of his type. He has a touch of genius. I lay no pretensions to genius. Of course, I could make him the best-known scientist in the world, with such brains as I have and my money. But that's not what I want him for—to be a kind of super-manager to him."

She was glancing at him, to see whether her words were taking effect.

"I didn't make that machine. Why should I? I bought it from that poor devil in Germany. But I did think up what to do with it. I happened to hear about it in Berlin, and I went and saw it. He kept it under the bed in the garret where he lived. He had patched it together on a small scale from biscuit tins and an old wireless set, together with two special tubes. I told him he could have all the money

he wanted to make a proper one. His eyes shone like glass beads. When he had finished, I went again. It was remarkable. But I had seen things out in the East. Seen things that would make your eyes pop out of your head! Those people have been doing things for centuries that we have hardly begun to dream about. *They can smash a man, smash him, I tell you!*"

Her voice rose a trifle to a note of restrained exultation, as though she was approaching a climax. Grimly she kept her eye on them, her hand still on the revolver.

"Or", she added deliberately, and with a certain hard relish, "*a woman either*! And I saw that the poor devil's machine could do, by the method of Western science, what these Tibetans have been doing by fasting and other nonsense. So I commissioned one about six times larger still. He couldn't believe it, but he did it, together with certain accessories that I haven't told anybody about."

She paused a moment, as though bidding each of them a melancholy good-bye. She had completely recovered her pose of urbanity. "It was", as McTavish later put it, "exactly like a semi-benevolent surgeon seeing a patient wheeled out of a hospital room for an operation he knew was going to be fatal."

They sat helplessly waiting her pleasure.

"The poor fellow died soon after," Olive went on. "Under-nutrition, I think. His luck came too late.

I attended his funeral. I was the only one there. They gave him a good funeral—on my money. So I packed up the machine and smuggled it out of Germany. I can't tell you about all that. In fact, I don't know why I am telling you any of it."

They sat still, wondering, indeed, why Olive had suddenly become anecdotal. Mary sat huddled in her chair, white and tense, whiter than she had yet been. Why didn't Olive shoot, or do whatever she was going to?

McTavish looked at the magnificent figure half-lying on the low chair, bare to her shoulders in the summer dress, a slight quiver of the trigger finger sending ripples of muscle from time to time along that splendid arm. He laughed audibly.

The woman looked at him interrogatively.

"Yes, George?" she said.

"I was thinking you had something up your sleeve," answered McTavish. "But I see your arm is as well-turned as ever."

Why he said it, he never knew. But it probably saved their lives.

"Thank you, George." She allowed her eye to turn downwards for a moment. Something very much like a blush of pleasure spread over her face. In that instant McTavish noticed Brooks grow tense, as though ready to spring.

"I have something up my sleeve, all right," she said intently, "and I'm going to pull it out now. Good-bye!"

Suddenly with both feet she pushed her chair back with all her force. Quickly throwing up her left arm, she seized a switch on the wall. A blinding flash of pain shot over McTavish.

His head! His head! His HEAD!

The world spun round and round him like the stars from a rocket. The room? Where was the room? It was at the centre of the world, and the world was spinning, twisting, writhing over him and under him! Stars shot across and across his eyes. His head! His head! He heard a woman's shriek, and the crash of some great form across him. Stars! Purple stars, red stars, like the shower from a blacksmith's anvil. He was a star! They battered him, they shot him through with that searing pain. Pain was yellow! No it was red! He shrieked aloud.

"Take them away, take them away! Take those stars away, the red ones!"

He lost consciousness. . . .

When he came to himself, he was lying on the floor. Brooks was bending over him. It was daylight.

"Don't talk," said Brooks. "You are all right."

McTavish struggled to ask a question. He was anticipated.

"Mary's all right, too," said Brooks.

McTavish went to sleep.

Chapter 14

Brooks Tells His Story

Back again on Nelson Island! Mary was seated on one side of the verandah, McTavish on the other. Both had their heads swathed in bandages. Between them hovered Brooks, performing the joint functions of solicitous husband, grateful friend and hospital nurse. It was evening. According to agreement, the guide had called at Rainbow Island at ten o'clock the next day and had taken them straight home. They had reached Willow Point at about two o'clock in the afternoon, and had slept four or five hours. McTavish had refused to stay longer in bed, had stumped out, and had found Mary and her husband sitting outside. Incredibly, they were laughing and joking. He joined Mary in persuading the scientist, somewhat against his will, to explain what had happened. Brooks felt they should wait until the next morning, but was beginning to describe Olive's appearance at the cottage on the day of the quarrel.

"After I . . . I ran after George, I came back to the cottage, and . . . ."

"We don't want to know about that," from Mary. "I . . . that is we . . . we know all about that. Just as you were feeling that George was right, and that no scientist should marry a—what is it?—lay-woman, and that no Etonian should marry a Canadian, along came Olive, looking very stunning in a white silk frock, and asked you if you wouldn't like to see the apparatus. So you thought: 'Oh well, it can't do any harm, I'll just go and have a look at it! I'll be back before night.' So you went."

Brooks was turning red.

"Honestly, Mary, it wasn't as . . . as bald as that. I was pretty angry at her to begin with."

"Of course you were," said Mary. There was acerbity in her voice. "So you went to the shore and she had you pull the boat up for her, so that she wouldn't wet her white kid shoes. And——"

Brooks was undeniably blushing.

"How did you know about the boat?" he stammered.

The girl disregarded his question.

"You may miss the details of Olive's conversation on the voyage. I'm sure it was most . . . ah, instructive. Tell us what happened last night."

The man sounded relieved.

"Well, I saw the apparatus," he hastened to begin. "It's amazing. Now that fellow *was* a genius. You know more or less how the thing functioned. I've told you already what I guessed, and I was about right. That machine worked on the thought patterns

in the brain, that is to say, on the electrical patterns that underlie thought. It did to a brain what the wireless transmitting station in New York does to your set in Montreal. Olive's machine transmitted electrical waves of a very complex pattern. When these waves meet the proper kind of apparatus . . . in this case, a human brain . . . they rouse a corresponding pattern. She had to use a good many of those special tubes, but not nearly so many as the cells of a television apparatus, after all. Think of the terrific complexity of sending a photograph across the Atlantic! Olive did her stunt on a much simpler scale!"

They nodded. It was fairly simple after all! Apparently on seeing their look of sudden enlightenment, he frowned slightly.

"But", he quickly disabused them, "it isn't quite so simple as it sounds. The human brain is always working. There are always electrical patterns of inconceivable complexity running over it. So the pattern transmitted by the machine has, so to speak, to use what it finds present in the brain. Do I puzzle you?" he asked, bending forward anxiously towards his wife. "It's important that I shouldn't tire you."

His wife reassured him.

"For example," he went on, "it couldn't make a colour-blind person see red or green, because that pattern wasn't there to start with. It couldn't make an ignorant person talk in chemical formulæ, for the same reason. It has to select from the material

it finds, like a man writing on a typewriter. It's like a railway locomotive that can't run unless there is a track laid for it."

"But it can choose among the tracks," said McTavish.

"Exactly," Brooks went on. "That's what happened the first night when the owl came at us. Undoubtedly Olive's first plan was to make Mary and me quarrel. So she transmitted an emotional pattern, and we didn't respond. At least, not to any extent. Though as a matter of fact, we were neither of us our usual sweet selves that first evening."

Mary nodded. "Yes, wasn't that when I lectured you about your science? Poor Reggie. It's a shame."

She smiled at him from under her bandage.

"Get me a drink," she said. "I'm a whole lot better already."

Her husband stood up. "That's exactly the point. You lectured me about something you already had on your mind. That grouch was selected and intensified by Olive's machine."

He disappeared for a few minutes, and came back with a tray, on which stood three drinks. Setting them down:

"We didn't respond," he said, "but the owl did. It must have been in a bad temper."

Mary interrupted.

"I didn't tell you at the time, but just before I met you I disturbed that owl looking for its nest. It

seemed to be pretty mad. I should have told you. It wasn't a nice owl."

Brooks was silent.

"Then there was the knight," he went on. "From what she told me, the knight was not exactly intended. After the quarrelling business did not work, she decided to be a little more subtle. She wanted to get across the idea that George was in love with Mary. She wanted to make him in love with Mary."

McTavish moved slightly in his chair, took up his glass and drained it. Brooks did not look at either of them.

"Did you see the picture of the knight in the hall?"

They nodded.

"Well, somehow or other that got mixed up with what she was transmitting. We all had the poem at the back of our minds. The machine selected that pattern out of all our memories of literature."

McTavish asked a question.

"I don't quite see it, Reggie," he said. "Surely all the literature we have ever read isn't always present in our minds, is it, like billiard balls in a bag?"

Brooks looked at him seriously.

"It is puzzling," he said. "But it is apparently what does happen. Take an accountant who is adding up numbers. When he comes to the figures 'three' and 'nine', he adds them automatically without asking himself whether he shall add them and get twelve, or subtract them and get six, or divide them and get three. The right association is selected by some un-

conscious force in the mind. In the case of Olive's machine the force came from outside, and so we thought of the Lady instead of something else from literature."

"Of course", he went on rapidly, "it would be more correct to say that the right brain pattern was selected."

They nodded hastily.

"Selected and enormously intensified," he continued. "So that, instead of imagining the knight and the lady, we actually saw them. And there's another thing which has struck me. Did it ever occur to you that George was very quick in guessing the 'Belle Dame Sans Merci'? He seemed to do it almost as soon as we started. I wondered about it at the time, but I put it down to George's Great Brain! Well, it wasn't. It was——"

"Olive's machine!" interrupted Mary.

"Yes. It was working on him as well as on us."

McTavish looked a little chagrined.

"I still don't see why she should want to send the picture of the knight," he said, a trifle peevishly.

"I told you that she didn't. It was a mistake. The picture was in her laboratory at the time. It was the only picture in the room. She sat and tried to transmit the idea that you and Mary were in love with each other. She would *think into* the machine at her end, just like the old willing game. On the wall in front of her was a picture of a man dying of love for a woman. The picture almost inevitably got mixed

up with what she was trying to transmit. You remember that we all saw slightly different things that night?"

They nodded.

"That was because the power Olive sent had slightly different material to work on in each of us. It was the first thing that put me on the track, though I had no idea of the scale on which she was working. When she found out what had happened," he added, "she took the print out of her working-room and stood it in the hall."

As though suddenly remembering something, he stopped and looked anxiously at them.

"Don't you think you should go to bed?" he asked.

The two turbaned figures looked at each other.

"No," said Mary.

"Also, no," said McTavish.

"We shouldn't", Mary added, "sleep a wink all night."

"Do we look as though we were dying?" asked McTavish.

Brooks shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I must say", he said, "that you seem to be in somewhat ruder health than when I carried you to the boat this morning. You got it worse than Mary, George. Journalism must be a tough profession." He eyed the other man with a certain admiration.

McTavish thrust out his chest, looked at Brooks, and put his finger to his nose in a vulgar gesture. He pushed over his glass.

"How about a little nourishment?" he said.

The glass was filled.

"But tell me," asked the journalist, "how Olive knew all this. You say, she knew what happened to us. How?"

"That's another aspect of the whole thing which you couldn't have guessed. At least, I couldn't, without being told."

McTavish looked curiously at him. It wasn't quite like the old Brooks to admit the possibility of defeat. And yet, thought McTavish, the man was always strangely humble where his science was concerned. But Brooks was speaking.

"She made records," he said.

"*Records*?" The other two sat up and stared.

He waved them to sit quiet. "Yes," he repeated. "Records. That machine at the ruined cottage was in two parts. You seem to have made a pretty clean smash of it, George."

McTavish started up, surprised.

"I found it this afternoon while you were asleep. On the under side was a recording apparatus which transmitted to a steel disk what was happening in the machine. A very pretty piece of apparatus it was. An oscillating magnetic field generated by——"

"That'll do, Reggie. Please!" It was Mary who spoke.

"I thought you wanted to *understand* it," he said.

"So we do, Reggie," said his wife. "But it's no use telling us about magnetic fields."

Her husband sat a moment, his head in his hands.

"It's so much more difficult if I can't use the proper terms," he said. Then:

"Look here," he went on. "The thing you have to bear in mind is that every human being is both a generator and a receiver of these waves. Imagine a human brain with a recording apparatus working in it, like the new gramophones, or like the phonograph-recording apparatus at the wireless studios. It would record the patterns in the brain, wouldn't it? As a matter of fact, *records have been made* of the electrical changes in the brain by a number of people, by Berger in Germany among others, only these were very much simplified, and one could not reproduce from them. Well, imagine that the brain which is being recorded is at the same time being influenced from outside, for example by Olive's machine. Then anybody could take the record and see just what had actually happened when the influence was turned on. The record would show a sort of mixture of the outside influence and the person's own ideas. It would, in fact. . . ." He paused. "It would show what effect the outside influence was having on the person."

"That seems clear enough," said McTavish. "But she had no recording apparatus on our brains, had she?"

"No, she hadn't, exactly. But you can think of the machine at the cottage as working like a human brain. Remember it was both a receiver and a transmitter. It received *both from Olive's headquarters and from us.*" He said the last words with great emphasis.

"Consequently," he went on, "what happened in it, and what it actually transmitted was a kind of composite of our thoughts and Olive's broadcast. Olive's central apparatus was stronger, but we were nearer. Olive's broadcast gave the general slant, while we filled in the details, so to speak. What we experienced was a composite of our own ideas and Olive's directions, just like any other thoughts that are directed from outside. And the record she took was the same kind of composite. So that she could tell exactly what we were actually thinking by taking the record home and putting it on the transmitting apparatus, with the power damped down so as to affect her only. You can think of the little apparatus at the ruined cottage as working for all intents and purposes like a part of our own brains. For the time being, this artificial brain-annexe . . . to be barbarous! . . . called the tune for both us and it, and at the same time acted as amplifier for the processes going on in us, because of the power Olive was supplying. As a matter of fact, we do know that one part of a natural nervous system can act as amplifier to another part, so that this was only an extension of something perfectly normal. The net result was that our wishes and ideas were stepped up to an incredible intensity! And Olive could look on at it all through her little window!"

It was a disquieting thought! They felt utterly naked! They shuddered at the grotesque notion that Olive could take their thoughts home and put them

under the microscope! That she had built an outhouse to their brains!

But Brooks was continuing:

"So she knew exactly what effects her experiments were having. And that's why she gave up her first attempt, which was to make us quarrel, and tried a second one, which was to make George and Mary fall in love. She must have had a nasty jar when she saw that knight appear."

Mary spoke again, rather diffidently.

"I suppose it was a record working last night at Olive's house, when George and I saw . . . when we saw each other."

Her husband nodded. He did not speak.

"Reggie," she said, suddenly, disquieted, her dark eyes searching him, "she hasn't got them, has she? The records, I mean. To think of her showing them round to . . . to little pimply scientists."

He shook his head grimly.

"No, she hasn't got them. She went away without them. I saw to that."

Their mood had suddenly changed and they became silent. They realized that they had not even asked what had become of Olive, whether she was alive or dead. They had been too glad to find themselves alive . . . and sane.

Sensing their question: "She went away in the night," he said. "To South America, I think, but I'm not sure."

Beneath his breath they heard him mutter.

"And I don't care." After a while:

"You oughtn't to misunderstand about those records," he went on more cheerfully. "They weren't exactly thought records. They simply sent out from the apparatus electrical waves that could influence what was happening in people's minds if the proper tracks were already laid. They would bring about more or less of a tendency towards a certain thought, but details would be filled in out of the thinker's own experience. Possibly, if the path was not laid, even the main thought would not get across. For example, I doubt whether a young child would have seen anything last night when . . . when you and George were watching."

He turned to his wife as he said the last few words.

"To the pure, all things are pure," she answered. Was there a suspicion of bitterness in her voice? He turned his head away.

"So Olive", he went on, "had a good deal of trouble to determine just what came from the record, and what came from herself. Exactly the same sort of thing is reported by everybody who has worked on what is ordinarily called thought transference. But, all in all, she managed pretty well."

McTavish broke in. "I think I understand all this dimly," he said. "But tell me, what happened to Mary and me at the ruined cottage? I don't see how a machine such as you have described could do that psycho-analytic effect."

"It was exactly as Mary said," answered Brooks.

"It was something Olive had not thought out. The batteries of the machine were timed for forty-eight hours continuous running. So she had to come every so often and change them. Usually she would wade to shore in rubber boots, take them off and stagger over with the battery in bare feet, so as not to make a track. Also she had to take off the record, and stop the machine. I heard her the evening after the Knight-at-Arms came. On the afternoon when she came, and I went away with her"—he hurried over his words—"she left the machine running as usual. Consequently, when you two people came near, what was happening in your own brains affected what was happening in the machine as before. But remember that it still acted as a broadcasting machine, and you were very near to it. So the machine amplified the original pattern in your brain, and this affected the machine again and so on, until you got an incredibly powerful effect. You can say that when it was undisturbed from outside—as in this case—Olive's brain-annexe still functioned as part of the brain with its own source of power. Only now it amplified *your own mirrored thoughts*. What you had as a secret thought would actually come out as a perception of tremendous distinctness, just as we know happens to insane people who have hallucinations and hear voices. You had a taste of what those poor chaps in the asylums have to endure, only they have it for years, some of them. You had it for half an hour, and didn't like it much."

"No, I didn't," confessed McTavish.

"You and Mary heard the Voice of Conscience itself," he concluded.

"By golly, yes," said McTavish. "We did." He stiffened at the recollection. "By the way," he asked, "this is off the point, but do you remember a hymn that goes:

> "*It is the motive, good or ill,*
> *that doth the deed inspire.*"

They looked at him inquiringly. Finally Brooks shook his head.

"I think, George," he said, "that is one of your own compositions."

McTavish shook his head ruefully.

"I was afraid so," he said.

"Reggie," said Mary, "apart from George's literary endeavours, there are still a good many things I don't understand. Why these bandages, for example? After all, we don't even know yet what happened last night."

"I'll come to that. But there is still a link I have to explain. Olive had to come here from time to time. But she couldn't afford to pay more than flying visits to the cottage, or we should have caught her. We nearly did, anyhow. The whole layout had its own difficulties, because, as I was not very successfully explaining, the local rebroadcasting set was also a receiving set from human brains. It may be that this has to be so with the transmission of this

kind of waves. The thing may be so delicate that it is automatically affected by what is happening in the brains of human beings nearby. Or it may possibly be that she wanted to take records and had the apparatus made that way. I don't know. My hat, that fellow was a genius! Isn't it pretty?" he ended enthusiastically, looking from one to the other.

Mary spoke a little dryly.

"Very," she said. "But what about what we saw at Olive's house? We don't seem to be getting any nearer to what happened last night."

"Well, Olive had the stage all set for you and George to come to Rainbow Island. She knows Mary pretty well, and she's pretty shrewd."

His wife looked straight ahead, past her husband. Brooks hastened on apologetically with his story.

"That evening, after I had gone over to read in the library, she came over very quietly to collect the record of what had happened between you and George. She did not go into the bay with her motor boat, as she suspected that you and George might be awake. She went to the landing stage about a mile and a half up the road, and walked along and pushed her way through the bushes. She took out the record and put in another as a matter of routine. Then she went home and put on her transmitting machine the record she had just brought back. She felt very angry because the plan was not working as quickly as she liked. Perhaps for that reason *she forgot to damp down the power*. Anyhow when she saw

you and George—from the record, you know—she sat and . . . and. . . ."

"And what, Reggie?" Mary asked softly.

"And gloated, and mocked." He was shamefaced and silent.

"The next night", he went on, "—that was the night George spent alone at Willow Point—she remembered she had left a record on the machine here, and came over to get it. When she tried it on the apparatus at Rainbow Island she was astonished to find another record of you and George! Much worse than the original! The Willow Point apparatus had received and recorded a kind of mixture of what she was thinking and what the original record showed! It had been transmitted from Rainbow Island and picked up just like any other set of waves!"

"Of course", he added apologetically, "she should have damped down the transmitting power, as she had other times, but that she didn't do, for some reason or other. You and George were asleep at the Point, so there was no interference from that quarter. So she got that disgusting caricature that you . . . that we saw." He spoke firmly.

"You did see it, then?" The question came softly, almost whispered, from Mary. Her eyes were averted.

"Yes. I saw it. That's why I stayed away when you came. She never told me till later how the record came to be made."

They were silent. Finally Mary looked at him.

"It's a pretty tangle, isn't it?" she quietly said. Then: "How did you find out about it?"

"I ought to have known as soon as I saw you," he said. "Without seeing you. I did know, of course, that what I had seen wasn't how you had acted. But it was like any other bitter and cruel caricature. It was something that had passed through a bitter and merciless mind and had been transformed . . . bitterly and mercilessly. It's very hard to live down . . . God help me, it was hard to live down! I couldn't live it down all at once. So when I knew that you and George were coming together on the motor boat, I . . . I felt it was all no use, and I couldn't bear to see you. So I kept away."

"Somewhere in a basement, with some kind of secret door?"

He nodded.

"Behind the ice-box," he answered.

"She saw us coming, and called in the dog?"

The man nodded again.

"And then?" Her voice was tender.

"And as I sat and talked with you and George, with Olive sitting there like a great, tawny tigress ——"

She nodded.

"I began to lose that horrible picture. Then when she started to talk, I gradually saw what she was. And when she talked about shooting Mary . . . why, one can't talk about shooting Mary." He paused with incredulity in his voice.

"So I watched her rather carefully, especially when she spoke of accessories she hadn't told anybody about. You see, I had . . . ah, flattered myself that she had told me all she knew about the machine."

"Poor old Brooks," thought McTavish. "It's his vanity that's hit now."

"Then I saw the switch, and I knew it meant trouble. She had edged her chair to be within striking distance of it. She did manage to get it pulled down, but only for a fraction of a second. You see", he almost stuttered, "there was that revolver, and she was not very particular about whom she hit. Her main plan had failed. She knew then she wasn't going to . . . to get me, after what Mary had said. So she didn't care much. . . . If she had hit me, that would have been the end of you people. After five minutes of that switch you would have been——"

"What?" asked his wife.

"Raving mad!"

They sat and looked at each other, white-faced, with the white bandages on their heads, staring with dark-ringed eyes. There was nothing to say.

"Does that mean all four of us?" asked McTavish humbly, after a while.

"I hardly think so. I rather think my chair and Olive's were specially grounded in some way. You noticed they had high hoods, with flaps on each side of the head. I tapped them afterwards, and there was metal screening in them. They were on metal

castors, and stood on copper slabs on the floor. Did you notice that?"

They had not.

"Also, the particular stunt she was trying to use on you and Mary was *directed*, like directional wireless. This much I got out of her, afterwards. So I think she and I were protected, though I wouldn't trust her even for that. I believe she's quite capable of sending all four of us into an insane asylum as long as she gets what she wants, which is to break up things between Mary and me."

They looked at him, silently.

"It was just the same idea as before, projecting waves of what you can call cerebral wavelengths, only lying within a certain critical band, and of tremendous intensity. Apparently they work like soldiers walking in step over a bridge. They seize up all the waves in one's brain and force them into a certain rhythm. The rhythm is automatically intensified, again like the soldiers on a bridge, until . . . until. . . ."

He spread out his hands suggestively and hopelessly.

"Until what, Brooks?" This time it was McTavish who asked.

"Until . . . Pop! Acute mania! It's ugly. That poor fellow in Germany died of it. He apparently gave himself an overdose. It's not like the usual form. It's permanent—until one does die."

"Then it wasn't malnutrition, as Olive told us?" It was Mary who asked.

Brooks shrugged his shoulders.

"No," he said.

"Do you think that . . . Olive. . . ?" asked McTavish tentatively.

"I don't know."

McTavish and Mary sat dumb. They had reached the extreme of horror. McTavish bowed his head, and clasped his hands over it.

"Good God!" he said. "Good God alive!"

Brooks was recalled to himself by hearing Mary speaking.

"I'm sorry, my darling," he said. "But what was it you said?"

"How did you find all this out from Olive?" she was asking. Her voice quavered.

"Oh, yes," he said, quickly. "I was going to tell you that. When I saw her put her hand to the switch, I jumped at her with a footballer's tackle. There was the hell of a scuffle. She fought like a cat. I managed to knock the switch up. Then I got hold of the revolver. I marched her to her bedroom and made her change."

"You made her change, while you stood with the revolver?"

"Yes."

"Why change?" asked McTavish.

"Because she had to go. I didn't want her taking any blueprints of that apparatus, and I don't think she can build it herself. She couldn't go to South

America, or wherever it was, in that dress. So I just stood there with the revolver till she had changed."

"Who suggested that she should change?" Mary's eyes almost held a twinkle.

"She did."

"I thought so. But, Reggie, I gather you did not fall for it."

"I don't know what you mean." Brooks was blushing.

"No, I really don't believe you do. You are a dear, after all. And then?"

"Then I walked behind her to the boathouse, and she went off towards the American shore. About half an hour later I heard an aeroplane start up. It was probably hers."

"So she is gone?"

"Yes."

"Why won't she come back and start again with that machine at Rainbow Island?"

"Because I destroyed it. I hated to do it, but I destroyed it. All the records, too. Everything. Most of it was built into the laboratory, which was chiseled right out of the granite. I couldn't have removed it without a gang of men, and I didn't want to take a chance on leaving it. It was heavy and far more powerful than the little machine here. There was a large room full of stuff. I ruined it all. It's no use to anybody now," he added, almost mournfully.

Mary stood up from her chair, walked over to her

husband, put her arm round her husband's neck, and kissed him.

"If ever, Reggie," she said, "I doubted whether you love me, I don't doubt it any longer."

Brooks was silent again. Suddenly:

"Now you two people must go to bed. I should have sent you long ago. But there are two or three more things that you will be thinking about if I send you off now. So I'd better save time by telling you at once. First, about poor old MacReady. When she first met him, she had on board the little machine which she finally installed at the ruined cottage. She had turned the boat in under a rock for something or other, when she saw a cat come along. So she turned on the machine and tried it out on the cat. The cat was behaving beautifully, when along came MacReady, whom she had seen in the Castleton Public Library a week before. You remember, Olive never forgets a name or a face?"

They nodded.

"When he was at the library, he happened to be getting out Nijinski's life. Olive heard him discussing it with the library girl. So she suddenly had the brilliant idea of trying out the apparatus on him. She induced him to come into the boat, kidnapped him, and made him dance. Then, when he was still under the influence of the apparatus, she told him he wouldn't remember it. It was a kind of a test case. You've got to realize that it's all the same to the apparatus what kind of a mental pattern you feed

into it. It may be action, as with the cat and MacReady, or it may be visual perception, as with the knight-at-arms."

"Or I suppose it may be the sense of touch," grinned McTavish. "As when I stroked your wife's ghost's knee!"

"With my wife's permission, I hope." He grinned.

"Quite."

"Yes, George," Brooks continued, "it may even be the sense of touch—you get that often in mental disease. That's one interesting thing about all this. It's happening to thousands of people every day on account of disease. All kinds of strange and intense patterns start up in the brains of the insane without the usual process of exciting a sense organ. So there's nothing unique about what's been happening to us. The brain's the key to the whole thing. As I said, and as far as we can tell, there is no difference between one kind of cerebral pattern and another, except that some have an exit, so to speak, down to the muscles and cause movement."

"Why did MacReady faint?" asked McTavish.

"That was a strange turn of fortune. You remember the experiments in McDougall's laboratory I was telling you about?" They nodded.

"They found that some people were much more sensitive than others to what they called extra-sensory perception. They think that all of us may have the power, but some have it in greater degree than others. There's nothing mystical about it. Some

people are more sensitive to the weather. Some can draw better than others, and some are good at music or mathematics. These special qualities have no relation to intelligence. You may be a good draughtsman and an imbecile. In the same way your brain may be unusually sensitive to outside influences of the kind they used at Duke University, which were apparently of the same kind as those that Olive's machine sent out, only caused by other brains. It appears that MacReady was a natural sensitive. All this power floating round simply put him out of action. It was too strong a dose for him."

McTavish perked up his head.

"Yes, George," said Brooks, "I thought that would make you sit up. It's what our friends the spiritualists call a medium. The specially gifted people that are sometimes called mediums often have long periods when they are quite unconscious of strange things that are happening about them. Things *do* happen, you know."

They found themselves able to believe it.

"You won't go far wrong," he added, "if you think of Olive's set up as something like an artificial thought transferring machine. Upton Sinclair used the term 'Mental Radio'. The main motive was revenge on Mary. She tried to make us quarrel, but couldn't. Then she tried to make George and Mary fall heavily for each other. The first attempt did not work. That was when the knight appeared. The second attempt worked."

McTavish held his peace. It was Mary, once more, who answered.

"I'm afraid so," she said.

"Yes. Then she wanted to get me. I didn't find out whether my quarrel with George was due to her. It may not have been. If it wasn't, she had counted on it and was waiting for it. So, at the right time, she came to get me, and that was successful, too, in a way . . . I fear. . . ."

Mary looked at him questioningly.

"Well, not exactly successful. I . . . I am afraid I am too much of a scientist for both of you. I. . . ." he sounded ashamed of himself. "I spent most of the time examining the apparatus."

His wife was still regarding him with that questioning look.

"The rest of the time, I slept," he said.

A gleam of amusement appeared in his wife's eye.

"That would make her mad," she said, half under her breath.

"It did," said her husband. "Now", he said, "you must go to bed."

They went.

As they were undressing:

"By the way, George," he shouted from their bedroom, "she had a man stationed on Hog Island with a powerful pair of glasses to watch what we were doing in the cottage. He would telephone to her when there was anything doing."

They went to sleep.

Epilogue

It was the next morning. The sun was shining in a cloudless sky. Brooks, Mary and McTavish were eating breakfast on the dining-porch, with the white-coated MacReady hovering discreetly about them. By Brooks's orders Mary's and McTavish's heads were still bandaged, although they had apparently recovered completely.

McTavish was speaking.

"Mary," he said. "I have a question to ask you."

"Yes, George?"

"Well," said McTavish, a little hesitantly, "we both owe our lives and our reason to Reggie."

She nodded silently.

"I may be wrong," he continued, "but when you and I went to Rainbow Island, it seemed to me that you appeared pretty confident of being able to handle the situation yourself. Too confident, to be frank, judging from what we know now. Hadn't you, so to speak, bitten off more than you could chew? Surely you must have known that Olive couldn't be talked over like a child?"

Mary looked at him for a while before speaking. Then deliberately:

"George," she answered, "I know as well as you do that if it had not been for Reggie we shouldn't be here now. But there's something you don't know, and Olive doesn't know it, either. Women have several reasons for being confident. One is that they can handle the situation themselves. Another is that they can get their man to handle things for them. That's how they keep their man, George, though this is a secret I shouldn't be telling you."

She looked away, far out past the green trees, to where the blue waters of the lake sparkled through the green.

"I had to tell Olive all those things. I had to make her furious, even at the expense of stretching the truth a little. I had to let her do her worst. Then I knew Reggie would do something to put everything right. That was the only way I could get him back."

She was silent again.

"Push out your chest, Brooks," said McTavish.

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