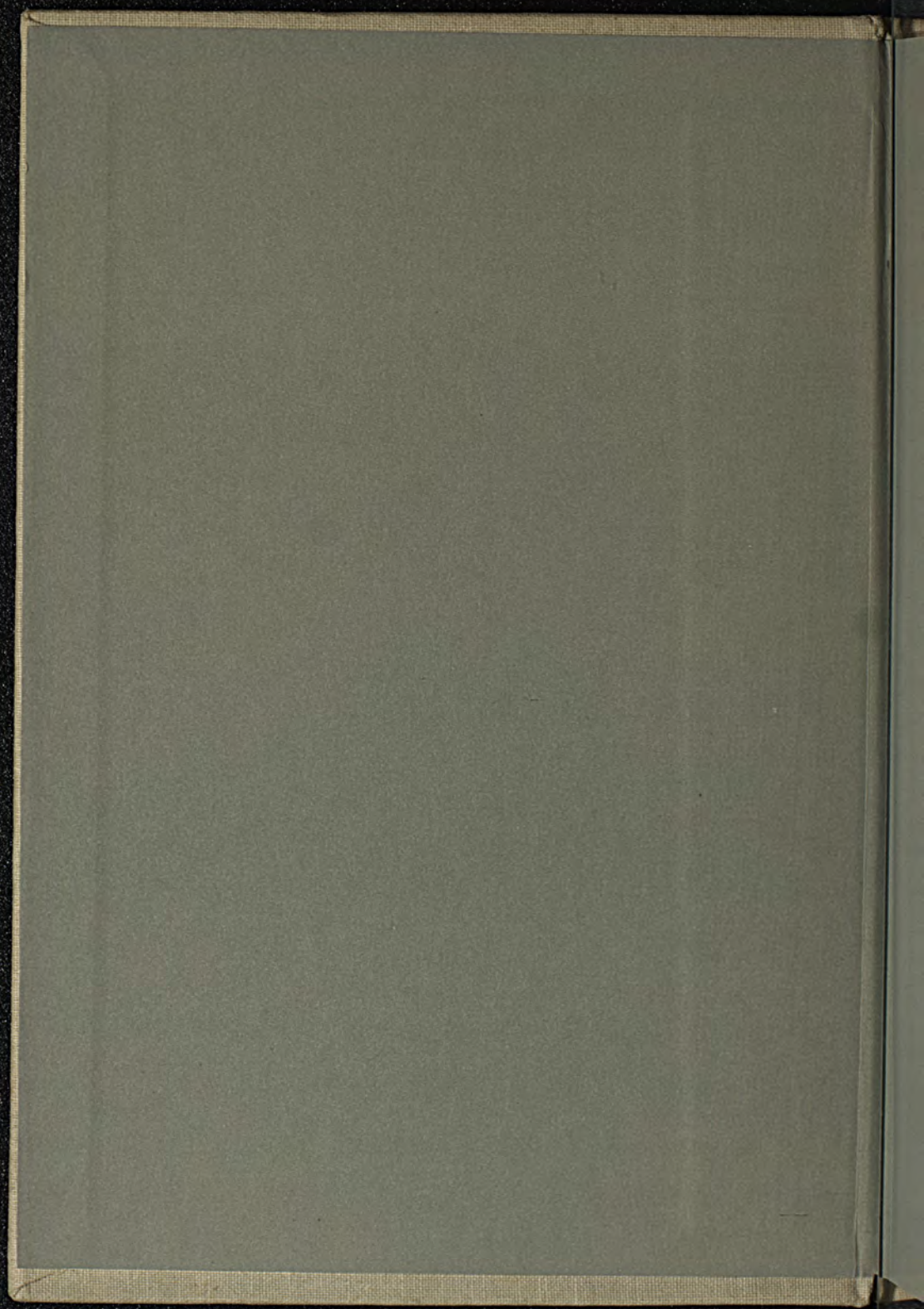
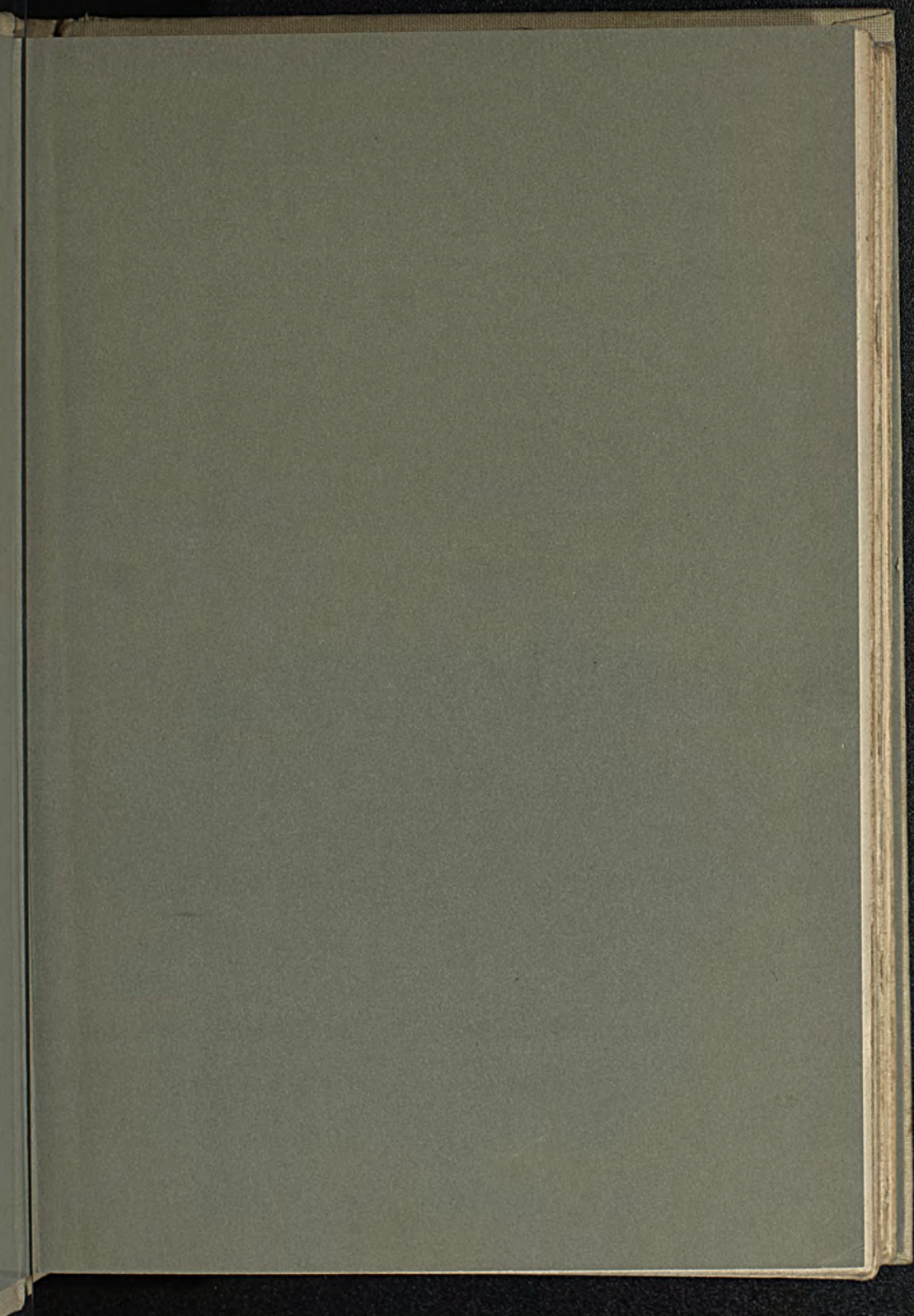
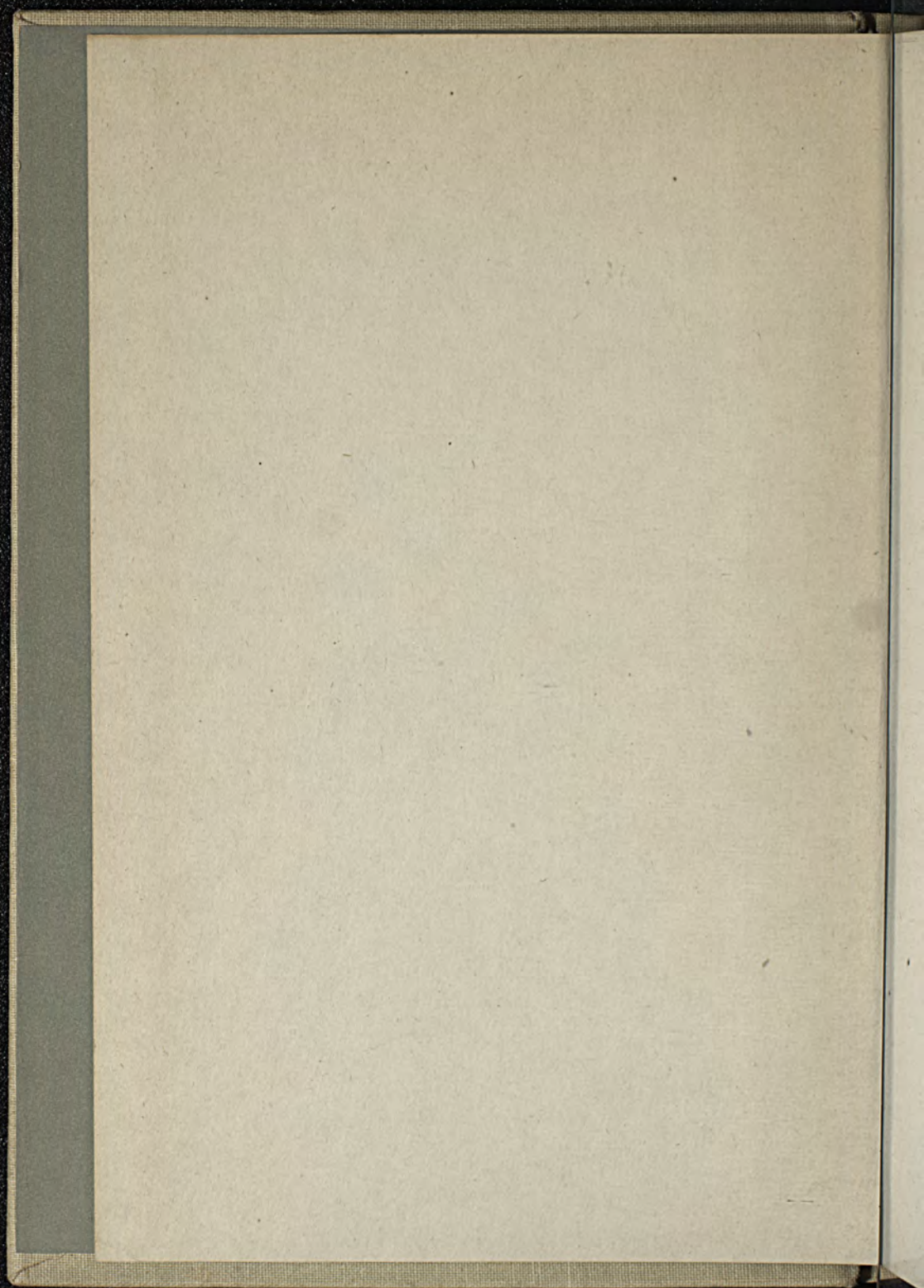


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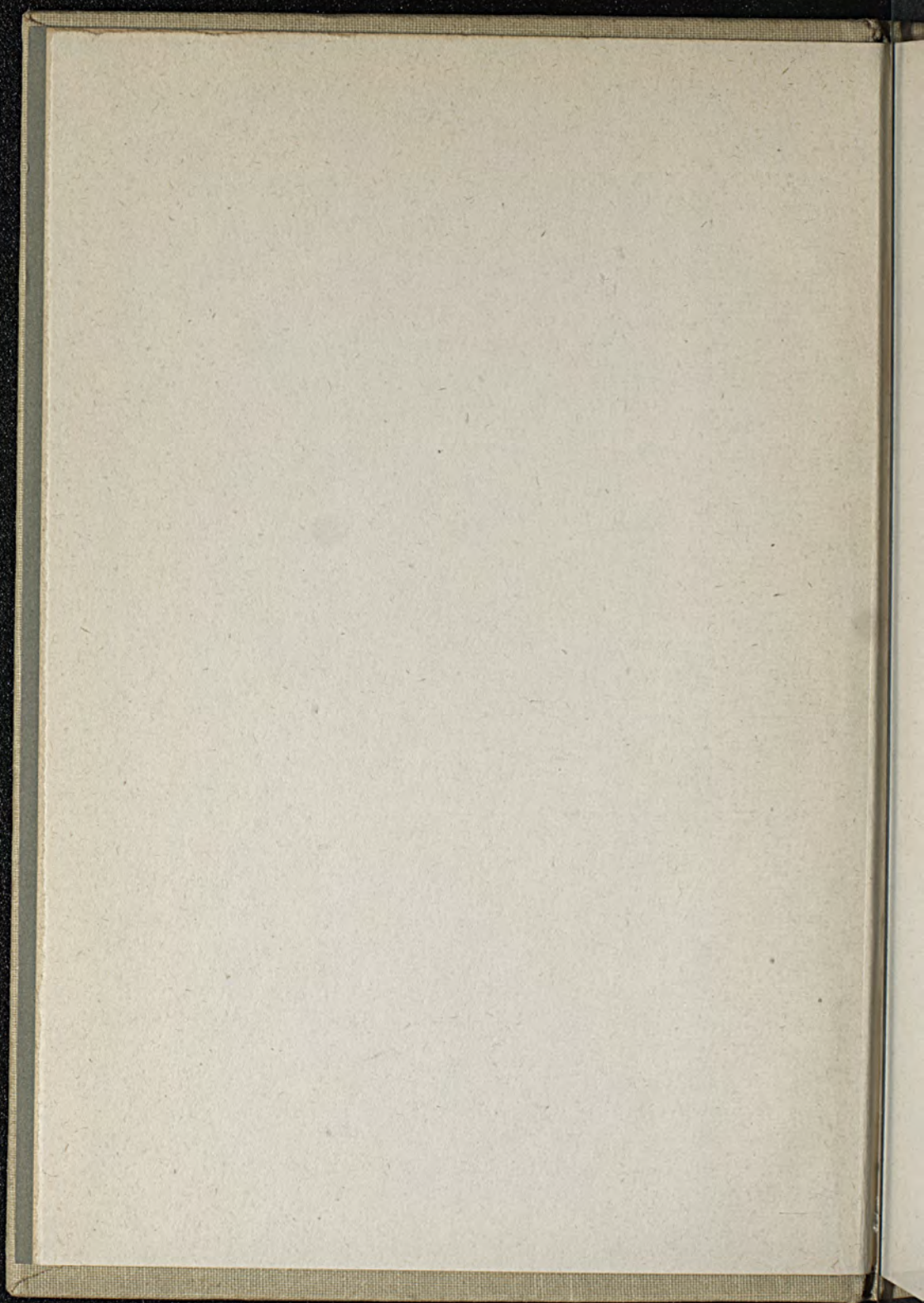






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Anna Kavan

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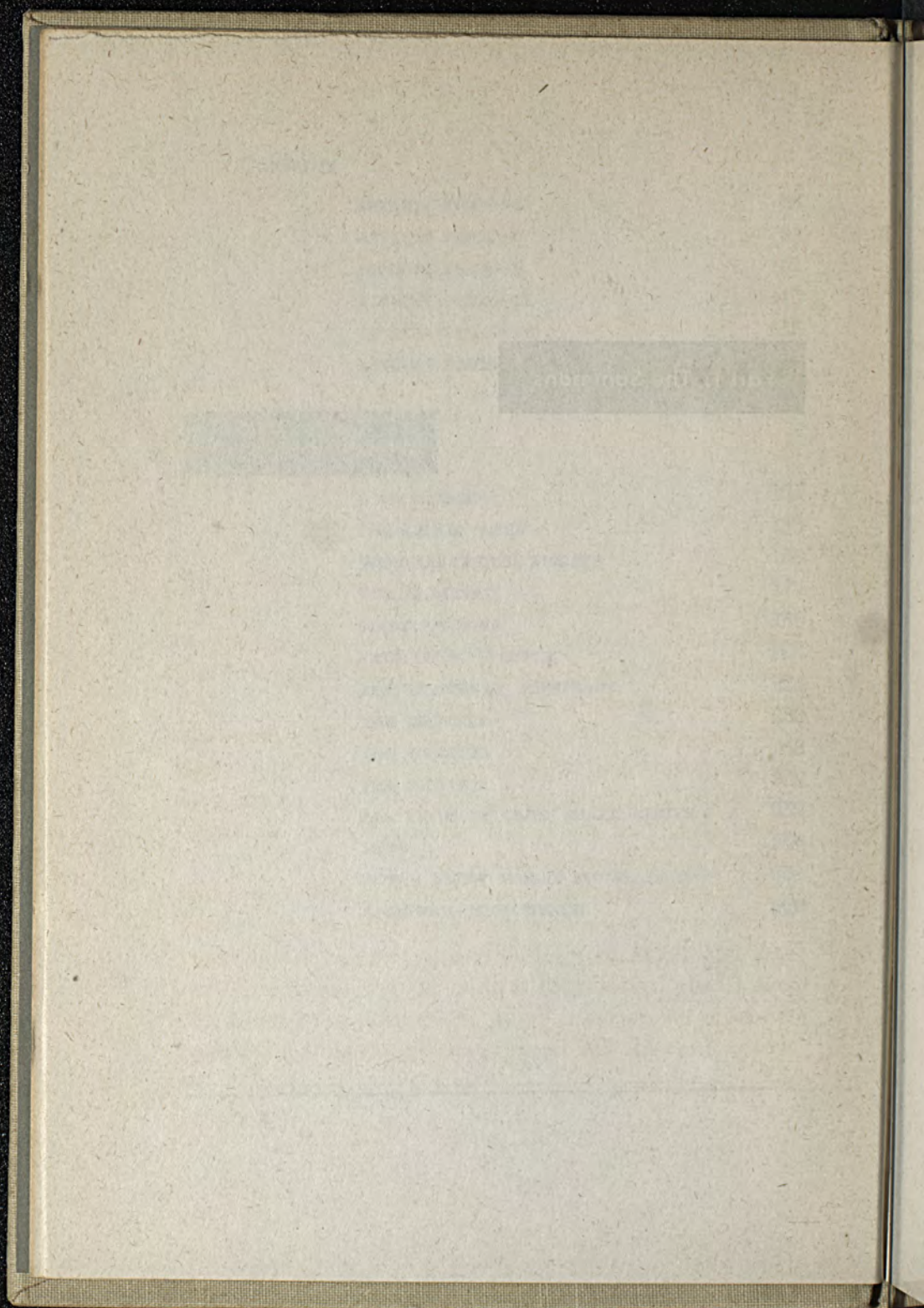
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Part I: The Summons



The Birthmark

WHEN I was fourteen my father's health made it necessary for him to go abroad for a year. It was decided that my mother should accompany him, our home was temporarily closed, and I was sent to a small boarding school in the country.

At this school I got to know a girl called H. I purposely use the words 'got to know' in preference to the words 'made friends with,' because, although I was acutely conscious of her all the time I remained there, no actual friendship developed between us.

It was at supper time on my first day at the school that H first caught my attention. I was sitting beside another new girl at the long table, feeling strange and subdued and a little homesick in this noisy environment so different from the enclosed, intimate atmosphere in which the whole of my life had been passed up to that day. I looked

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at the young faces of these still unknown companions, some of whom were to become friends, some enemies. One face among them all held my eyes with compelling attraction.

He was sitting on the opposite side of the table, almost immediately facing me. In the midst of so many brown heads her fairness alone was arresting. It was an autumn evening, misty and cold, and the room was not too well lighted. I had the impression that what light there was in the dining hall clustered around her, reviving and renewing itself as it played upon her fair hair. In looking back I think that she must have been beautiful; yet the detailed picture of her obstinately eludes me, I can recall only an impression of a face unique, neither gay nor melancholy, but endued with a peculiar quality of apartness, the look of a person dedicated to some accepted destiny. Perhaps these phrases sound out of place in connection with a schoolgirl who was only a few months older than I; and naturally I did not think of her in that way at the time. It is the accumulated rather than the momentary impression which I want to convey. Just then I saw only a fair girl, slightly my senior, who, catching my eyes upon her and doubtless thinking that I might be in need of encouragement, smiled at me across the table.

I remember that I looked back at her with some envy. It seemed to me then that she must possess everything that I, as a newcomer, lacked—success, popularity, an established place in the school world. Afterwards I found

The Birthmark

out that this was not quite the case. A curious shade seemed to dim all H's activities. I came to look upon this shadow, so hard to describe in words, as being in some way the complement of her rare outward brilliance.

How can I convey the strange sense of nullification that accompanied her? Although she was not unpopular, she had no intimate friends; and although she was in the first rank both as regards work and sport, some inevitable accidental happening always debarred her from supreme achievement. This fate she seemed to accept without question: almost, one would have thought, without being aware of it. I never heard her complain of the bad luck which so consistently robbed her of every prize.

And yet she was certainly neither indifferent nor unaware.

I recall very clearly an occasion towards the end of my time at school. In one of the corridors was a baize-covered board to which, among other notices, was fastened a large sheet of paper bearing our names and the number of marks which each of us received every week. H was standing in front of this list, quite alone, looking at it with an expression that I did not understand, an expression not of resentment, not of regret, but, so it seemed to me, of resignation combined with dread. Seeing that look on her face I was overcome by a wave of passionate and inexplicable compassion; an emotion so profound, so apparently unjustified by the circumstances, that I was astonished to feel tears in my eyes.

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'Let me help you . . . Let me do something,' I heard myself imploring, inarticulate as though my own fate were at stake.

Instead of answering me, H rolled up one of her sleeves and silently pointed to a blemish on her upper arm. It was a birthmark, faint as if traced in faded ink, which at first sight seemed to be no more than a little web of veins under the skin. But as I examined it more closely I saw that it resembled a medallion, a miniature design, a circle armed with sharp points and enclosing a tiny shape very soft and tender—perhaps a rose.

'Have you ever seen that anywhere else?' she asked me; and it crossed my mind that she hoped that I, too, bore a similar mark.

Was it disappointment, embarrassment or despair that appeared on her face as I reluctantly shook my head? I only know that she hurried out of the corridor and that for the rest of the time I was at school she seemed to avoid me and that we were never alone together again.

The years passed, and though I heard nothing about H, I never really forgot her. Every now and then, once or twice a year, when I was in a train, or waiting for an appointment, or getting dressed in the morning, the thought of her would come to me, together with a peculiar discomfort, a kind of spiritual unease which I would banish as soon as possible.

One summer I was travelling in a foreign country, and, owing to an alteration in the railway timetable, I found

The Birthmark

myself obliged to change trains at a small lake-side town. As I had three hours to wait, I left the station and went out into the streets. It was an August afternoon, very hot and sultry; ominous thunder clouds were boiling up over the high mountains. At first I thought I would go down to the lake in search of coolness, but something ill-omened in the aspect of that stagnant sheet of lava-coloured water repelled me, and I decided instead to visit the castle which was the principal feature of the place.

This ancient fortress was built at the highest point of the town and was clearly visible from the square in front of the station. It seemed to me that I had only to walk up any one of the steep streets leading in that direction to reach it in a few moments. But my eyes must have deceived me as to the distance, for it turned out to be quite a long walk. Arriving hot, tired and unaccountably depressed at the great studded gates, I almost decided not to enter, but a group of tourists was just going inside and I allowed the guide to persuade me to join them.

I had been told at the station that the building now served as a museum, so it surprised me to see armed soldiers standing on guard in the courtyard. Replying to my question, the guide told me that part of the castle was still in use as a prison for offenders of a certain type. I tried to find out more as I had not heard before of these special prisons; the guide listened to me politely but refrained from answering. The other tourists, too, seemed to disapprove of my inquisitiveness. I gave in and became

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silent. We all trooped into a great hall and gazed at the dark stone walls carved in threatening relief.

As we went from one gloomy chamber to the next I wished more and more that I had not come on this expedition. The stone flags tired my feet, the menacing walls, the heavily barred doors, depressed my spirits; but I had the idea that it was impossible to go back, that no one would be permitted to leave these precincts until our guide led us outside again.

We were examining a display of medieval weapons when I noticed a small door half-hidden behind a suit of armour. I cannot tell now whether it was bravado, or a sudden longing for fresh air, or just idle curiosity that made me step behind the knight's ponderous armour and try the handle. To my astonishment the door was unlocked. It opened quite easily and I passed through it. The others, engrossed in the guide's lecture, paid no attention.

I was now in an enclosed flagged space, too small to be called a court, open to the sky, but so barricaded by cliff-like walls that no sunlight reached it and the livid air felt stale and oppressive. Not liking this any better than the interior of the castle, I was about to return to the tedious tour I had just forsaken, when something made me look down at the ground. I was standing in front of what I took for a low grating, a ventilator probably, which did not reach higher than the calf of my leg. Looking more attentively, I saw that this was in reality a low, barred window giving on to some subterranean cell. It was a movement

The Birthmark

behind the bars that had caught my eye. I knelt down, peering through the weeds which had grown up in the cracks between the great flagstones.

At first I could see nothing; it might have been a black cellar into which I was gazing. But soon my eyes penetrated the darkness and I could make out some sort of a pallet under the grating with a shrouded form lying upon it. I could not be sure whether it was a man or a woman who lay there, shrouded as if on a bier, but I thought I discerned a tarnished gleam of fair hair, and presently an arm, no thicker than bone, was raised, feebly, as if groping towards the light. Was it imagination, or did I really see on that almost transparent flesh a faint stain, circular, toothed, and enclosing a shape like a rose?

I cannot hope that the horror of that moment will ever leave me. I opened my mouth, but for several seconds I was not able to utter a sound. Just as I felt myself about to call out to the prisoner, soldiers appeared and hustled me away. They spoke roughly and threateningly, jostling me and twisting my arms as they dragged me into the presence of their superior officer. I was commanded to produce my passport. Falteringly, in the foreign language, I started to frame an inquiry about what I had seen. But then I looked at the revolvers, the rubber truncheons, the callous, stupid faces of the young soldiers, the inaccessible officer in his belted tunic; I thought of the massive walls, the bars, and my courage failed me. After all, what could I hope to do, an insignificant foreigner, and a

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woman at that, against such terrifying and strongly established force? And how would I help the prisoner by myself becoming imprisoned?

At last, after much questioning, I was allowed to go. Two guards escorted me to the station and stood on the platform until the train carried me away. What else could I have done? It was so dark in the underground cell: I can only pray that my eyes were deceiving me.

Going Up in the World

IN the low-lying streets near the river where I live there is fog all through the winter. When I go to bed at night it is so cold that the pillow freezes my cheek. For a long time I have been lonely, cold and miserable. It is months since I have seen the sun. Suddenly, one morning, all this becomes intolerable to me. It seems that I can no longer bear the cold, the loneliness, the eternal fog—no, not even for another hour—and I decide to visit my Patrons and ask them to help me. It is a desperate resolve, but once I have made it I am filled with optimism. Perhaps I deliberately trick myself with false hopes as I put on my best dress and carefully make up my face.

At the last moment, just as I am ready to start, I remember that I ought to take a present with me. I have no money with which to buy a gift worthy of such great

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people: is there anything in the house that will do? In a panic I hurry from room to room, as if expecting to discover some valuable object, the existence of which I have overlooked all the time I've been living here. Of course there is nothing suitable. Some apples on the kitchen shelf catch my eye because even in this gloomy half-light their cheeks show up yellow and red. I hastily fetch a cloth and polish four of the yellowest apples until they shine. Then I line a small basket with fresh paper, arrange the apples inside, and set out. On my way I tell myself that the simple fruit may please palates which have grown too accustomed to the flavour of hot-house peaches and grapes.

Soon I am in a lift, being whirled up towards the skies. A manservant in white stockings and purple knee-breeches shows me into a magnificent room. Here one is above the fog, the sun is shining outside the windows draped in soft veils of net, or, if it is not, it makes no difference, for the room is full of artificial sunshine from the concealed lights. The floor is covered by a carpet softer than moss, there are chairs and great sofas upholstered in delicate brocade, beautiful flowers are arranged in vases some of which are shaped like shells and some like antique urns.

My Patrons are not present and I am in no hurry to meet them. I am happy just to be in this warm room with its sunny, flower-scented air through which one almost expects to see butterflies flitting. After the foggy gloom to

Going Up in the World

which I have grown accustomed it is like being transported to summer, to paradise.

Before very long my Patron appears. He is tall and fine-looking as such an important man ought to be. Everything about his appearance is perfect: his shoes gleam like chestnuts, his shirt is of finest silk, he wears a red carnation in his buttonhole and in his breast-pocket is a handkerchief bearing a monogram embroidered by holy women. He greets me with charming courtesy and we sit talking for a while on general topics. He addresses me as an equal. I begin to feel quite elated at such a promising start. Surely everything is going to turn out as I wish.

The door opens and my Patroness enters. We both rise to meet her. She is dressed in deep blue velvet, and on her hat perches a small bird as vivid and rare as a jewel. There are pearls round her neck and diamonds on her smooth hands. She speaks to me with rather stilted brightness, smiling with narrow lips that do not uncloze easily. Diffidently I offer my humble present, which is graciously accepted and then laid aside. My spirits fall somewhat. We sit down again in our cushioned seats and for a few minutes continue to maintain polite conversation. There comes a pause. I realize that the preliminaries are over and that it is time for me to state the object of my visit.

'I am freezing with cold and loneliness down there in the fog!' I exclaim in a voice that stammers with its own urgency; 'please be kind to me. Let me share a little of your sunshine and warmth. I won't be any trouble to you.'

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My companions glance at one another. A look of the deepest significance passes between them. I do not understand what the look means, but it makes me uneasy. It seems that they have already considered my petition and come to an understanding about it between themselves.

My Patron leans back in his chair and places the tips of his long fingers together. His cuff-links glitter, his hair shines like silk.

'We must treat this question objectively,' he begins. His voice has a reasonable, impartial sound, and I start to feel hopeful again. But as he goes on talking I perceive that the air of consideration which has impressed me so favourably is really nothing but a part of his perfect ensemble, and no more to be relied upon than the flower in his buttonhole. In fact, he is not to be trusted.

'Don't think that I am accusing you,' he says, 'or setting myself up as your judge, but you must admit that your conduct towards us in the past has been far from satisfactory.'

He looks again at my Patroness, who nods her head. The little bird in her hat seems to wink at me with its brilliant, blind eyes.

'Yes,' says she, 'you have caused us a great deal of sorrow and anxiety by your bad behaviour. You have never consulted our wishes about anything but have obstinately gone your own way. It is only when you are in trouble that you come here asking us to look after you.'

Going Up in the World

'But you don't understand,' I cry, and I am ashamed to feel tears in my eyes. 'It's a matter of life and death this time. Please don't bring the past up against me now; I'm sorry if I've offended you; but you have everything and you can afford to be generous. It can't mean very much to you. But, oh, if only you knew how I long to live in the sunshine again!'

My heart falls into my boots while I am speaking. I am plunged into despair because I see that neither of my hearers is capable of comprehending my appeal. I doubt if they are even listening to me. They do not know what fog is like; it is only a word to them. They do not know what it means to be sad and alone in a cold room where the sun never shines.

'We don't intend to be hard on you,' my Patron remarks, crossing his knees. 'No one will ever be able to say that we have not treated you with patience and forbearance. We will do our best to forget and forgive. But you, on your side, must promise to turn over a new leaf, to make a clean break with the past and give up your rebellious ways.'

His voice goes on, but now I am the one who is not listening. I have heard enough to fill me with hopeless disappointment. It is useless for me to attempt any further approach to people who are utterly inaccessible, utterly out of sympathy with me. Almost at my last gasp, I come to throw myself on their mercy, and a lecture is all they can find for me in their empty hearts. I sigh and

Asylum Piece

undo my coat, which no one has invited me to remove, and in which I am now uncomfortably warm. My eyes glance sadly about the handsome room, in the golden, flowery atmosphere of which butterflies might be floating. Through a glaze of tears I catch sight of my yellow apples pushed into a corner behind an enormous box of liqueur chocolates. I feel remorseful because I have brought them here only to be abandoned to indignity. Perhaps the valet or the chambermaid will take a bite out of one of them before they are thrown into the dustbin.

'You must set out with the fixed intention of doing your duty towards us,' my Patron is saying. 'You must try your hardest to wipe out past bad impressions. Above all you must demonstrate your gratitude towards your Patroness, earn her forgiveness, and prove yourself worthy of her generosity.'

'And where am I to find a little warmth in all this?' I cry out desperately. What an incongruous sound the words have between these serene walls and how the fastidious flowers seem to toss their heads in disdain.

I know now that I have thrown away my last chance. There is no object in waiting a moment longer, so I get up and fly from the room. And at once the lift is swooping away with me, carrying me down to the cold, foggy streets where I belong.

The Enemy

SOMEWHERE in the world I have an implacable enemy although I do not know his name. I do not know what he looks like, either. In fact, if he were to walk into the room at this moment, while I am writing, I shouldn't be any the wiser. For a long time I believed that some instinct would warn me if we ever came face to face; but now I no longer think this is so. Perhaps he is a stranger to me; but much more probably he is someone whom I know quite well—perhaps someone I see every day. For if he is not a person in my immediate environment, how does he come to possess such detailed information about my movements? It seems quite impossible for me to make any decision—even concerning such a trifling matter as visiting a friend for the evening—without my enemy knowing about it and taking steps to

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ensure my discomfiture. And, of course, as regards more important issues, he is just as well informed.

The fact that I know absolutely nothing about him makes life intolerable, for I am obliged to look upon everybody with equal suspicion. There is literally not a soul whom I can trust.

As the days go past I find that I am becoming more and more preoccupied with this wretched problem; indeed, it has become an obsession with me. Whenever I speak to anyone I catch myself scrutinizing him with secret attention, searching for some sign that would betray the traitor who is determined to ruin me. I cannot concentrate on my work because I am always debating in my mind the question of my enemy's identity and the cause of his hate. What act of mine can possibly have given rise to such a relentless persecution? I go over and over my past life without finding any clue. But perhaps the situation has arisen through no fault of my own but merely on account of some fortuitous circumstances that I know nothing about. Perhaps I am the victim of some mysterious political, religious or financial machination—some vast and shadowy plot, whose ramifications are so obscure as to appear to the uninitiated to be quite outside reason, requiring, for instance, something as apparently senseless as the destruction of everybody with red hair or with a mole on his left leg.

Because of this persecution my private life is already practically in ruins. My friends and family are alienated,

The Enemy

my creative work is at a standstill, my manner has become nervous, gloomy and irritable, I am unsure of myself, even my voice has grown hesitating and indistinct.

You would think that my enemy might take pity on me now; that, seeing the miserable plight to which he has reduced me, he would be content with his vengeance and leave me in peace. But no, I know perfectly well that he will never relent. He will never be satisfied until he has destroyed me utterly. It is the beginning of the end now; for during the last few weeks I have received almost certain indications that he is starting to lodge false accusations against me in official quarters. The time can't be far off when I shall be taken away. It will be at night, probably, that they will come for me. There will be no revolvers, no handcuffs; everything will be quiet and orderly with two or three men in uniform, or white jackets, and one of them will carry a hypodermic syringe. That is how it will be with me. I know that I'm doomed and I'm not going to struggle against my fate. I am only writing this down so that when you do not see me any more you will know that my enemy has finally triumphed.

A Changed Situation

WHEN one has lived for seven years in the same house some strange things are apt to take place. Of course, I am not speaking now about people who have lived all their lives in one house which they have perhaps inherited from their fathers and grandfathers or even from more remote ancestors; I imagine that an entirely different system of laws must apply to them. But when somebody like myself, a person who is by nature a wanderer, through a chain of accidental circumstances becomes attached to a certain building, the consequences may be very surprising.

I belong to a family of rolling stones. We have never been landowners; in fact, we have always avoided the accumulation of possessions which tend to restrict one's free movement about the world. So the prospect of my

A Changed Situation

becoming a householder gave rise to a good deal of talk among us.

My relatives all advised me to sell the property. How I wish now that I had followed their advice! But at the time I was unaccountably averse to parting with the place. I remember that my uncle Lucius, who hates slow travelling, actually undertook a long, complicated cross-country journey—and in bitter Christmas weather, too—to come and discuss the matter with me. And I remember that I countered his reasonable proposals with arguments in which I only partially believed even then, saying that the house was too small to become burdensome and that if I sold it and invested the proceeds the income would be only negligible.

What made me so obstinate? That's the question I've asked myself hundreds of times without finding any answer. Was it a sort of masochism, a secret desire for self-punishment, that held me to a line of conduct which, right from the beginning, I more than half-consciously felt could only end in disaster?

It's not as though the place has any special attractions. It is a house of no definite architectural design, half old, half new. The lines of the new part are straightforward and easily read like a sum in simple arithmetic; the old part is complicated and oblique, full of treacherous angles, with a roof that sags like the back of a worn-out horse and is blotched with scabrous patches of lichen. Paradoxically, the old part has only been added recently.

Asylum Piece

When I first came to live here it was an entirely new house—that is to say, it had certainly not been standing for more than ten or fifteen years. Now, at least half of it must have been built many centuries ago. It is the old part which has grown up during my occupation that I fear and distrust.

Lying peacefully curled up on a sunny day, the new house looks like a harmless grey animal that would eat out of your hand; at night the old house opens its stony, inward-turning eyes and watches me with a hostility that can scarcely be borne. The old walls drape themselves with transparent curtains of hate. Like a beast of prey the house lies in ambush for me, the victim it has already swallowed, the intruder within its ancient structure of stone.

Coiling itself round me it knows I cannot escape. Imprisoned in its very fabric, I am like a small worm, a parasite, which the host harbours not altogether unwillingly. The time has not yet come to eject me. A few more months or years the house will nourish me in its frozen bowels before it spews me like an owl's pellet into the arches of infinite space through which my husk of skin and crushed bones will fall for ever and ever.

Sometimes I almost burst out laughing when, in the level daylight, it turns its new face to me. Why this childish clinging to a pretence which misleads no one? Isn't it enough that the house has wound me with hateful entanglements—that it will soon cast me out like vomit, like dung

A Changed Situation

—but that it must even try to mock me with its deception as well?

Perhaps I do not catch a single glimpse of the ancient for days at a time. Only the tame grey animal confronts me, and seems as if it has rolled itself into a ball and is about to purr like a cat. Everything appears simple and above-board; but I am not taken in so easily. I watch, I am on the alert, I turn round suddenly to catch what is behind me. And sooner or later, sure enough, there, beyond the new innocuousness, is the old head rearing up like a hoary serpent, charged with antique, sly, unmentionable malevolence; waiting its time.

The Birds

If some fortune teller had predicted all the reverses I was to suffer this winter I should have laughed outright at such an exaggerated catalogue of evil. And yet, in point of fact, it would be almost impossible to exaggerate the number of misfortunes which have overtaken me during the last few months. And all due to the subterranean activities of a secret enemy whose very name is unknown to me! Could anything be more heart-breaking—more cruelly unfair? I am ready to burst into tears at the mere thought of such senseless injustice. But, of course, it's no good lamenting or making complaints or protestations to which nobody pays any attention and which may even, for all I know, be used against one in the ultimate issue.

It's this obscurantist atmosphere that is one of the worst

The Birds

aspects of the whole business. If only one knew of what and by whom one were accused, when, where, and by what laws one were to be judged, it would be possible to prepare one's defence systematically and to set about things in a sensible fashion. But as it is one hears nothing but conflicting rumours, everything is hidden and uncertain, liable to change at a moment's notice or without any notice at all.

How is it possible not to lose hope in these circumstances? As the days drag on without bringing forth anything more definite than a number of contradictory whispers or perhaps some equivocal and incomprehensible official communication of which one can't make head or tail, it's extremely difficult not to despair. One is forced into a position of inactivity, of passive waiting, of nerve-racking suspense, with absolutely no relief except an occasional visit to one's official advisor—an interview which is just as likely to plunge one into utter dejection as to buoy one up with fugitive hopes.

And through all this one is expected to carry on one's personal existence as usual; to work and to perform social and family duties as if the background of one's life were still perfectly normal: that is what is hardest of all to bear. Naturally one gets nervy and irritable and absent-minded; one's friends gradually start to avoid one; one's work suffers, and then one's health begins to break down. One loses sleep, it becomes harder and harder to take any interest in conversation, books, music, plays, eating and

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drinking, love-making, even in one's personal appearance. Ultimately one becomes completely cut off from reality, alone in a world in which there is nothing to do but wait, day after day, for some fate at which one can only guess but which, in any case, can scarcely be less tolerable than the preceding uncertainty.

That is the state of unreality in which I have been living now for some time. Perhaps it is not really so very long; perhaps not more than a month or so; one loses the sense of time as well as everything else in this wretched condition. It seems ages since I have been able to concentrate on my work: and yet I am obliged to put in the same number of hours each day at my desk.

What do I do with myself during these interminable hours which once used to pass so swiftly? My workroom overlooks a garden, a small green space containing three trees; a walnut, a cherry, and a third rather spindly tree, a variety of prunus, I fancy, of which I do not know the correct name though someone once told me that it was a Siberian plum. When life turns against one, one tends to seek a sort of timid solace in simple things, and I am not ashamed to admit that my principal occupation recently and almost my only pleasure has been connected with the birds which during the winter frequent this small enclosed piece of ground. I have taken lately to throwing out an occasional handful of grain on to the grass as well as scraps of bread and other food left over from the meals for which I no longer have any appetite. The weather all

The Birds

through January has been exceedingly cold—I can't help feeling that there is some connection between this bitter cold and my own sufferings—there has been snow on the ground practically continuously; a thing which I never remember seeing in previous winters. On account of these severe weather conditions an unusual number of small birds has congregated in the garden—great tits, blue tits, cole tits, marsh tits, long-tailed tits, greenfinches and chaffinches, as well, of course, as robins, starlings, blackbirds, thrushes and innumerable sparrows.

A human being can only endure depression up to a certain point; when this point of saturation is reached it becomes necessary for him to discover some element of pleasure, no matter how humble or on how low a level, in his environment if he is to go on living at all. In my case these insignificant birds with their subdued colourings have provided just sufficient distraction to keep me from total despair. Each day I find myself spending longer and longer at the window watching their flights, their quarrels, their mouse-quick flutterings, their miniature feuds and alliances. Curiously enough, it is only when I am standing in front of the window that I feel any sense of security. While I am watching the birds I believe that I am comparatively immune from the assaults of life. The very indifference to humanity of these wild creatures affords me a certain safeguard. Where all else is dangerous, hostile and liable to inflict pain, they alone can do me no injury because, probably, they are not even aware of my

Asylum Piece

existence. The birds are at once my refuge and my relaxation.

A few days ago I was standing as usual in front of the window with my hands on the broad sill. It was the middle of the morning and I ought to have been at work, but a particularly hopeless mood of dejection had overtaken me and I had abandoned even the pretence of concentration. Perhaps you will wonder why I don't remember which day of the week it was: I can only answer that all days are so alike to me now that I really can't tell one from another. I remember that it was rather foggy, that the branches of the trees were motionless except when they were transiently stirred by the light weight of a bird, and that the half-frozen snow which had been lying about for so long, though not actually dirty, had acquired a sort of unsparkling deadness, very wearisome to the eye.

The woman who looks after me entered the room with some trivial message or question to which I replied without looking round. She is a good soul who has served me well for a number of years, but during the last few weeks a morbid sensitiveness has made it increasingly difficult for me to look her in the face. Does she know or does she not know the doom which is hanging over me? Sometimes I think that she knows nothing; yet, surely, unobservant as she is, she must notice a change in me. And sometimes it seems to me that she goes out of her way to provide little titbits for my meals, that she prepares my food with special care as if trying to tempt me to eat, and I fancy that I catch

The Birds

on her elderly face an expression that might almost be one of pity.

On this occasion of which I am writing I avoided her eye and continued to stare into the garden, feeling too miserable even to maintain before her a semblance of industry. And suddenly, my aimless gaze, shifting about the muffled, uncoloured scene, was caught sharply and held amazed, incredulous, charmed, by an appearance so brilliant, so unexpected, that it was as if two tiny meteors of living flame had suddenly plunged through the dull atmosphere. It is impossible for me to describe adequately the vividness of those two small birds as they alighted among the sparse twigs of the prunus in the sad, misty half-light of the winter day. Not only their gay feathers, but their movements, their airy wing-sweeps, light as the pirouettes of extremely delicate dancers, gave an impression of unearthly buoyancy, of joyous animation that seemed to belong to visitants from a blither world.

I watched in astonishment, half believing myself the victim of a hallucination, expecting that next moment the birds would vanish away and leave the garden unilluminated as before. But still they remained, not approaching the food which I had thrown out of the window nor mingling with the other birds—now, by contrast, so drab and uninspired looking—but keeping to the straggly bare boughs of the prunus, sometimes flirting their wings as in an impish fan dance, sometimes comporting themselves with a mimic dignity, like cadets from the school of pages.

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Enchanted by the vision, I was about to make an appreciative comment aloud, when something made me glance at the servant who was still standing behind me. Although she, too, was looking out into the garden, the good woman's face expressed no particular interest, and it was clear to me that she did not see the two bright birds which were causing me such emotion.

What conclusion was I to draw from this? It seemed incredible that anyone could fail to observe those twin spots of colour, more striking than jewels on the grey January background. No, I could only presume that the birds were visible to me alone. That is the conclusion to which I have held ever since, for my ethereal visitors have not deserted me. It is true that several times in the day they will disappear, but always to return after a few hours, so that looking up from my papers I will suddenly be re-enchanted by the sight of their incongruous brightness in the midst of the dreary scene. Is this a good sign? I can almost bring myself to believe that it is; that an omen has been vouchsafed to me indicating that my troubles are nearly over and that things are at last going to take a more favourable turn.

Or am I just being superstitious, like an unlucky gambler who sees fate in the fall of a chip and symbols even in the patterns of the wallpaper?

Airing a Grievance

YESTERDAY I went to see my official advisor. I have visited him fairly often during the last three months in spite of the inconvenience and expense of these interviews. When one's affairs are in such a desperate state as mine, one is simply obliged to make use of any possible help; and this man D has been my last hope. He has been the only source of advice and assistance available to me, the only person with whom I could discuss my affairs; in fact, the only person to whom I could speak openly about the intolerable situation in which I have been placed. With everybody else I have had to be reserved and suspicious, remembering the motto, 'Silence is a friend that never betrays anyone.' For how can I tell whether the person to whom I am talking is not an enemy, or perhaps connected with my accusers or with those who will ultimately decide my fate?

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Even with D I have always been on my guard. From the start there have been days when something seemed to warn me that he was not altogether to be trusted: yet on other occasions he filled me with confidence; and what was to become of me if I were deprived even of his support—unsatisfactory as it might be? No, I really couldn't face the future entirely alone, and so, for my own sake, I *must* not distrust him.

I went to him confidently enough in the first place. His name was known to me as that of a man, still young, but already very near the top of his profession. I considered myself lucky to have been placed in his charge, notwithstanding the long journey which separated me from him; in those early days I did not anticipate having to visit him frequently. At the beginning, I was favourably impressed by his solid town house, and by the room in which he received me with its wine-coloured velvet curtains, its comfortable armchairs, its valuable-looking pieces of tapestry.

About the man himself I was not so certain. I have always believed that people of similar physical characteristics fall into corresponding mental groups, and he belonged to a type which I have constantly found unsympathetic. All the same, there could be no doubt as to his ability, he was excellently qualified to take charge of my case, and as I was only to meet him occasionally—and then in a professional and not in a social capacity—the fact of our being basically antipathetic to one another seemed

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of little significance. The main thing was that he should devote sufficient time to my affairs, that he should study my interests seriously; and this, to begin with, he seemed quite prepared to do.

It was only later, as things went from bad to worse, and I was obliged to consult him at shorter and shorter intervals, that I started to feel dubious about his goodwill towards me.

At our early meetings he always treated me with extreme consideration, even with deference, listening with the closest attention to everything I had to say, and in general impressing me with the grave importance of my case. Irrational as it may sound, it was this very attitude of his—originally so gratifying—which aroused my first vague suspicions. If he were really looking after my interests as thoroughly as he asserted, why was it necessary for him to behave in this almost propitiatory way which suggested either that he was trying to distract my attention from some possible negligence on his part, or that matters were not progressing as favourably as he affirmed? Yet, as I have previously mentioned, he had a knack of inspiring confidence, and with a few encouraging, convincing phrases he could dispel all my tenuous doubts and fears.

But presently another cause for suspicion pricked my uneasy mind. Ever since my introduction to D I had been aware of something dimly familiar about his face with the very black brows accentuating deep-set eyes into which I never looked long enough or directly enough to deter-

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mine their colour but which I assumed to be dark brown. From time to time my thoughts idly pursued the half-remembered image which I could never quite manage to bring into full consciousness. Without ever really giving much attention to the subject, I think I finally decided that D must remind me of some portrait seen long before in a gallery, most probably somewhere abroad; for his countenance was decidedly foreign, and contained the curious balance of latent sensuality and dominant intellectualism seen to the best advantage in some of the work of El Greco. Then one day, just as I was leaving his house, the complete memory which had eluded me for so long suddenly came to me with an impact sharp as a collision with a fellow pedestrian. It was no ancient portrait that D's face recalled to my mind, but a press photograph, and one that I had seen comparatively recently, one that was contained in an illustrated periodical which was probably still lying about somewhere in my living-room.

As soon as I got home I started to search through the papers which, in my preoccupied state of mind, I had allowed to accumulate in an untidy pile. It was not long before I found what I was looking for. The face of the young assassin, gazing darkly at me from the page, was, in all essentials, the same black-browed face that had confronted me a short time previously in the curtained seclusion of his handsome room.

Why did this accidental likeness make such an impression on me, I wonder? It is possible for a man to resem-

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ble a certain murderer in his outward appearance without possessing himself any violent tendencies; or if, as is more likely, he does possess them, without lacking sufficient restraint to hold them in check. One has only to think of D's responsible position, to look at his controlled, serene, intelligent face, to realize the fantastic nature of the comparison. The whole sequence of ideas is utterly grotesque, utterly illogical. And yet there it is; I can't banish it from my mind.

One must remember, too, that the man in the photograph was no common assassin, but a fanatic, a man of extraordinarily strong convictions, who killed not for personal gain, but for a principle, for what he considered to be the right. Is this an argument against D or in his favour? Sometimes I think one way, sometimes the other: I am quite unable to decide.

As a result of these prejudices—and of course there were others which would take too long to write down here—I decided to put my case in the hands of a different advisor. This was a serious step, not to be taken lightly, and I expended a great deal of time considering the subject before I finally sent off my application. Even after I had posted the letter I could not feel at all sure that I had done the right thing. Certainly, I had heard of people who changed their advisors, not once but several times, and of some who seemed to spend their whole time running from one to another; but I had always rather despised them for their instability, and the general feeling in the public mind

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was that the cases of these individuals would terminate badly. Still, on the whole, I felt that the exceptional circumstances warranted the change where I was concerned. In wording my letter of application I was particularly careful to avoid any statement that could possibly be taken as detrimental to D, merely stressing the point of how expensive and awkward it was for me to be continually undertaking the long journey to his house, and asking for my case to be transferred to someone in the university town near my home.

For several days I waited anxiously for an answer, only to receive at the end of that time a bundle of complicated forms to be filled up in duplicate. These I completed, sent off, and then waited again. How much of my life lately has consisted of this helpless, soul-destroying suspense! The waiting goes on and on, day after day, week after week, and yet one never gets used to it. Well, at last the reply came back on the usual stiff, pale blue paper, the very sight of which I have learned to dread. My request was refused. No explanation was given as to why a favour which had been granted to hundreds of people should be denied to me. But of course one can't expect explanations from these officials; their conduct is always completely autocratic and incalculable. All they condescended to add to the categorical negative was the statement that I was at liberty to dispense altogether with the services of an advisor should I prefer to do so.

I was so cast down after the receipt of this arbitrary

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communication that for two whole weeks I remained at home, absolutely inactive. I had not even the heart to go out of doors, but stayed in my room, saying that I was ill and seeing no one except the servant who brought my meals. Indeed, the plea of illness was no untruth, for I felt utterly wretched in body as well as in mind, exhausted, listless and depressed as if after a severe fever.

Alone in my room, I pondered endlessly over the situation. Why, in heaven's name, had the authorities refused my application when I knew for a fact that other people were allowed to change their advisors at will? Did the refusal mean that there was some special aspect of my case which differentiated it from the others? If this were so, it must surely indicate that a more serious view was taken of mine than of the rest, as I was to be denied ordinary privileges. If only I knew—if only I could find out something definite! With extreme care I drafted another letter and sent it off to the official address, politely, I'm afraid even servilely, beseeching an answer to my questions. What a fool I was to humiliate myself so uselessly, most likely for the benefit of a roomful of junior clerks who doubtless had a good laugh over my laboriously thought-out composition before tossing it into the waste-paper basket! Naturally, no reply was forthcoming.

I waited a few days longer in a state of alternate agitation and despair that became hourly more unbearable. At last—yesterday—I reached a point where I could no longer endure so much tension. There was only one person in the

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whole world to whom I could unburden my mind, only one person who might conceivably be able to relieve my suspense, and that was D who was still, when all was said, my official advisor.

On the spur of the moment I decided to go and see him again. I was in a condition in which to take action of some sort had become an urgent necessity. I put on my things and went out to catch the train.

The sun was shining, and I was astonished to see that during the period I had remained indoors, too preoccupied with my troubles even to look out of the window, the season seemed to have passed from winter to spring. When last I had looked objectively at the hills I had seen a Breughel-like landscape of snow and sepia trees, but now the snow had vanished except for a narrow whiteness bordering the northern edge of the highest point of the wood. From the windows of the train I saw hares playing among the fine, emerald-green lines of the winter wheat; the newly ploughed earth in the valleys looked rich as velvet. I opened the carriage window and felt the soft rush of air which, not far away, carried the plover in their strange, reeling love dance. When the train slowed down between high banks I saw the glossy yellow cups of celandines in the grass.

Even in the city there was a feeling of gladness, of renewed life. People walked briskly towards appointments or dawdled before the shop windows with contented faces. Some whistled or sang quietly to themselves under

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cover of the traffic's noise, some swung their arms, some thrust their hands deep in their pockets, others had already discarded their overcoats. Flowers were being sold at the street corners. Although the sunlight could not reach to the bottom of the deep streets the house-tops were brightly gilded, and many eyes were raised automatically to the burnished roofs and the soft, promising sky.

I, too, was influenced by the beneficent atmosphere of the day. As I walked along, I determined to put the whole matter of the letter and its answer frankly before D, to conceal nothing from him, but to ask him what he thought lay behind this new official move. After all, I had not done anything that should offend him; my request for a change of advisor was perfectly justifiable on practical grounds. Nor had I any real reason for distrusting him. On the contrary, it was now more than ever essential that I should have implicit faith in him, since he alone was empowered to advance my cause. Surely, if only for the sake of his own high reputation, he would do everything possible to help me.

I reached his house and stood waiting for the door to be opened. A beggar was standing close to the area railings holding a tray of matches in front of him, a thin, youngish man of middle-class appearance, carefully shaved, and wearing a very old, neat, dark blue suit. Of course, the whole town is full of destitute people, one sees them everywhere, but I couldn't help wishing that I

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had not caught sight, just at this moment, of this particular man who looked as though he might be a schoolmaster fallen on evil days. We were so close together that I expected him to beg from me; but instead of that he stood without even glancing in my direction, without even troubling to display his matches to the passers-by, an expression of complete apathy on his face that in an instant began to dissipate for me all the optimistic influence of the day.

As I went inside the door, some part of my attention remained fixed on the respectable-looking beggar, with whom I seemed in some way to connect myself. The thought crossed my mind that perhaps one day I, no longer able to work, my small fortune absorbed in advisor's fees, my friends irreparably alienated, might be placed in the same situation as he.

The manservant informed me that D had been called out on urgent business but that he would be back before long. I was shown into a room and asked to wait. Alone here, all my depression, briefly banished by the sun, began to return. After the spring-like air outside, the room felt close and oppressive, but a sort of gloomy inertia prevented me from opening one of the thickly draped windows. An enormous grandfather clock in the corner didactically ticked the minutes away. Listening to that insistent ticking, a sense of abysmal futility gradually overwhelmed me. The fact of D's absence, that he should choose today of all days to keep me waiting in this dismal

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room, created the worst possible impression on my overwrought nerves. A feeling of despair, as if every effort I might make would inevitably be in vain, took possession of me. I sat lethargically on a straight-backed, uncomfortable chair with a leather seat, gazing indifferently at the clock, the hands of which had now completed a half circle since my arrival. I thought of going away, but lacked even the energy to move. An apathy, similar to that displayed by the beggar outside, had come over me. I felt convinced that already, before I had even spoken to D, the visit had been a failure.

Suddenly the servant returned to say that D was at my disposal. But now I no longer wanted to see him; it was only with the greatest difficulty that I forced myself to stand up and follow the man into the room where my advisor sat at his desk. I don't know why the sight of him sitting in his accustomed pose should have suggested to me the idea that he had not really been called out at all, but had been sitting there the whole time, keeping me waiting for some ulterior motive of his own; perhaps to produce in me just such a sensation of despair as I now experienced.

We shook hands; I sat down and began to speak, driving my sluggish tongue to frame words that seemed useless even before they were uttered. Was it my fancy that D listened less attentively than on previous occasions, fidgeting with his fountain pen or with the papers in front of him? It was not long before something in his at-

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titude convinced me that he was thoroughly acquainted with the whole story of my letter of application and its sequel. No doubt the authorities had referred the matter to him—with what bias, with what implication? And now my indifferent mood changed to one of suspicion and alarm as I tried to guess what this intercommunication portended.

I heard myself advancing the old argument of inconvenience, explaining in hesitant tones that in order to spend less than an hour with him I must be nearly six hours on the double journey. And then I heard him answer that I should no longer have cause to complain of this tedious travelling, as he was just about to start on a holiday of indefinite length and would undertake no further work until his return.

If I felt despairing before you can imagine how this information affected me. Somehow I took leave of him, somehow found my way through the streets, somehow reached the train which carried me across the now sunless landscape.

How hard it is to sit at home with nothing to do but wait. To wait—the most difficult thing in the whole world. To wait—with no living soul in whom to confide one's doubt's, one's fears, one's relentless hopes. To wait—not knowing whether D's words are to be construed into an official edict depriving me of all assistance, or whether he intends to take up my case again in the distant future, or whether the case is already concluded. To wait—only

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to wait—without even the final merciful deprivation of hope.

Sometimes I think that some secret court must have tried and condemned me, unheard, to this heavy sentence.

Just Another Failure

I WAS feeling very anxious and unhappy when I left D's house, angry with myself and with him as well because he had refused to help me. It was quite natural that I should have gone to him in my distress. He certainly knows more than any living person about me and my affairs, he is a clever man whose judgment is to be trusted, and also, on account of his profession, he has special qualifications for advising on problems of this sort.

'Why won't you tell me what I ought to do?' I asked him indignantly at the end of our interview. 'Why can't you give me a definite line of conduct and save me from all this suffering and uncertainty?'

'That's exactly what I don't intend to do,' he answered me. 'The trouble with you is that you're always avoiding responsibility. This is a case where you must act on your

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own initiative. I'm sorry if I appear unkind, but you must believe me when I say that it will do you far more good in the long run to see this through by yourself than blindly to follow outside advice—whether mine or anyone else's . . .'

I was so hurt by D's unexpected attitude that I believe I was thinking more about him than about my own trouble as I went out into the wintry London twilight. In my imagination I kept hearing his agreeable, soft, sympathetic voice, so out of keeping with the heartless words it was speaking, and seeing his dark-browed face which always vaguely reminded me of some other face I had seen long ago, I couldn't remember quite where, perhaps in a painting or a newspaper photograph. I felt mortified at having asked him for a favour which he was unwilling to give. I was ashamed of having presumed too much on a friendship which might, all the time, have been a very one-sided affair. Quite possibly I had allowed my own wishes to delude me into mistaking that sympathetic manner of his for the sign of some warmth of feeling towards me personally. Now that I came to consider it, I could not recall a single occasion during our acquaintanceship when his behaviour had expressed anything more than the generalized benevolence of a humane, understanding and intelligent man. The idea of having made such a mistake was specially distressing to me because I am by nature very reserved and afraid of receiving rebuffs from the people around me. Now I felt that I

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had given myself away and that D must be despising me or laughing at me; though really I knew perfectly well that he understood the workings of the mind and heart too clearly to be guilty of that sort of cruelty.

Although these humiliating thoughts were far from pleasant, I clung to them as long as possible, actually exaggerating to myself my own recent mortification, as if my relations with D were of more importance than anything else in the world. But of course I couldn't succeed in driving the real problem out of my head. It was there all the time, like a toothache which gradually grows more and more insistent until it finally drowns every other sensation.

What was I going to do about the interview at which I was shortly supposed to be present? The questions I had so desperately put to D and which he had refused to answer, now presented themselves to me with imperious urgency. Should I go to the hotel, as I had agreed to do, to meet my husband and the young woman whom he proposed to introduce into our home? Was I capable of accepting emotionally the situation to which, in discussion, I had already given an intellectual acceptance? With what smile, with what words, should I greet this stranger, younger, more beautiful, more fortunate than I? With what unnaturally hardened gaze should I observe glances, gestures, long familiar to my heart, directed towards a new recipient?

The recurring sequence of these questions, to which I

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seemed fundamentally incapable of replying—to which, indeed, I did not hope or expect to find any answers—began to assume by its very monotony a quality of horror and torment impossible to describe. I began to feel that if I did not succeed in breaking out of the loathsome circle I should suddenly become mad, scream, perpetrate some shocking act of violence in the open street. But worst of all was the knowledge that the laws of my temperament would forbid me even a relief of this kind; that I was inexorably imprisoned behind my own determination to display no emotion whatever.

I was cold and tired. I realized that I must have been walking for a long time without taking any notice of my direction. Now I saw that I was in a street which I did not know very well. Night had fallen, the lights glowed mistily through a thin haze. I looked at my watch and saw that the hour arranged for the interview had almost arrived.

No sooner had I discovered this than a change seemed to come over everything. It was as though, in some mysterious way, I had become the central point around which the night scene revolved. People walking on the pavement looked at me as they passed; some with pity, some with detached interest, some with more morbid curiosity. Some appeared to make small, concealed signs, but whether these were intended for warning or encouragement I could not be sure. The windows, lighted or unlighted, were like eyes more or less piercing, but all

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focused upon me. The houses, the traffic, everything in sight seemed to be watching to see what I would do.

I turned round and began to walk quickly in the direction of the hotel. I hurried in order not to be late for my appointment, but the idea of taking a taxi for some reason never occurred to me. The attention of the city accompanied me as I went, the bright eyes of the cars followed me faithfully, with speculation or foreknowledge. In my head I could hear D's pleasant voice telling me that I must act on my own initiative. His face, with the black eyebrows that always recalled an elusive memory, floated before me, no larger than a mouse, and then vanished away.

I came to the hotel entrance which was brilliantly lighted. People were going in and out of the revolving doors. I walked slower and finally stood still. Even now I half believed that I should go inside, keep the appointment, and behave creditably, too, at the interview. But then my feet were carrying me away, and I knew, what I think the watching eyes had known all the time, that rather than face the situation I would escape anywhere, into no matter what shame, what guilt, what despair.

Shall I be able to endure my self-condemnation now? But that is only a rhetorical question, because, although it is difficult to live with so much unhappiness and so many failures, to die seems to be harder still.

The Summons

R is one of my oldest friends. Once, long ago, we used to live in flats in the same building, and then, of course, I saw a great deal of him. Afterwards the circumstances of our lives altered, wider and wider distances divided us, we could only meet rarely and with difficulty—perhaps only once or twice in a whole year—and then only for a few hours or at most for a week end. In spite of this our friendship—which was purely platonic—continued unbroken, although it was naturally not possible to maintain quite the original degree of intimacy. I still felt that a close and indestructible understanding existed between R and myself: an understanding which had its roots in some fundamental character similarity and was therefore exempt from the accidents of change.

A particularly long interval had elapsed since our last

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encounter, so I was delighted when we were at length able to arrange a new meeting. It was settled that we should meet in town, have dinner together, and travel by train later in the evening to the suburb where R was living.

Our appointment was for seven o'clock. I was the first to arrive at the restaurant, and, as soon as I had put my bag in the cloakroom, I went upstairs to the little bar which I often visited and where I felt quite at home. I noticed that a waiter was helping the usual barman, and in the idle way in which one's thoughts run when one is waiting for somebody, I wondered why an assistant had been brought in that evening, for there were not many customers in the bar.

R appeared almost immediately. We greeted each other with happiness, and at once fell into a conversation which might have been broken off only the previous day.

We sat down and ordered our drinks. It was the waiter and not the barman who attended to us. As the man put down the two glasses on the table, I was struck by his ugliness. I know that one should not allow oneself to be too much influenced by appearances, but there was something in this fellow's aspect by which I couldn't help feeling repelled. The word 'troglodyte' came into my head as I looked at him. I don't know what the cave dwellers really looked like, but I feel that they ought to have been very much like this small, thick-set, colourless individual. Without being actually deformed in any way, he seemed curiously misshapen; perhaps it was just that he was badly

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proportioned and rather stooping. He was not an old man, but his face conveyed a queer impression of antiquity; of something hoary and almost obscene, like a survival of the primitive world. I remember particularly his wide, grey, unshaped lips which looked incapable of anything so civilized as a smile.

Extraordinary as it seems, I must have been paying more attention to the waiter than to my friend, for it was not until after we had lifted our glasses that I noticed a certain slight alteration in R's appearance. He had put on a little weight since our previous meeting and looked altogether more prosperous. He was wearing a new suit, too, and when I complimented him upon it, he told me that he had bought it that day out of a considerable sum of money which he had received as an advance on his latest book.

I was very glad to hear that things were going so well with him. Yet at the same time a small arrow of jealousy pierced my heart. My own affairs were in such a very bad way that it was impossible for me not to contrast my failure with his success, which seemed in some indefinable manner to render him less accessible to me, although his attitude was as friendly and charming as it had ever been.

When we had finished our drinks we went down to the restaurant for dinner. Here I was surprised, and, I must admit, rather unreasonably annoyed, to see the same waiter approaching us with the menu. 'What, are you working down here as well as upstairs?' I asked him, irritably enough. R must have been astonished by my dis-

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agreeable tone, for he looked sharply at me. The man answered quite politely that his work in the bar was finished for the evening and that he was now transferred to the restaurant. I would have suggested moving to a table served by a different waiter, but I felt too ashamed to do so. I was very mortified at having made such an irrational and unamiable display of feeling in front of R, who, I felt sure, must be criticizing me adversely.

It was a bad start to the meal. All on account of this confounded waiter, the evening had acquired an unfortunate tendency, like a run of bad luck at cards which one cannot break. Although we talked without any constraint, some essential spark, which on other occasions had always been struck from our mutual contact, now withheld from us its warmth. It even seemed to me that the food was not so good as usual.

I was glad when the waiter brushed away the crumbs with his napkin and set the coffee before us. Now at last we should be relieved of the burden of his inauspicious proximity. But in a few minutes he came back, and putting his repulsive face close to mine, informed me that I was wanted outside in the hall.

'But that's impossible—it must be a mistake. Nobody knows I'm here,' I protested, while he unemphatically and obstinately insisted that someone was asking for me.

R suggested that I had better go and investigate. So out I went to the hall where several people were sitting or standing about, waiting to meet their friends. I could

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see at a glance that they were all strangers to me. The waiter led me up to a man of late middle age, neatly and inconspicuously dressed, with a nondescript, roundish face and a small grey moustache. He might have been a bank manager or some such respectable citizen. I think he was bald-headed. He bowed, and greeted me by my name.

'How do you know who I am?' I asked in amazement. I was positive that I had never seen him before; yet how could I be quite certain? His was one of those undistinguished faces which one might see many times without remembering it.

In reply, he began to reel off quite a long speech; but all so fast and in such a low voice that I could only catch a word here and there and these did not make sense. Totally unable to follow what he was saying, I only vaguely got the impression that he was asking me to accompany him somewhere. Suddenly I saw that the suitcase standing on the floor near his feet was my own.

'What are you doing with my bag? How did you get it . . . ? The attendant had no right to let you take it out of the cloakroom,' I said angrily, stretching down for the handle. But before I could reach it he picked up the bag himself with a deprecating smile, and carried it out of the door.

I followed him, full of indignation and eager to reclaim my property. In the street, pedestrians came between us and I was unable to catch up with him until he had turned the corner into a narrow alley full of parked cars. It oc-

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curred to me that the man was out of his mind: I couldn't believe he intended to steal the suitcase; he looked far too respectable for that.

'What's the meaning of all this? Where are you taking my bag?' I said, catching hold of his sleeve. We were just beside a large black limousine which stood in the rank of waiting cars. My companion rested the bag on the running board.

'I see that you haven't understood me,' he said, and now for the first time he spoke clearly so that I could really hear what he was saying. 'Here is my authorization. It was merely out of consideration for you that I refrained from producing it inside where everyone would have seen it.' He took a pale blue form out of his pocket and held it towards me. But in the uncertain cross light from the street lamps and the cars I only had time to make out some unintelligible legal phrases, and my own name embellished with elaborate scrolls and flourishes in the old-fashioned style, before he hastily put the stiff paper away again.

I was opening my mouth to ask him to let me look at it properly, when the chauffeur of the black car suddenly climbed out of the driving seat and picked up my case with the clear intention of putting it inside the vehicle.

'That belongs to me—kindly leave it alone!' I commanded, at the same time wondering what I should do if the man refused to obey my order. But, as if the whole matter were of perfect indifference to him, he at once

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let go the handle and returned to his seat where he immediately appeared to become absorbed in an evening newspaper.

Now for the first time I observed the official coat-of-arms emblazoned on the glossy black door panel of the car, and I saw, too, that the windows were made of frosted glass. And for the first time I was aware of a faint anxiety; not because I thought for an instant that the situation was serious, but because I had always heard what a tedious, interminable business it was to extricate oneself from official red tape once one had become even remotely involved with it.

Feeling that there was not a moment to be lost, that I must make my explanations and escape before I became any further entangled in this ridiculous mesh of misunderstanding, I began to talk to the elderly man who was standing patiently beside me. I spoke quietly and in a reasonable tone, telling him that I was not blaming him in the least, but that a mistake had certainly been made; I was not the person mentioned on the document he had shown me which probably referred to somebody of the same name. After all, my name was not an uncommon one; I could think of at least two people offhand—a film actress and a writer of short stories—who were called by it. When I had finished speaking I looked at him anxiously to see how he had taken my arguments. He appeared to be impressed, nodded his head once or twice in a reflective way, but made no reply. Encouraged by his attitude, I decided

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on a bold move, picked up my suitcase and walked rapidly back to the restaurant. He did not attempt to stop me, nor, as far as I could see, was he following me, and I congratulated myself on having escaped so easily. It seemed as if boldness were what was most needed in dealing with officialdom.

R was still sitting at the table where I had left him. My spirits had now risen high. I felt cheerful, lively and full of confidence as I sat down—bringing my bag with me this time—and related the peculiar incidents that had just taken place. I told the story quite well, smiling at the absurdity of it; I really think I made it sound very amusing. But when, at the end, I looked for R's smile of appreciation, I was astonished to see that he remained grave. He did not look at me, but sat with downcast eyes, drawing an invisible pattern on the cloth with his coffee spoon.

'Well—don't you think it was funny that they should make such a mistake?' I asked, trying to force his amusement.

Now indeed he looked up at me, but with such a serious face and with eyes so troubled that all my assurance and good spirits suddenly evaporated into thin air. Just at that moment I noticed the ugly waiter hovering near, almost as if he were trying to overhear our conversation, and now a feeling of dread slowly distilled itself in my veins.

'Why don't you say something?' I burst out in agitation as R still remained silent. 'Surely it's not possible that you

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think—that there was no mistake . . . ? That I am the person they really wanted?’

My friend put down the spoon and laid his hand on my arm. The affectionate touch, so full of sympathy and compassion, demoralized me even more than his words.

‘I think, if I were you,’ he said slowly and as if with difficulty, ‘I think I would go and find out just what the charge is against you. After all, you will easily be able to prove your identity if there has really been a mistake. It will only create a bad impression if you refuse to go.’

Now that I have so much time on my hands in which to think over past events, I sometimes wonder whether I was right: whether I would not have done better to keep my freedom as long as possible and even at the risk of prejudicing the final outcome of the affair. But at the time I allowed him to persuade me. I have always had a high opinion of his judgment, and I accepted it then. I felt, too, that I should forfeit his respect if I evaded the issue. But when we went out into the hall and I saw the neat, inconspicuous man still impassively, impersonally waiting, I began to wonder, as I have wondered ever since, whether the good opinion of anybody in the whole world is worth all that I have had to suffer and must still go on suffering—for how long; oh, for how long?

At Night

How slowly the minutes pass in the winter night: and yet the hours themselves do not seem so long. Already the church clock is calling the hour again in its dull country voice that sounds half stupefied with the cold. I lie in bed, and like a well-drilled prisoner, an old-timer, I resign myself to the familiar pattern of sleeplessness. It is a routine I know only too well.

My jailer is in the room with me, but he cannot accuse me of being rebellious or troublesome. I lie as still as if the bed were my coffin, not wishing to attract his attention. Perhaps if I don't move for a whole hour he will let me sleep.

Naturally, I cannot put on the light. The room is as dark as a box lined with black velvet that someone has dropped into a frozen well. Everything is quiet except when the

At Night

house-bones creak in the frost or a lump of snow slides from the roof with a sound like a stealthy sigh. I open my eyes in the darkness. The eyelids feel stiff, as if tears had congealed upon them in rime. If only I could see my jailer it would not be so bad. It would be a relief to know just where he is keeping watch. At first I fancy that he is standing like a dark curtain beside the door. The ceiling is lifted off the room as if it were the lid of a box and he is towering up, taller than an elm tree, up towards the icy mountains of the moon. But then it seems to me that I have made a mistake and that he is crouching on the floor quite close to me.

An iron band has been clamped round my head, and just at this moment the jailer strikes the cold metal a ringing blow which sends needles of pain into my eye sockets. He is showing his disapproval of my inquiring thoughts; or perhaps he merely wishes to assert his authority over me. At any rate, I hastily shut my eyes again, and lie motionless, hardly daring to breathe, under the bed-clothes.

To occupy my mind I begin to run through the formulae which the foreign doctor taught me when I first came under suspicion. I repeat to myself that there is no such person as a *victim* of sleeplessness, that I stay awake simply because I prefer to continue my thoughts. I try to imagine myself in the skin of a newborn infant, without future or past. If the jailer looks into my mind now, I think, he cannot raise any objection to what is going on there. The

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face of the Dutch doctor, thin and sharp and hard like the face of a sea captain, passes before me. Suddenly a cock crows near by with a sound fantastic, unearthly, in this world still locked in darkness and frost. The cock's crow flowers sharply in three flaming points, a fiery fleur-de-lis blossoming momentarily in the black field of night.

Now I am almost on the point of falling asleep. My body feels limp, my thoughts start to run together. My thoughts have become strands of weed, of no special colour, slowly undulating in colourless water.

My left hand twitches and again I am wide awake. It is the striking of the church clock that has called me back to my jailer's presence. Did I count five strokes or four? I am too tired to be certain. In any case, the night will be over soon. The iron band on my head has tightened and slipped down so that it presses against my eyeballs. And yet the pain does not seem so much to come from this cruel pressure as to emanate from somewhere inside my skull, from the brain cortex: it is the brain itself which is aching.

All at once I feel desperate, outraged. Why am I alone doomed to spend nights of torment, with an unseen jailer, when all the rest of the world sleeps peacefully? By what laws have I been tried and condemned, without my knowledge, and to such a heavy sentence, too, when I do not even know of what or by whom I have been indicted? A wild impulse comes to me to protest, to de-

At Night

mand a hearing, to refuse to submit any longer to such injustice.

But to whom can one appeal when one does not even know where to find the judge? How can one ever hope to prove one's innocence when there is no means of knowing of what one has been accused? No, there's no justice for people like us in the world: all that we can do is to suffer as bravely as possible and put our oppressors to shame.

An Unpleasant Reminder

LAST summer, or perhaps it was only the other day—I find it so difficult to keep count of time now—I had a very disagreeable experience.

The day was ill-omened from the beginning; one of those unlucky days when every little detail seems to go wrong and one finds oneself engaged in a perpetual and infuriating strife with inanimate objects. How truly fiendish the sub-human world can be on these occasions! How every atom, every cell, every molecule, seems to be leagued in a maddening conspiracy against the unfortunate being who has incurred its obscure displeasure! This time, to make matters worse, the weather itself had decided to join in the fray. The sky was covered with a dull grey lid of cloud, the mountains had turned sour prussian blue, swarms of mosquitoes infested the shores of the lake. It was one of those sunless summer days that are infinitely

An Unpleasant Reminder

more depressing than the bleakest winter weather; days when the whole atmosphere feels stale, and the world seems like a dustbin full of old battered tins and fish scales and decayed cabbage stalks.

Of course, I was behindhand with everything all day long. I had to race through my changing for the game of tennis I had arranged to play in the afternoon, and as it was I was about ten minutes late. The other players had arrived and were having some practice shots as they waited for me. I was annoyed to see that they had chosen the middle court which is the one I like least of the three available for our use. When I asked why they had not taken the upper one, which is far the best, they replied that it had already been reserved for some official people. Then I suggested going to the lower court; but they grumbled and said that it was damp on account of the overhanging trees. As there was no sun, I could not advance the principal objection to the middle court, which is that it lies the wrong way for the afternoon light. There was nothing for it but to begin playing.

The next irritating occurrence was that instead of keeping to my usual partner, David Post, it was for some reason decided that I should play with a man named Müller whom I hardly knew and who turned out to be a very inferior player. He was a bad loser as well, for as soon as it became clear that our opponents were too strong for us, he lost all interest in the game and behaved in a thoroughly unsporting manner. He was continually nod-

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ding and smiling to the people who stopped to watch us, paying far more attention to the onlookers than to the game. At other times, while the rest of us were collecting the balls or I was receiving the service, he would move away and stare at the main road which runs near, watching the cars as if he expected the arrival of someone he knew. In the end it became almost impossible to keep him on the court at all; he was always wandering off and having to be recalled by our indignant shouts. It seemed futile to continue the game in these circumstances, and at the end of the first set we abandoned play by mutual consent.

You can imagine that I was not in a particularly good mood when I got back to my room. Besides being in a state of nervous irritation I was hot and tired, and my chief object was to have a bath and change into fresh clothes as soon as possible. So I was not at all pleased to find a complete stranger waiting for me to whom I should have to attend before I did anything else.

She was a young woman of about my own age, quite attractive in a rather hard way, and neatly dressed in a tan linen suit, white shoes, and a hat with a little feather. She spoke well, but with a slight accent that I couldn't quite place: afterwards I came to the conclusion that she was a colonial of some sort.

I invited her to sit down as politely as I could and asked what I could do for her. She refused the chair, and, instead of giving a straightforward answer, spoke evasively, touching the racquet which I still held in my hand, and making

An Unpleasant Reminder

some inquiry about the strings. It seemed quite preposterous to me in the state I was in then to find myself involved with an unknown woman in an aimless discussion of the merits of different makes of racquets, and I'm afraid I closed the subject rather abruptly and asked her point-blank to state her business.

But then she looked at me in such a peculiar way, saying in quite a different voice, 'You know, I'm really sorry I have to give you this,' and I saw that she was holding out a box towards me, just an ordinary small, round, black pill box that might have come from any chemist. And all at once I felt frightened and wished we could return to the conversation about tennis racquets. But there was no going back.

I'm not sure now whether she told me in so many words or whether I simply deduced that the judgment which I had awaited so long had at last been passed upon me and that this was the end. I remember—of all things!—feeling a little aggrieved because the sentence was conveyed to me in such a casual, unostentatious way, almost as if it were a commonplace event. I opened the box and saw the four white pellets inside.

'Now?' I asked. And I found that I was looking at my visitor with altered eyes, seeing her as an official messenger whose words had acquired a fatal portentousness.

She nodded without speaking. There was a pause. 'The sooner the better,' she said. I could feel the perspiration, still damp on me from the game, turning cold as ice.

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'But at least I must have a bath first!' I cried out in a frantic way, clutching the clammy neck of my tennis shirt. 'I can't stay like this—it's indecent—undignified!'

She told me that would be allowed as a special concession.

Into the bathroom I went like a doomed person, and turned on the taps. I don't remember anything about the bath; I suppose I must have washed and dried myself mechanically and put on my mauve silk dressing gown with the blue sash. Perhaps I even combed my hair and powdered my face. All I remember is the little black box confronting me all the time from the shelf over the basin where I had put it down.

At last I brought myself to the point of opening it and holding the four pills on the palm of my hand; I lifted them to my mouth. And then the most ridiculous contretemps occurred—there was no drinking glass in the bathroom. It must have got broken; or else the maid must have taken it away and forgotten to bring it back. What was I to do? I couldn't swallow even four such small pellets without a drink, and I couldn't endure any further delay. In despair I filled the soapdish with water and swallowed them down somehow. I hadn't even waited to wash out the slimy layer of soap at the bottom and the taste nearly made me sick. For several minutes I stood retching and choking and clinging to the edge of the basin. Then I sat down on the stool. I waited with my heart beating as violently as a hammer in my throat. I waited; and nothing

An Unpleasant Reminder

happened; absolutely nothing whatever. I didn't even feel drowsy or faint.

But it was not till I got back to the other room and found my visitor gone that I realized that the whole episode had been a cruel hoax, just a reminder of what is in store for me.

Machines in the Head

THERE is some quite trivial, distant noise; a sound, moreover, which has nothing to do with me, to which there is not the slightest need for me to pay any attention: yet it suffices to wake me, and in no gentle way, either, but savagely, violently, shockingly, like an air-raid alarm. The clock is just striking seven. I have been asleep perhaps one hour, perhaps two. Roused in this brutal fashion, I jump up just in time to catch a glimpse of the vanishing hem of sleep as, like a dark scarf maliciously snatched away, it glides over the foot of the bed and disappears in a flash under the closed door. Useless, quite futile, to dash after it in pursuit: I am awake now for good, or rather, for bad; the wheels, my masters, are already vibrating with incipient motion; the whole mechanism is preparing to begin the monotonous, hateful functioning of which I am the dispirited slave.

Machines in the Head

'Stop! Wait a little—it's so early! Give me a little respite!' I cry, although I know it is quite in vain. 'Only let me have a little more sleep—an hour—half an hour—that's all I ask.'

What's the good of appealing to senseless machinery? The cogs are moving, the engines are slowly gathering momentum, a low humming noise is perceptible even now. How well I recognize every sound, every tremor of the laborious start. The loathsome familiarity of the routine is almost the worst part of it, intolerable and inescapable at the same time, like a sickness inside the blood. This morning it drives me to rebellion, to madness; I want to batter my head on the walls, to shatter my head with bullets, to beat the machines into pulp, into powder, along with my skull.

'It's horribly unjust!' I hear myself calling out—to what, to whom, heaven alone knows. 'One can't work so many hours on so little sleep. Doesn't anyone know or care that I'm dying here amongst all these levers and wheels? Can't somebody save me? I haven't really done anything wrong—I feel terribly ill—I can hardly open my eyes—'

And it's true that my head aches abominably and I feel on the point of collapse.

Suddenly I notice that the light which hurts my eyes so much comes from the sun. Yes, the sun is actually shining outside; instead of snow there is dew sparkling all over the grass, crocuses have spread their neat, low fire of symmetrical flames under the rosebushes. Winter has gone; it is spring. In astonishment I hurry to the window and look

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out. What has happened, then? I feel dazed, bewildered. Is it possible that I am still living in a world where the sun shines and flowers appear in the springtime? I thought I had been exiled from all that long ago. I rub my tired eyes; still there is sunlight, the rooks flap noisily about their nests in the old elms, and now I hear how sweetly the small birds are singing. But even as I stand there all these happy things start to recede, to become phantasmal, transparent as the texture of dream plasma, banished by the monstrous mechanical outlines of pulleys, wheels, shafts, which in their orderly, remorseless and too-well-known evolutions now with increasing insistence demand my attention.

Like a fading mirage in the background I can still, straining my eyes, faintly discern the sunlit grass, the blue, blue arches of sky across which a green shape flies in remote parabola, the ghost of an emerald dagger spectrally flung.

'Oh, stop—stop! Give me another minute—just a minute longer to see the green woodpecker!' I implore, with my hands already, in automatic obedience, starting to perform their detested task.

What does a machine care about green woodpeckers? The wheels revolve faster, the pistons slide smoothly in their cylinders, the noise of machinery fills the whole world. Long since cowed into slavish submission, I still draw from some inexorable source the strength to continue my hard labour although I am scarcely able to stand on my feet.

Machines in the Head

In a polished surface of metal I happen to notice my reflected face; it wears a pale, beaten lonely look, eyes looking out at nothing with an expression of fear, frightened and lonely in a nightmare world. Something, I don't know what, makes me think of my childhood; I remember myself as a schoolchild sitting at a hard wooden desk, and then as a little girl with thick, fair, wind-tossed hair, feeding the swans in a park. And it seems both strange and sad to me that all those childish years were spent in preparation for this—that, forgotten by everybody, with a beaten face, I should serve machinery in a place far away from the sun.

There Is No End

*'Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
Whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend into heaven thou art there.
If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning, even there thy
hand shall lead me.'*

I CAN'T think properly these days, I find it difficult to remember, but I suppose those words were written about Jehovah, though they apply just as well to my enemy—if that is what I should call him.

'If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.' That particular phrase rings in my brain with a horrid aptness: for certainly I have made my bed in hell and certainly he is here with me. He is near all the time although I do not see him. Only sometimes, very early in the morning before

There Is No End

it has got light, I seem to catch a glimpse of a half-familiar face peering in at the window; but it is always snatched away so quickly that I have no time to recognize it. And just once, one evening, the door of my room was suddenly opened a little way and somebody glanced in through the crack, glanced in, and then passed hurriedly out of sight down the corridor. Perhaps that was he.

Why does he keep his eye on me like this now that he has accomplished his purpose and brought about my destruction? It can't be to make sure that I don't escape; oh, no, there's no possibility of that, he need not have the slightest fear. Is it just to gloat over my ruin? But no, I don't think that's the reason, either, for if that were so he would come more often and at times more humiliating to me when I am in the deepest despair.

Somehow I have the impression from those vague glimpses I have caught of his face that it wears a look that is not vindictive, but kindred, almost as though he were related closely to me by some similarity of brain or blood. And of late the idea has come to me—fantastic enough, I admit—that possibly after all he is not my personal enemy, but a sort of projection of myself, an identification of myself with the cruelty and destructiveness of the world. On a planet where there is so much natural conflict may there not very well exist in certain individuals an overwhelming affinity with frustration and death? And may this not result in an actual materialization, a sort of eidolon moving about the world?

Asylum Piece

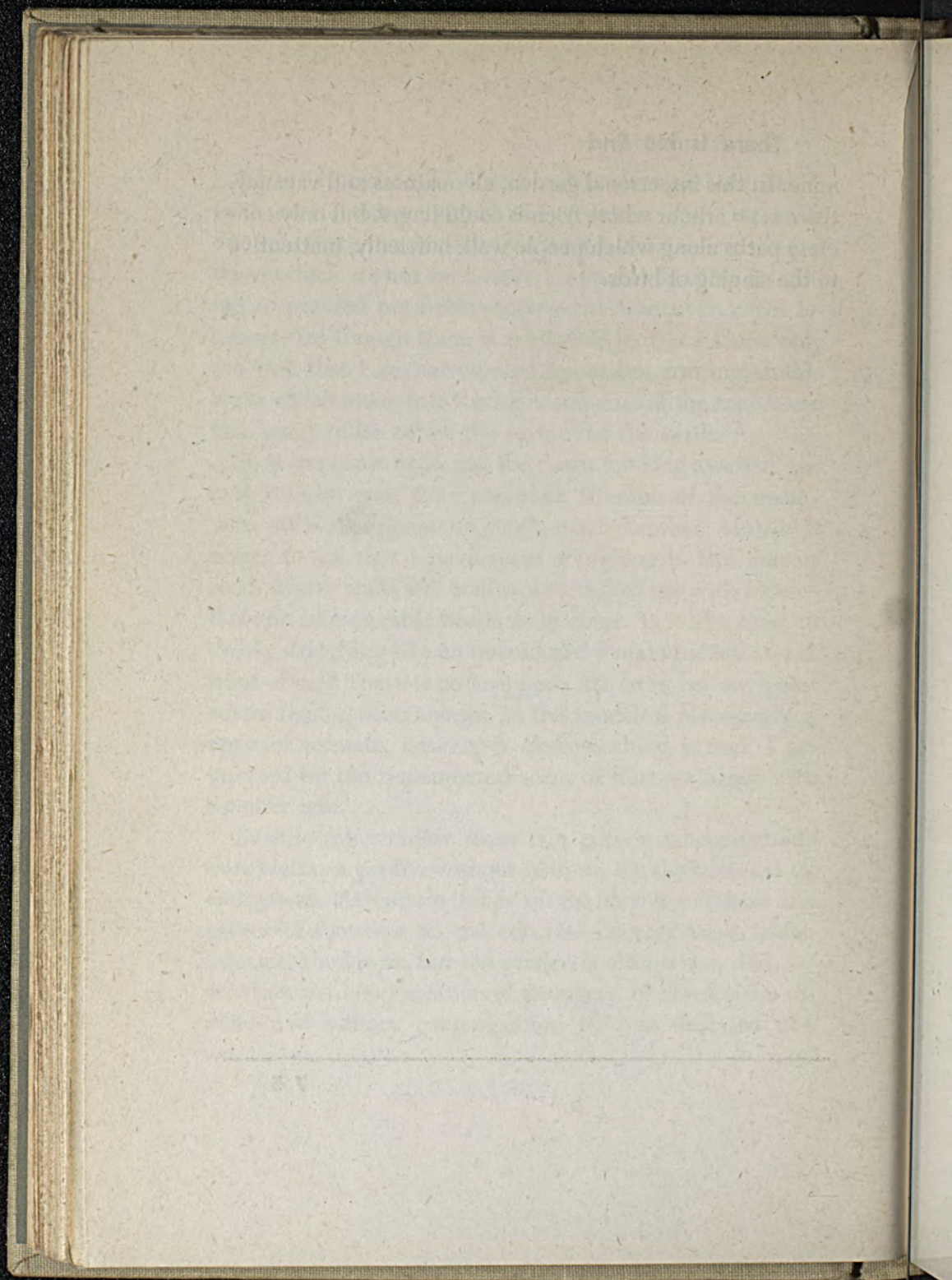
I have thought a lot about such matters of late, sitting here and looking out of the window. For, strangely enough, there are windows without bars in this place and doors which are not even locked. Apparently there is nothing to prevent me from walking out whenever I feel inclined. Yet though there is no visible barrier I know only too well that I am surrounded by unseen and impassable walls which tower into the highest domes of the zenith and sink many miles below the surface of the earth.

So it has come upon me, the doom too long awaited, the end without end, the bannerless triumph of the enemy who, after all, appears to be close as a brother. Already it seems to me that I have spent a lifetime in this narrow room whose walls will continue to regard me with secrecy through innumerable lifetimes to come. Is it life, then, or death, stretching like an uncoloured stream behind and in front of me? There is no love here, nor hate, nor any point where feeling accumulates. In this nameless place nothing appears animate, nothing is close, nothing is real; I am pursued by the remembered scent of dust sprinkled with summer rain.

Outside my window there is a garden where nobody ever walks: a garden without seasons, for the trees are all evergreens. At certain times of the day I can hear the clatter of footsteps on the concrete covered ways which intersect the lawns, but the garden is always deserted, set for the casual appreciation of strangers, or else for the remote and solitary contemplation of eyes defeated like

There Is No End

mine. In this impersonal garden, all neatness and vacancy, there is no arbour where friends could linger, but only concrete paths along which people walk hurriedly, inattentive to the singing of birds.



Part II: Asylum Piece

1845

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Asylum Piece

I

THE SCENE is set exactly like a stage upon which a light comedy, something airy and gay, is about to be acted. At the back can be seen part of the ground floor of a mansion with doors right and left opening upon a wide terrace where tables and chairs are arranged. In front, a flight of shallow stone steps leads down to the garden. Large pillars of light-coloured stone support the roof of the terrace. At each end, beyond the final column, the walls of the house can be seen covered by creepers which are a mass of brilliant orange and purple flowers. Some of the full-blown flower trumpets have been carried by the wind on to the steps where they lie as if strewn for the feet of a bridal procession. The foreground, which in a theatre would be the auditorium, consists of an enormous view over falling ground with a lake in the middle distance and mountains beyond. The whole vista is flooded with dazzling midsummer sunshine.

Asylum Piece

At first there is no one to be seen. A flock of pigeons circles round twice with flashing wings and vanishes into the upper blue.

The door at the right extremity of the terrace opens and a number of people emerge. They are well-dressed men and women of varying ages who stand about or sit in groups round the tables. They have just finished lunch. Some are smoking, some have coffee cups in their hands. The most striking thing about them is their silence. Only a few talk together; the others seem abstracted, or as if suspended, as if waiting to be told what to do. After a few moments they start to drift slowly across the terrace and vanish one after another through the door on the left. A grey-haired woman who appears to be in a position of authority is seen to be shepherding them along. She settles a group of four at a table on the extreme left and gives them a pack of cards which one of them deals in a perfunctory fashion.

A stout man in a dark suit occupies the most comfortable chair in the middle of the terrace. He is about forty years old, slightly bald, and has a round, red, cheerful face. He unfolds a newspaper and starts to read. Something, it is not easy to say what, distinguishes him from the people who have lately passed by. Perhaps it is merely that he is exempt from the domination of the grey-haired woman. He is the Professor.

After a minute or two, the door on the left opens and three new figures emerge with a somewhat stealthy ap-

Asylum Piece

pearance: they have an obvious air of having evaded authority. At the sight of the Professor, whom they had not expected to find there, they hesitate uncertainly, but he smiles at them over his paper and waves them forward with an indulgent gesture. Relieved, they advance past the cardplayers, who glance up at them with faint curiosity, and then seat themselves on the top step of the terrace just in front of the Professor.

Here they remain for a while without speaking, staring through their dark glasses into the glare. The central person of the trio is a young woman with yellow hair. She is smartly dressed in pale pink. On her right is a young man with the pointed ears and the half-wistful, half-malicious look of a faun. The man on her other side is older with a sad Jewish face. Between all three a curious resemblance is noticeable, and this is not only due to the fact that each one is slender and elegant and wearing a pair of dark spectacles.

The cardplayers, having once displayed their dim inquiry, without further interest in what is passing lethargically continue the game which they have been ordered to play, dealing and receiving the cards with gestures as automatic as those of the hands of so many clocks. The Professor rustles the page of his newspaper. The three on the steps sit motionless, deriving some incommunicable solace from each other's proximity and from the fugitive sense of escape.

Suddenly a flock of pigeons flies up from the direction

Asylum Piece

of the lake and circles low in front of the terrace with bright flashing wings. And immediately, as if stricken into life at the sight of those beating wings, the three rise from the steps with one simultaneous lamentable cry.

Now it can be seen only too clearly where their mutual and horrid resemblance lies. What appeared as slender elegance now reveals itself as emaciation, hip bones protrude shockingly through the covering clothes, cheekbones have almost pushed their way through the reluctant flesh.

The long, lank, match-thin limbs with their enlarged joint mechanisms jerk into forlorn obedience to the Professor's wires as, like a smiling puppet master, he hurriedly takes control. And from behind the three pairs of dark spectacles large tears roll over the painted marionette cheeks and slowly drip on to the stone terrace.

II

I HAD a friend, a lover. Or did I dream it? So many dreams are crowding upon me now that I can scarcely tell true from false: dreams like light imprisoned in bright mineral caves; hot, heavy dreams; ice-age dreams; dreams like machines in the head. I lie between the bare wall and the medicine bitter with sediment in its dwarfish glass, and try to recall my dream.

I see myself walking hand in hand with another, a human being whose heart and mind had grown into mine. We walked together on many roads, in sunshine beside ancient olive trees, on hillsides sprayed as by fountains with the larks' singing, in lanes where the raindrops dripped from the chilly leaves. Between us there was understanding without reservations and indestructible peace. I, who had been lonely and incomplete, was now fulfilled. Our thoughts ran together like greyhounds of

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equal swiftness. Perfection like music was in our united thoughts.

I remember an inn in some southern country. A crisis, long since forgotten, had arisen in our lives. I remember only the cypresses' black flames blowing, the sky hard as a blue plate, and my own confidence, serene, unshakable, utterly secure. 'Whatever happens is trivial so long as we are together. Under no circumstances could we fail one another, wound one another, do one another wrong.'

Who shall describe the slow and lamentable cooling of the heart? On what day does one first observe the infinitesimal crack which finally becomes a chasm deeper than hell?

The years passed like the steps of a staircase leading lower and lower. I did not walk any more in the sun or hear the songs of larks like crystal fountains playing against the sky. No hand enfolded mine in the warm clasp of love. My thoughts were again solitary, disintegrate, disharmonious—the music gone. I lived alone in a few pleasant rooms, feeling my life run out aimlessly with the tedious hours: the life of an old maid ran out of my finger tips. I arranged the flowers in their vases.

Yet still, intermittently, I saw him, the companion whose heart and brain once seemed to have grown to mine. I saw him without seeing him, the same and yet not the same. Still I could not believe that everything was lost beyond hope of salvage. Still I believed that one day the world would change colour, a curtain would be ripped away, and all would be as it once was.

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But now I am lying in a lonely bed. I am weak and confused. My muscles do not obey me, my thoughts run erratically, as small animals do when they are cornered. I am forgotten and lost.

It was he who brought me to this place. He took my hand. I almost heard the tearing of the curtain. For the first time in many months we rested together in peace.

Then they told me that he had gone. For a long while I did not believe it. But time passes by, and no word comes. I cannot deceive myself any longer. He has gone, he has left me, and he will not return. I am alone for ever in this room where the light burns all night long and the professional faces of strangers, without warmth or pity, glance at me through the half-open door. I wait, I wait, between the wall and the bitter medicine in the glass. What am I waiting for? A screen of wrought iron covers the window; the house door is locked though the door of my room is open. All night long the light watches me with its unbiased eye. There are strange sounds in the night. I wait, I wait, perhaps for the dreams that come so close to me now.

I had a friend, a lover. It was a dream.

III

HANS comes out of the lift and crosses the hall of the clinic. Just beside a large vase of salmon-pink gladioli which stands on a table he remembers that he has left the door of the lift open. He turns back and closes it very carefully, then slowly crosses the wide hall again. He is a small, slim man, quite young, with pointed ears and black hair that grows in a point on his forehead. His brown eyes, which nature intended to be gentle and mischievous, are now gentle and sad. His whole expression is one of barely concealed anxiety which shows also in the undecided steps of his shiny black shoes. He is smartly, if rather unsuitably, dressed in a dark town suit.

A woman in a white uniform wishes him good morning from her desk near the main door. He answers mechanically, without seeing her. At the door he hesitates for several moments: it is difficult for him to pass through it

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although it is standing open. Finally he manages to overcome his inhibition and goes outside. On the steps he again hesitates, not being able to decide which direction to take.

The sun shines brilliantly. Before him is a parklike expanse of grass with groups of trees and some single fine Wellingtonias dotted about. There is nobody in sight. It is eleven o'clock and all the patients who are well enough are at work in the atelier or in different parts of the grounds.

Hans glances round uneasily. It is part of his routine, too, to work in the atelier at this hour. Until a few days ago someone would certainly have come to investigate his absence; but now nobody comes near him; nobody seems to care how he occupies his time. This strikes him as exceedingly ominous. 'My brother must have written to say that he can't afford to keep me here much longer. Soon I shall be sent away from the clinic—and then what will become of me?'

He sighs and takes from his pocket a crumpled letter which he has been carrying about for several days. It is from his brother in Central Europe and contains nothing but bad news about the factory upon which the family fortune depends—strikes, unemployment, rising price of raw materials. The whole village also depends upon the factory; the whole village is suffering.

Hans sighs again deeply and returns the letter to his pocket without unfolding it. He takes out his dark spectacles and puts them on, hiding from the brightness of the day which fills him with obscure alarms.

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Suddenly his face changes. A girl of about twenty is approaching him on a bicycle. She is the gymnastic teacher with whom, up to a few days ago, Hans has been indulging in a mild flirtation. Now he feels far too anxious to think of flirting, although he admires automatically the beautiful golden tan of her bare arms and legs. She carries a black swimming suit over the handlebars of her cycle.

'How I wish she would ask me to go swimming with her!' he thinks to himself, as a smile of eager anticipation appears on his face. It is not that he really wants to swim in the lake; but what he longs for above everything at this moment is laughter, companionship and a friendly voice.

The girl is abreast of him now; her thick, curly hair blows out like a fleece in the sun. The gravel crunches, minute particles of grit fly up from under the tires; there is a greeting, a flash of teeth and a whirring noise. She has gone.

Hans stands for a moment watching the departing form of the gym mistress. The smile slowly fades from his face and he begins to walk on. His loitering steps carry him as a matter of course in the direction of the atelier. On his way he passes the vegetable garden where several patients are working. Two of them, in blue overalls, are hoeing the parched earth quite close to the path where he walks. A man near by, who looks like a gardener, is really a nurse who is keeping them under his eye. Hans pauses to watch the workers who do not return his gaze. The ground is baked dry, it is hard work, sweat runs down their faces.

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The two men do not speak to each other, nor do they look happy; yet Hans, who detests hard work, almost envies them their place in the established order of institutional life to which he now feels himself an outsider. He wanders on past another man who is picking blackberries. The blackberry bushes have been trained over wires, and the patient stands with his back to Hans, intent on his prickly task, carefully picking out the berries and putting them into a basket. Hans would like to speak to him, but the unresponsive look of the man's back deters him, and he walks on in silence, looking abstractedly at the path.

His thoughts fall back into their usual unhappy pattern—money troubles, bad health, insecurity. Once more he fingers the letter in his pocket. Yes, the poor old factory is certainly in a bad way—perhaps even on its last legs. How broken-hearted Father would have been! A good thing the old man didn't live to see these terrible times. But what about Hans's own enterprise, the small private business which he has built up by his personal efforts? For the hundredth time he tries to think of some reason why he has not heard from his partner for such a long time. It's over a month since the fellow has written. 'Can he be ill? Is he double-crossing me? Or has he really written and they have kept the letters from me because of more bad news? I really ought to go and find out what's happening. I ought to go at once—tomorrow. If I wait I may be too late.' But the thought of taking a long train journey alone, of talking to strangers and concentrating upon business problems is

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too much for poor Hans. 'I can't do it. It's no use. They shouldn't expect it of me in my condition. I'm ill—I can't sleep, I can't eat, I can't make decisions. I can't even think properly any more . . .' He passes his hand over his dark hair with a despairing gesture, takes off his glasses for a moment, and then, dazzled, hastily puts them back on his nose.

Now he has reached the atelier. A confused hum of activity comes from within. In the carpenter's shop someone is hammering. A machine in one of the other rooms makes a thin buzzing noise like a wasp. The various workshops open on to a veranda raised several steps above the path where Hans is walking, but looking up he can see the faces of the people near the windows and doors. With some of them he exchanges a nod. They are busy with book-binding or leather-work or basket-making. The official in charge of the atelier comes out on to the veranda for a minute to wish Hans good day. He behaves as though it were quite in order for him to be strolling out there when all the rest of the clinic is hard at work. This attitude on the part of the supervisor confirms the young man's worst fears and he moves off immediately.

At the last open door a girl is sitting alone, working at a sketch on an easel. 'Hullo, Hans!' she calls out amiably.

He stops and leans against the stone wall of the veranda. He would like to see what she is painting, but the effort required to mount the steps is too great, and he stays where he is, looking up at her wistfully.

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'Why do you always wear those dark clothes?' she asks him. 'You look so hot and dismal—as if you were going to a funeral or a dreary business appointment.'

'Well, you see, it's like this,' he begins to explain, feeling the stone warm under the palms of his hands, 'I never could decide what to put on. Every morning when I started to dress I used to put out all my suits in a row, and it would take me perhaps half an hour, perhaps longer, to make up my mind. The same thing happened with my shoes—with my ties—it was really awful. You can't think how this silly affair used to worry me. So at last I thought of a plan to avoid making a choice. I just put on the same suit every day. This is the one I wore when they took us to that concert in Geneva; I've worn it ever since.'

The girl doesn't say any more. She doesn't see his forlorn expression. Perhaps she is not interested; perhaps her painting absorbs her just then; or perhaps she has simply fallen into a dream.

Hans moves away. Suddenly he feels envious, bitter. 'She's well—not nearly as ill as I am, at any rate. And yet she can stay here as long as she likes while I shall be turned out in a day or two to face the world.'

So far he has been dawdling along, but now he comes to a decision and starts to walk briskly. He will send another telegram to his partner and this time he will word it so that it is bound to bring a reply. Out he goes into the dusty public road that leads to the village. He has no business to be there, but what does it matter? He has often

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done it before, and anyway, nobody seems to care what he does these days.

Soon he comes to the street of humble, rather squalid houses, shuttered against the heat. Most of the dwellings are built in one with their cowsheds or stables. In front of one an enormous heap of manure slowly steams in the sun. The overpowering smell of manure, the heat, the quick walk, combine to make Hans feel dizzy for a few seconds. He stands still, bending his head, and looking down at his shoes, now white like a tramp's with the dust. With fumbling fingers he unfastens his jacket. A tiny split in the front of his shirt catches his eye. 'But I'm going about in rags—absolutely in rags! It will be the gutter for me next,' he mutters under his breath, with a sort of mild, aggrieved surprise.

Now he is at the post office. He pulls himself together and goes inside. The empty room smells fustily of dried ink, just outside the window some shabby, gaunt hens are pecking in an enclosure of wire netting overgrown with convolvulus. Hans observes with distaste all the details of the place with which he is already only too familiar. The postmaster appears. He is an oldish, pot-bellied peasant with grizzled hair. Carefully, with much thought, Hans writes out his message and hands the telegraph form over the counter.

After the young man has gone, the postmaster stands for a time holding the telegram against his huge belly, and watching the door as if he half expects the sender to come

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back. Then, in a methodical way, he sets about tearing the form into small pieces, until nothing is left but a handful of shreds which he negligently tosses out of the open window. With greedy eyes, the hens come rushing on their strong, scaly legs, pouncing on the torn fragments. But immediately discovering that the paper scraps are inedible, they abandon them in disgust and resume their unprofitable pecking in the hard earth.

IV

AN ELDERLY MAN and his wife are standing in the chief doctor's study. The husband is a big, tall man who is beginning to stoop a little. He has a serious, important face with a large grey moustache and pouches under the eyes. In his buttonhole he wears a narrow red ribbon. He is rather a fine figure for his age and is obviously used to being in a position of command. His wife, on the other hand, is nondescript and ineffective looking. One realizes at once that she has been dominated by her husband ever since their marriage, and by her parents before that.

It is just after noon on a hot summer day. The interview is ended. The chief doctor rises behind his desk. He is as tall as his visitor, but handsome, slender and in the prime of life, with thick, wavy hair which he wears rather long and which is just starting to be becomingly streaked with

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grey. He is dressed in a beautiful silver-grey suit and brown-and-white shoes. The room is large, lofty and expensively furnished, but rather dark with curtains drawn over the french windows. There is a perceptible odour of eau de cologne ambrée which emanates from the doctor's person. One feels that a slightly mysterious atmosphere has been aimed at with a view to impressing visitors. There are flowers and a number of large, dim, allegorical pictures.

The couple move slowly towards the door. The wife is distressed and reluctant to leave. There is something she wants to say, but she is intimidated by the atmosphere of the room and by the doctor who looks to her like a film actor. Finally she manages to bring out a question.

'Couldn't I please, Doctor, see her just for a minute before we go? We've come all this way—and it's such a long time since I saw her . . .' Her voice, just as one would expect, is humble and diffident. The poor old lady is tired out with travelling and not far from tears as she stands there nervously clasping her shapeless black handbag and gazing at the head doctor with imploring eyes.

'My dear madame, it would be the greatest mistake. It would upset your daughter and possibly cause a relapse. I'm extremely sorry, but we must consider the patient's best interests before everything, mustn't we? I assure you that she has settled down most satisfactorily, I am very pleased with her progress, and I have excellent reports of her from my doctors as well. You can leave her in our

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hands without the slightest anxiety. She is well and happy and has taken remarkably well to our community life.'

The cultured voice sounds softer than silk, but the mother hardly hears the last part of the speech. She grasps only that she is not to be permitted to see her child who is so close to her, perhaps even within calling distance, hidden away behind all these invisible barriers of medical authority and discipline. A mist comes in front of her eyes, she can no longer see very clearly where she is going; but this does not matter because her husband takes her by the arm and steers her firmly through the door.

'We must be guided in everything by the doctor's advice,' he is saying. And then she hears him refusing an invitation to lunch at the chief's private house. 'A thousand thanks—no. We shall just be in time to catch the express from Lausanne.'

Tremulously, she walks down the polished corridor, supported by the inexorable arm of her husband. She does not see the white-coated attendant who is escorting them. She feels very old, and chilly in spite of the heat. Now there is nothing before her but the tiresome, exhausting train journey back to her empty home.

The head doctor is relieved to have got rid of the elderly pair. He had quite expected that he would have to entertain them to lunch. As soon as he ceases to hear the sound of the car carrying them away, he opens a window and steps out into the sunshine. His house is a short distance off, on the shore of the lake. As he walks towards it,

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everyone whom he passes stops to salute and admire the fine-looking, clever, successful, debonair physician with his graceful, athletic stride.

Meanwhile, Mademoiselle Zélie is getting ready for lunch in her own room. She is a plump, heavy-looking girl in the early twenties, who has rather the air of an enormously bloated child. Her body seems unwieldy like a young child's, and her face has the childish simplicity that includes some cunning. Her complexion is pale and unhealthy, her hair needs a shampoo. She has altogether a rather slatternly aspect: her stockings are wrinkled, there is a gap at the back between her white linen skirt and her spotted blouse. Her nurse, who is sitting over some embroidery at the window, suddenly takes a look at her, jumps up and impatiently rearranges her clothing.

'How is it you can't keep yourself tidy, mademoiselle?' she says in a scolding voice. 'I'm always putting you right and you're as bad again in two minutes. Your hair, too—you haven't combed it yet. And your hands—have you washed them for lunch? Let me look—no, of course not. Go on now, give them a good scrub with the brush; the nails are quite black.' And she gives the girl a little push towards the washbasin.

Zélie obediently turns on the taps. As the water is running into the basin, she glances at her companion with dislike. This is a new nurse; her nurses never stay long with her. 'Why does she nag at me like that?' she is thinking. 'To have one of these stupid creatures with me all the

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time, day and night . . . their stupid voices going on and on . . . just peasant women, too, who don't understand anything—it's insupportable. If only my mother would come . . . If only I could tell her . . . She would never allow it.'

Standing there with her hands in the water she has quite forgotten what she is supposed to be doing. The nurse comes up with the expression of a person restraining herself in exasperating circumstances, lets out the water, gives her a towel and briskly and efficiently tidies her hair. 'There, now; we must hurry. The gong's gone—didn't you hear it?'

Zélie is glad to go into the dining-room; she is fond of her food. But today her pleasure is spoilt by the fact that her place has been laid next to a young Italian whom she detests. As she sits down between him and her nurse, she glances with sidelong suspicion at the shock-headed, narrow-eyed youth who teases her and confuses her with his spiteful tricks.

Today it seems as though he is going to leave her in peace. He says nothing at all until the first course has been eaten and taken away. Then, just as the waiters are making a subdued clatter with the fresh plates, he leans towards her and whispers into her ear: 'And how were your mother and father today, mademoiselle?'

'My mother and father? They haven't been here.' She looks at him blankly, yet with distrust, out of her sparkless eyes.

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'Oh, yes, indeed—they were here this morning. I was in the corridor when they came out of the doctor's study. He was saying good-bye to them. I saw them and heard the name quite distinctly.' The Italian boy seems to be only interested in his food, but really he is all attention, all on the alert.

Zélie takes a mouthful of veal from her plate. Suddenly she grasps the meaning of what has just been said to her; the implication of the words dawns upon her. She lets her knife and fork fall. 'My mother has been here . . . and she went away . . . without seeing me!'

Her chair is on the side of the table nearest the double doors. The doors are almost immediately behind her chair. She has only to get up and take two or three steps and then she is out of the room. For a moment everything hangs in suspense. The waiters stand poised with their dishes. There has been no noise, no disturbance: for a moment no one seems to realize what has happened. Then the girl's nurse rises and follows her. Here and there about the room other figures also get to their feet and go out. The young Italian bends low over his plate. His mouth is crammed full of food, his jaws solemnly chewing. But an impish glee crinkles the ends of his eyes; he is happy.

Zélie runs across the hall towards the chief doctor's study. The main door of the clinic is wide open and her pursuers will naturally assume that she has gone out that way. It is not with the idea of eluding them that she goes to the study, but simply because the Italian said he had

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seen her mother there. Of course the room is now empty; but the french window is still open as the doctor left it, and Zélie passes through. Now she is on a grass bank that slopes down to a pine wood. She runs down the steep bank, moving clumsily, tripping and stumbling in her high-heeled shoes which do not fit very well. In the wood she still finds it hard to run because the pine needles are slippery, and treacherous roots are continually tripping her up. She is out of condition and soon feels exhausted. Her breath makes a painful sobbing sound in the quiet wood, her heart-beats sound loud and continuous like a waterfall, her face, streaked with her tumbled hair, is glazed over with sweat, one of her shoes has gone and she is completely dishevelled. She does not know why she is running or where. One word, 'Mother! Mother!' keeps crying out in her head.

Suddenly she is pulled up short. A wire fence, twelve feet high and strong enough to imprison a herd of wild beasts, marks the boundary of the estate. Zélie is running so blindly that she does not see the wire and crashes against it. Her hands beat on the fine mesh, her awkward body staggers and falls to the ground. She lies collapsed on the pine needles under the indifferent trees. The small harmony of the wood, which her clumsy irruption has broken, slowly renews itself. A wood pigeon starts to coo over her head. That gentle summer sound, which when she was a child always made her think of her mother's sewing machine, is more than Zélie can bear. Her heart

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breaks, she clutches handfuls of the sharp pine needles which pierce her flesh, while from between her thick lips, smeared with saliva and rouge, issues a desolate keening that soon leads her pursuers in the right direction.

V

It is quite early, just after seven o'clock, on a beautiful summer morning. The sky is pale blue, cloudless, serene and mild, like an immense arch, not awe-inspiring, but full of benevolence and protectiveness. The untroubled lake is opalescent, half solid looking as if one could walk across it. The mountains withdraw their stern faces behind gauzy mist veils. On the first slope of the hillside above the lake the main building of the clinic stands washed in the clear new sunshine, a fine mansion with flowers edging the balconies and a pillared terrace in front. Everything is peaceful, orderly and reassuring. In a steep hayfield above the road some labourers are already at work with their scythes, moving rhythmically, their brown, nude torsos gleaming like statuary. A car comes along the highroad from the town and smoothly loops its way up the private road to the clinic. It stops in

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front of the main entrance which is in shadow, on the side of the building that faces away from the lake. Here the aspect of the new day is slightly less comfortable, owing perhaps to the dark, wide shade from the house and the huge black trees that point severely away from the world.

A man and a young woman emerge from the car. They have been travelling all night. The man is about forty, rather well-looking in the heavy Roman emperor style, young for his age, in spite of the fact that his face is unshaven and wears a harassed expression. He has the indescribably, almost imperceptibly, false look of a person who is outwardly friendly and kind but inwardly barren and self-absorbed. He is large, and altogether somewhat dishevelled after the journey. The woman, who is several years younger than he, is almost in a state of collapse and has to be helped up the steps into the clinic. Nevertheless, she has managed to achieve a fairly normal appearance. Her green dress is in order, her fair hair is smoothly combed, there is powder on her face and lipstick on her mouth: probably her last living impulse would be to attend to these things. She does not speak or look about her, but passively allows herself to be led into a room facing the lake where there is sunshine and a large vase of antirrhinums on a round table. Here she subsides on to a sofa. The pupils of her eyes are dilated, she sees only a blur of afflicting brightness, she is really hardly conscious of what is going on. The man sits in a chair near her,

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drumming nervously on the table with his thick fingers. Neither of the two utters a word.

A girl in a white overall brings in a tray of coffee. She is attractively fresh-looking and glances with curiosity at the travel-worn strangers, particularly at the woman who now seems to be on the verge of losing consciousness altogether and falling off the sofa on to the floor. The attendant speaks to her, pours out a cup of coffee and puts a cushion under her head. With colossal effort the other pulls herself back to life sufficiently to murmur some half-audible comment, shading her eyes with her hand. The nurse goes to the window and quietly closes the shutters; then she goes out of the door with a last backward glance. Now there is only a green, subaqueous dimness left in the room, striated with bands of brightness. The man, in unbroken silence, and, as it were, gloomily, apprehensively, absent-mindedly, swallows the hot coffee, directing from time to time upon his companion a look of automatic anxiety which really conceals a sort of resentment. The other cup of coffee, untasted, slowly steams on the table.

After a few minutes the chief doctor comes into the room. Although it is so early in the morning, he is immaculately turned out and has an air of brisk and vital efficiency about his handsome person. He shakes hands with the visitor who rises to greet him, immediately sinking back heavily into his chair. Then the doctor goes to the fair-haired woman and takes her limp hand. There is an exchange of preliminary talk between the two men. The

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stranger briefly outlines certain medical details with which the physician has already been made familiar by letter. The large man speaks in the halting manner of someone who forces himself to discuss a matter subconsciously repugnant to him. He often fails to finish a sentence, one gets the impression that his real attention is wandering, that he longs to dissociate himself from the whole situation. The doctor, although he listens with polite attention, realizes that the other, unable or unwilling to acknowledge responsibility, will say nothing of any value, and his dark eyes continually turn to the silent woman across the room. Finally he addresses her:

'So you think you would like to come to my clinic, madame?'

She, who has appeared oblivious of the talk, reacts unexpectedly to the direct question. Her eyes open wide, a kind of contortion appears on her face as though she might weep or even strike a blow if she had the strength. She pulls herself up on the sofa, clenches her hands, and her voice, too, is unexpectedly strong as she answers:

'No, I never wanted to come. I was forced—brought here against my will.'

She cannot help the intense hostility in her tone, which is the result of hysteria, of complete emotional exhaustion, perhaps of despair: it is aimed at her own neurosis and at a whole chain of events which have gone before—not at the man who now speaks to her with a smile. But he, because they are foreigners and strangers to one another,

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and because they belong besides to ethnological groups fundamentally unsympathetic, he is a little stung, a little displeased. However, he continues to smile as he says with unchanging smoothness:

'Perhaps you will rest here for a few minutes. There are one or two things I must discuss with Monsieur.'

Left alone, the young woman lapses into a state of complete quiescence, her fair hair spread on the brown cushion. She does not move, she hardly appears to breathe; only at long intervals a deep, broken sigh comes from her painted lips; her grey, distracted, unfocused eyes open wide and gaze at the pleasant room like the eyes of a lost person, a person who has lost his memory, or has been incomprehensively taken prisoner in a strange land.

The two men are absent rather a long time, at least half an hour, but she does not notice. It would be all the same to her if they stayed away the whole morning: drugs and exhaustion have destroyed her appreciation of time. She is not asleep, but neither is she truly awake. Vague fantasies, most of them unpleasant, occupy her submerged brain.

Presently the big man returns with a nurse. The doctor sends a message that he has been called away but will visit his new patient later in the morning. Supported by the two others, the young woman slowly traverses a wide corridor. Now there are signs of life in the building. A few patients, accompanied by an attendant, are returning from the gymnasium. Some of them look curiously at the

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blonde victim, soon to be their companion, who does not return their gaze: most likely she does not see them. The man with her is clearly uneasy, frowning and biting his nails, and seeking security in talk with the tranquil, matter-of-fact nurse in her white overall.

Now they are in a bedroom. The nurse goes in search of the luggage. The other woman, her last physical force depleted by the recent exertion, droops on the edge of the bed, less than half present: only a kind of mechanical masochism still keeps her upright. Her companion, without knowing why, is irritated by this posture.

'Why don't you lie down comfortably?' he asks her, repressing annoyance and keeping his voice low.

She does not answer, but something—perhaps it is the sight of the white clouds that now, like choir-boys, like seraphs, are moving across the sky in ordered procession—moves her to take his hand.

'I'll get better now . . . Everything will be all right, won't it?' she says, incoherent, seeking from him some reassurance which is not in his power to give.

He stirs awkwardly, scowling and biting the nails of his free hand.

'Yes . . . of course . . . you'll get better . . .' He only wants to be free, to be gone—anywhere, out of this situation so intolerable to his irresponsible heart. But suddenly he bends down and kisses her on the cheek. She is surprised out of her trance, touched, grateful, encouraged; for a second she feels almost her old self. Even now, at

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the last moment, she will save everything; she will walk, and they will go out together into the sun. She starts to speak, to stand up, but he disengages himself and goes to the door.

'You're going away?' she asks, disappointed. He mutters something, looking aside. 'But you'll come back soon?'

'Yes, of course. When you're in bed.'

He goes out of the room. She sits on the edge of the bed, suspended, almost lifeless, the brief animation, departed, leaving her emptier than before.

All at once she hears the engine of a car being started outside. From where she is sitting she can see through the window, covered with iron scrolls, a sweep of the drive where a car is beginning to move. Her eyes recognize that it is the car in which they drove from the town, but her brain draws no conclusion from this. Suddenly she sees in the back seat the man who accompanied her. But even now she feels only bewilderment, stupefaction. What does it mean? Why is he in the car? His suitcase lies on the seat at his side, and for some reason the sight of this bag, which she herself gave him years before, convinces her of the truth.

'He's leaving me here. He's going away . . . Without telling me . . . Without even a word. When he kissed me it was good-bye.'

Some final desperate reserve of nervous energy enables her to run to the door. 'I must go to him—I must stop him—he can't leave me like this!' she cries out to the empty

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room. The door is locked on the outside. She twists the handle and beats on the glass panel. The glass is unbreakable and an iron bar would do no more than splinter it. Nevertheless she continues to beat weakly upon it with her two hands while tears run down her distorted face.

An attendant passing along the corridor glances with a startled look at the convulsed face with its wild, lost, streaming eyes, and then hurries off in search of someone in authority.

VI

IT is early in the morning in one of the bedrooms of the foreign clinic. The empty room has the indefinably forlorn air of a place just deserted by its usual occupant. The door into the passage stands open, there is a tray with disarranged breakfast things on a table beside the bed. The room is quite large and has a parquet floor and well-proportioned furniture of pale wood; although one would not call it luxurious, it is certainly comfortable and pleasant. All the same, there is something a little odd, a little disquieting, about it. It would be difficult to locate the source of this impression; perhaps the circumstance that there is not a single hook anywhere, that all planes are bare and smooth, and that the electric light is protected by a wire screen, has something to do with it. The big window, too, is covered by a grille of wrought iron work which, though it is ornamental, some-

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how suggests a utilitarian purpose. Just now the room is cool, even chilly, in spite of the fact that it is midsummer. There is a thick white mountain mist out of doors.

A young peasant girl in an overall hurries in from the passage, carries away the breakfast tray, and then returns with an armful of cleaning utensils. She is nineteen or twenty years old, big, robust, rather bony, with an un-beautiful large-nosed face and brown hair scraped back from her forehead. All her movements are clumsy but vigorous. She kneels down on the floor, scoops a dollop of some thick, grease-like substance out of a tin, and begins to polish the boards energetically. As she works she quietly hums to herself a long, tuneless national song. All her life she has worked hard, she is full of unbounded energy, it pleases her to see the smooth wood shine like water under her cloth; she is happy.

Soon the floor is polished as if for a ball, but still there is the bed to make, the furniture to attend to. She washes her hands at the basin and dries them on her special cloth before putting the bed in order; then goes over to dust the dressing-table, looking with unenvious curiosity at the decorative boxes of powder and cream, the scent in its slender flask.

Before she has finished, the occupant of the room returns from her bath. She is about ten years older than the peasant girl, of whom she is the antithesis in every way; the two might serve as examples of opposite products of society. The newcomer is exceedingly slim and decorative

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in a sophisticated way. Her long, smoothly curving, heavy blonde hair, her full cyclamen-coloured gown that trails on the floor, give her a somewhat romantic appearance which is not negated by her unhappy eyes, nor by her face of assumed hardness, of assumed indifference, which does not conceal desolation.

She says good morning, then carelessly drops on the bed the sponge, the soap, the essence which she has brought back from the bath, and goes to the window where she stands staring out at the mist that hides everything behind its sad, opaque, colourless veil. The peasant girl hurries to pick up the things from the bed and arranges them carefully in their proper places. As she finishes her work she glances all the time at the other woman who stands there so still, looking away from her, as if in another world. The graceful cyclamen robe fills the beholder with admiration. 'How wonderful it must be to wear such a dress,' she thinks in her simple heart. 'She looks like an angel with her hair hanging down so bright,' and she touches her own drab head with a sort of surprise.

'The room is done now,' she says at length, timidly, in the bad French which she speaks only with difficulty.

The woman in front of the window makes no reply, no movement at all. Perhaps she has not understood, perhaps she has not heard.

The other takes out her brooms, her cloths, her polish, and puts everything down in the corridor. Then she goes back and loiters a moment or two inside the bedroom

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door. She knows she ought to get on with her work, to hurry into the next room and start polishing the floor there, instead of wasting her time; but somehow she cannot bear to go away without some response from that motionless figure whose hands are now clutching the scrolls of the iron grille.

'Don't stand there, madame,' she says in her awkward way; 'Madame will catch cold—let me close the window.' She crosses the room and actually reaches towards the glass, brushing the other's sleeve as she does so. The physical touch breaks the spell of the elder woman's abstraction and she turns her head. The servant is horrified to see her eyes overflowing with tears which slowly and without any concealment run down her cheeks.

'Oh, madame . . .' she stammers, 'what is it . . . ? Don't cry . . .'

Scarcely realizing what she does, she loosens the clenched, cold fingers, chilled by their prolonged contact with the metal lattice, and leads the other away from the window. The fair-haired woman submits passively, like a child, without words; too violent or too painful emotion, too long endured, seems to have deprived her of all vitality. She might be a mechanical figure but for the tears which continue their soundless rain, leaving dark spots where they fall on the purplish silk. Suddenly she stumbles over the hem of the long gown and would fall were it not for the strong young arms which support her on to the edge of the bed. This pathetic loss of dignity in one so

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remote, so perfect, is altogether too much for the peasant girl, already emotionalized by the sight of those incongruous tears.

Forgetting their different social status, forgetting the possibility of observation, forgetting even her work, she embraces this unhappy being as she would embrace a hurt child in her native village, murmuring inarticulate sounds of comfort. The other, who for so long has remained obdurate, confronting her equals with a disdainful, unchanging face, can allow herself to relax a little in such an uncouth clasp. It is as though she found solace in the sub-human sympathy, the mute caresses of an affectionate dog.

'Why are you being kind to me . . . ? What are you saying? What language is that?' she asks at length, vague, out of her unreal world.

'It is Romansh, madame; I come from the Grisons,' the girl answers in French. The moment is slipping away; she already begins to feel a trifle awkward, incipiently aware of herself. Yet she still encircles the thin shoulders with both arms, reluctant to withdraw her support. 'Don't cry,' she says once again. 'Don't be so unhappy. It's not really bad here . . . And you'll go away soon—back to your home. Can't you think of it as a little holiday?'

'I'm frightened . . . quite alone . . . and so far from everything,' the other replies in a whisper, tasting the tears on her mouth. She is still as if in a dream, unconscious of the inappropriate situation.

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The maid, who understands nostalgia only too well, searches her brain for some consolation.

'But it's so comfortable here, madame!' she exclaims; 'and the food . . . ! Yesterday I brought you asparagus for lunch, and today there will be strawberries—I know because I saw the men picking them. And look—the mist is breaking! The sun will shine soon.'

Just at this moment she hears someone calling her name in the passage; it is one of the other work girls who has been sent to find out why she is being so slow over the rooms this morning.

'Yes, yes—at once—I am coming!' she cries out. She stands upright immediately; but then she bends down and impulsively plants a warm peasant's kiss on the wet cheek before she crosses the room in a clumsy rush and vanishes into the corridor.

The other woman sits on in the same position, alone. Her tears have almost ceased falling; and now, for the first time in many days, there appears on her face the difficult inception of a smile.

VII

A CHARMING eighteenth-century house stands just at the edge of the lake. It is really a small château with turrets which give it a sophisticated, frivolous, dashing air, well suited to the residence of the mistress of some distinguished personage, as which it was originally designed. The building is in an excellent state of repair, the flowering magnolia on its façade has been skilfully trained and pruned, everything indicates an appreciative and careful proprietor. Only a very sensitive observer might notice about the place an almost indescribable air, not exactly forlorn, but deprived of something, lacking the touch of individual affection, like a child brought up in an efficient institution instead of a home. There is an indefinably impersonal look about the rooms visible through the windows which are all wide open to the hot summer afternoon.

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A number of people are having tea on the lawn between the house and the lake. They sit in groups round tables set in the shade of lime trees and tall acacias. Two or three women among them seem to be acting as hostesses, encouraging conversation which tends to flag and, even under their stimulus, has an oddly spasmodic character.

Marcel is the centre of his particular group. For several minutes he has been talkative, amusing, gay, with a smile that comes and goes easily on his wide, flexible mouth. The vigilant hostess looks with approval upon this young man opposite her, dressed in white flannels, who is entertaining the table so well. Suddenly he observes her appreciative glance, his smile changes, loses its rather winning spontaneity, and becomes cynical, sardonic.

'Well, I've been a good boy long enough,' he thinks to himself; 'it's someone else's turn now.'

He looks at his watch, rises with a polite excuse, and picks up a racquet that has been lying on the grass near his chair. It is time for him to go to his game of tennis.

The court where he is supposed to be playing is higher up the hill, near the main building of the clinic to which all this property belongs. Swinging his racquet, Marcel saunters round the elegant little château that now houses guests so different from its original occupant. With the animation gone from his face one sees that he is not so young as he seemed at the tea-table; he is at least thirty—perhaps a few years older. A trace of grey has already appeared at the sides of his dark hair, there are lines on

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his expressive face, his eyes have a slightly strained look, a slightly over-emotional brightness.

Alone on the far side of the château his steps become slower and slower until he finally stops altogether. The strokes of the stable clock sound like five languid birds floating on the warm air. He must hurry if he is not to be late for his game. He knows he ought to walk quickly up the hill, but instead he stands motionless, with drooping shoulders, the racquet dangling limp from his hand. He is suffering the reaction from his recent display of sociability and vivaciousness. An expression that is at the same time bitter and mournful overshadows his face; he feels lonely, resentful, depressed. The remainder of the day stretches before him in a dreary vista of boredom, like a dull newspaper that he has already read through many times. He thinks with distaste, with irritation, of the tennis and of his partner, the red-haired American girl who sulks whenever they lose a game. She will be waiting for him now up there on the court, beginning to get bad-tempered because he is five minutes late.

'Confound them all! Why should I play when I don't feel like it?' he mutters under his breath. And suddenly he turns his back on the path leading up the hill and walks down towards the lake again, passing this time round the opposite side of the château, so that he emerges on a part of the lawn some distance away from the groups at the tea-tables. Although he walks quickly, he has no object in view, but is merely expressing an instinctive rebellion

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against the boring tennis, the detestable American girl.

The low wall bordering the lake pulls him up short. He pauses irresolute, with a sense of frustration, not knowing what to do next. Finally he sits down on the warm stone wall, letting his legs hang over the water. A clump of bushes conceals him from the distant people, not one of whom seems to have noticed his presence. This makes him feel isolated, a sensation not at all pleasing to his nature, but one from which he nevertheless derives a certain masochistic satisfaction just now. For some seconds he gazes idly into the shallow, transparent, almost stagnant water through which shoals of tiny fish are busily moving. Although the water is clear it has a tepid, stale look; all sorts of unappetizing scraps of refuse have collected on the stony bed of the lake. A black, thin shape like a miniature eel comes wriggling through the shallows towards the stones at the edge; it is a leech. With a suppressed exclamation of disgust Marcel looks in another direction.

His glance now falls on a rowing boat moored a few yards away. Usually the boat is padlocked to an iron ring in the wall, but now it is only loosely secured by a knotted rope. He vaguely remembers seeing the gym mistress unfasten the padlock while he was sitting at tea. Perhaps some of the patients are going out for a row. Well, that does not interest him any more than the tennis. He raises his wide, bright, unstable eyes and sees, straight across the smooth water, the French coast with its mountains and its lower hills crested with countless poplars.

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Immediately a new thought sequence springs to activity in his brain. 'It's high time I went home. I ought to get back to work or I shall be losing all my connections. A barrister can't afford to take such long holidays, even if he has a rich wife.' He tries to reckon up how many months he has spent in the clinic, but somehow the calculation eludes him, and this inability to concentrate on a simple question of dates increases his general discontent. 'All the days are alike in this wretched place. One quite loses count of time,' he thinks angrily. And then: 'Why are they still keeping me here? I'm quite well—it's not as if there ever was much wrong with me. I'd been overworking—I only needed a rest. Now I'm perfectly fit, and yet they still keep me hanging about—wasting my time.' He scowls as he thinks of the doctors, of the evasive replies they give him when he suggests fixing a day for his departure. 'Of course it's just a money-making concern; they're all a lot of sharks trying to make as much out of us as they can.'

The mental picture of his wife now passes before him, a handsome young woman, rather plump, and beautifully dressed in black with pearls round her throat; it is she who is paying for him to stay at the clinic. An atrocious suspicion that often crosses his mind causes him to pick up a stone and hurl it viciously into the lake, startling the small fish out of their ceaseless voyaging. 'No, it's simply not possible—no one could be so wicked, so unscrupulous. I mustn't allow myself to imagine such terrible things.'

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All the same, he can no longer remain quietly sitting on the wall, but jumps up and takes a few restless paces in the direction of the rowing boat, above which he stands, tapping his foot against the iron ring to which the mooring rope is attached.

'If only I could be certain what's going on at home. If only I could get back,' he says to himself, now for the first time admitting in his own mind that there exists some obstacle to his departure. A fantasy of leave-taking next occupies him: he imagines himself packing his luggage, going up to the chief doctor and demanding his money, his passport, booking a sleeper on the Paris train. 'Yes, I'll do it,' he says aloud, twice, first with enthusiasm, then with dwindling conviction. But he does not move to put the plan into practice; something which he cannot, dare not, acknowledge, forbids him to make the attempt.

Instead, he begins to think nostalgically of his old life, of the gaiety of the city, of his work, and of his friends who will be so pleased to see him again. He looks across the lake at the mountains of Savoie, his own country, and it seems to him that only this negligible strip of water, which looks as smoothly solid as if one could walk over it, divides him from the fulfilment of his desires.

A sudden idea comes to him, and it is curious to observe the rapid change in his face which now all at once assumes a mischievous, crafty expression. He glances at the people sitting rather more than the width of the château away. Enervated by the hot afternoon, not a soul

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seems to have moved, not a soul is paying any attention to him. He stoops down and with hurried movements unfastens the knotted rope, then springs into the boat and hastily rows off. A few strong pulls carry him round a small promontory, out of sight of the château grounds. Smiling, with an almost roguish look, he rows on with powerful, regular strokes.

Soon he is far out from the land, alone in his boat in the midst of the practically colourless expanse of smooth water. About half a dozen other small boats are scattered over the lake. They are far away from him, but he is glad of their presence, which means that his own boat will be less conspicuous from the shore. There is no breeze, it is very hot, the air shimmers with heat. Sweat rolls down Marcel's face, but he does not mind; still smiling his roguish smile, he wipes the sweat out of his eyes and rows on. His bare, brown, muscular arms swing to an indefatigable rhythm. This man who could not find energy for a game of tennis is now quite happy toiling in the blind watery glare, gratified by his own strength.

It is further than he expected across the lake, but before very long the French coast is appreciably nearer, he can distinguish the windows of houses, then human figures, then dogs and chickens moving about. He rows parallel with the shore for a little way, seeking a secluded landing place; he has the idea that it might be wiser not to land in a village where he could be questioned immediately. He has not formulated any plan of action as yet.

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So far, he has been occupied solely with the physical effort and with the elation he feels at his own enterprise.

Now he has found just the place to land, a curved beach like a diminutive bay, out of sight of all dwellings, with green grass banks rising steeply above. He brings the boat close to the shore but makes no attempt to disembark. He sits still, with the oars trailing in the water and the sweat slowly drying on his face which now begins to acquire a look of uncertainty. Why does he hesitate? All he has to do is to ground the boat, to jump out and climb up the bank into his own land. True, he has no passport and only a few coins of trifling value in his pockets; but still, he will be free, safe, among his own countrymen. He has only to explain his position to someone in authority and all will arrange itself satisfactorily: a telephone call will be put through to Paris, his railway fare will be advanced to him, he will be at home in the morning.

Yes, it all seems so simple, and yet he can't bring himself to get out of the boat. What is it that prevents him from stepping ashore? What is it that tells him that it is safer not to think, safer to remain vague, to realize nothing? Dimly, through a haze of unreality, he envisages the gendarmes, the questions, the significant looks. But all these things are far-off, unimminent, cloudy. Much better not to think about them, much better not put things to the test, much better not risk having realization forced upon one.

All the archness, the volatileness, has vanished with

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the smile from his face. He now looks much older, worn and dejected. The spirit has quite gone out of him. He feels very tired. Slowly, wearily, with a deep sigh, his eyes empty and downcast, he takes hold of the oars and begins the laborious passage back to the other shore.

VIII

IN THE CLINIC, as in heaven, there are many mansions. The worst cases, and those requiring the most supervision, are lodged in a house called 'La Pinède' which stands some distance away from the main building. Metal scrolls guard the windows of this house and there is only one outer door that is always kept locked. An attendant is constantly on duty to unfasten and relock the door each time anyone passes through.

The attendant sits in a little room, white and bare as a nun's cell, just to the left of the door. This morning quite a young girl is on duty there. She is bright and pleasant-looking in her superlatively clean overall; she has put a bunch of flowers on the table where she sits with her English grammar, her note book and pencil. She is industrious, she means to get on in the world, and she studies her book with concentration. Nevertheless, she finds time to glance

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occasionally at the little bunch of wild cyclamen which she picked yesterday in the forest with a young man in whom she is interested. Everything about her is normal, cheerful, serene. It is difficult to associate the contented girl with the hidden unhappiness that surrounds her under this roof.

She hears footsteps approaching and goes out into the hall.

A middle-aged English lady is waiting for the door to be opened. She is rather tall, rather large, and wears a mauve knitted dress that clings to her solid figure. Her faded hair is encircled with a bandeau of brown tulle which gives her an air that somehow contrives to be both impressive and slightly comic. She has the intensely respectable, intensely reserved look so characteristic of a certain old-fashioned type of Englishwoman abroad. One would expect to find her in a *pension* at Mentone, making tea in her bedroom over a spirit lamp, or perhaps painting precise little water-colours with a good deal of ultramarine. Today is one of her good days. There is nothing at all in her appearance to suggest the moods of suicidal depression which are the cause of her presence at 'La Pinède.'

'Good-morning, Miss Swanson,' says the smiling attendant in careful English, as she unlocks the door.

Miss Swanson answers and smiles in her remote way and goes out into the sun. After the shadows indoors the bright light is like a blow and she stops to put on the dark

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spectacles that she carries about in her bag. In front of her, in the middle of the asphalted private road, is a round bed full of succulent-looking cannas; behind, to the right and left, is the pinewood from which the house takes its name. When she has adjusted her glasses Miss Swanson puts up a linen sunshade lined with green and walks slowly along the middle of the roadway that leads both to the main building and to the workroom for which she is bound.

As she goes, she has, from some distance away, a clear view of what is happening ahead. From time to time, at irregular intervals, singly or in small groups, figures emerge from the white-balconied house and walk towards the atelier. All of them, in passing, pause for a few seconds beside a small, solitary girlish form under a clump of trees; the distant girl in her gay summer frock seems to have some piece of news which she is imparting to each one in turn.

The woman with the sunshade watches this procedure intently, screwing up her eyes behind their dark screens. The contraction of her eyes seems to indicate anxiety or disapproval—perhaps both. She begins to walk faster.

Soon she comes within speaking distance of the girl who is now alone, half sitting on an iron table under the trees. She is so small-boned and slight, her body is so immature-looking, that at a first glance one would take her for a child of about fifteen. It is hard to believe that she is actually a married woman when she calls out to her friend.

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'My husband's come! He's with the doctors now. As soon as he's finished with them he's going to take me out for the day.' She jumps up and seizes Miss Swanson's arm impulsively, shaking back her soft, fluffy hair and exclaiming: 'I told you he'd come, didn't I? You didn't believe me, but you see I was right all the time!' She tilts her head and laughs rather aimlessly, glancing up at the elder woman who, for her part, looks down gravely into the pretty, childish, undisciplined face which seems to lack some co-ordination with its receding chin, its large, slightly prominent blue eyes.

'How nice for you, Freda,' she says, non-committal.

The lukewarm tone disappoints the other who pouts and moves a few petulant steps away, putting a space between the two of them.

'You don't sound a bit pleased,' she complains in an ag-grieved tone.

Miss Swanson advances and pats her on the shoulder.

'Gracious, how thin you are, child!' she mutters to herself, feeling the bones under their inadequate coverings of silk and flesh. A thwarted maternal instinct in her has fastened upon this girl, her compatriot, who, like herself, is an exile, almost a prisoner, in this unhappy place. She feels possessive, protective, towards Freda; jealous of anyone who might come between them. 'Of course I'm pleased that you're happy,' she goes on. 'But I'm afraid for you—that things will be worse for you afterwards—that you'll feel lonelier than ever when your husband has gone.'

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'But he's not going!' cries Freda triumphantly. 'He's going to stay at the hotel by the lake.'

'All the same, he'll have to go back to England sometime.'

'Then he'll take me with him—I'll persuade him—you'll see. I'm quite well now, anyhow.'

The childish face is all smiles and Miss Swanson has not got the heart to refrain from smiling back in return. But she says nothing, and as it happens she is spared the necessity for words, because at that moment Mr. Rushwood comes out on to the steps of the clinic. He is very much older than his wife—perhaps more than twice her age—the last man in the world one would expect her to marry, for his face is serious, repressive, almost stern, under his grey hair. He approaches stiffly in the sunshine, walking with rather a wooden gait on account of an old war wound in the right leg. Freda introduces her friend, and he smiles like a schoolmaster, without warmth. His voice, too, is the voice of a master or of a clergyman, authoritative and cool.

'Well, what did the doctors say? Did they tell you how good I've been?' Freda is asking, clinging on to his arm and beaming at him.

But he, without answering the question, advises her to go and fetch her hat and bag as the car will arrive in a moment.

She runs off, like a docile child, and the elders are left together in the shade of the trees. Neither speaks. Mr. Rushwood stands stiffly by the table with an expressionless

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face. He is preoccupied, and a little embarrassed, too, at being left alone with this stranger who, though she looks quite conventional, may at any moment display some disturbing eccentricity. Miss Swanson surveys him with eyes that, in spite of everything, are shrewd enough behind the concealing black lenses. She does not seem to find reassurance in his aspect. Presently she puts up the sunshade which she has folded during the conversation with Freda, and starts to move off. But then a sudden impulse, very rare in her restrained spinster's heart, makes her turn back and address the uncompromising man.

'Mr. Rushwood, will you allow me to say something which I really have no right to say? You may quite well tell me that your wife's future is no business of mine, and I can only answer that nothing but my very genuine affection for her would induce me to interfere in matters which do not concern me. During the last few weeks I have come to know Freda very well, she has confided in me, and I understand her character. Perhaps, if you will forgive my saying so, I understand her even better than you do. Of course I don't know what plans you have made for her, but, Mr. Rushwood, I do beg you most earnestly to consider very carefully whether this is the right place for her—whether it would not be better to take her away from an environment where she is always lonely and sad and where she is bound to see and hear things which would be shocking to any young girl and must be especially so to one so sensitive and highly strung as she is. If you leave her

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here when you go I am really afraid of what may happen to her—I am really afraid she will break her heart.'

It is the proof of Miss Swanson's love that she is able to urge a course of action so contrary to her own wishes, for without Freda her existence at the clinic would lose its last shred of value.

The visitor has been growing slowly more uncomfortable during her long speech which, though spoken in a perfectly quiet voice, strikes him as being charged with dangerous emotion. For the first time he displays some sign of feeling, as, with a look half irritable, half apprehensive, he glances about as if in search of assistance. 'This is insupportable!' he thinks indignantly. 'Why doesn't someone come and take the woman away?' But there is nobody at all in sight and he is obliged to make a reply.

'My dear madam, even though you don't credit me with any understanding of my wife, you must at least allow the doctors' opinion——' he is beginning coldly, when two things occur simultaneously to rescue him from further embarrassment: a car sweeps round the bend of the private road and Freda rushes through the door of the clinic and comes running down the steps.

With only the briefest of salutes to his companion Rushwood goes across to the car where the girl is already sitting. Miss Swanson slowly waves her hand in response to Freda's fluttering handkerchief. She watches the car out of sight and then walks in a dispirited way towards the workshop and the lampshade upon which she is stencilling

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a floral design. She knows that the day will pass drearily for her now.

For Freda, on the contrary, the hours fly like happy birds. Like a child just back from boarding-school for the holidays she wants to see everything, to do everything at once. The small lakeside town is a heaven to her; she darts in and out of shops, eating pastries and chocolates, buying absurd trifles, chattering all the while to her husband, whose attitude is more like that of a father, at the same time indulgent, distrait and somewhat impatient. At lunch on the terrace of the hotel he can no longer restrain his impatience but sharply reproves the girl for her indecorous behaviour which, he fancies, is attracting the attention of the people around. Freda is cast-down and subdued for a few moments, but she soon forgets the rebuke and laughs and talks as irrepressibly as before.

The husband is rapidly coming to an end of his store of indulgence. The fact that the waiters obviously take Freda for his daughter and address her as 'mademoiselle' adds to his annoyance. He feels tired and worried, his leg is beginning to hurt him, he can no longer see anything but the faults in Freda's conduct. Finally he suggests a trip on the lake. It seems to him that her childish irresponsibility and exuberance will be less noticeable on the steamer.

From the man's point of view the afternoon is more satisfactory than the morning. To be sure, his wife is excited by the boat to begin with, she runs from one side to the other, leaning eagerly over the rail at the landing-stages

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to watch the people embark, and throwing bread to the gulls which mysteriously, so far from any sea, follow the steamer like white shadows. But towards the end of the trip she becomes quieter, sitting beside him on the wooden bench, her hand affectionately curled round his fingers. He spreads his coat over their knees so that no one shall see that she is holding his hand.

At dinner her febrile animation returns. The evening is chilly; instead of eating on the terrace they are now in the long dining-room. Her large, bright, prominent eyes dart mischievously from table to table, her indefatigable voice pours out its treble comments upon the diners. Once more Rushwood is forced to reprove her.

'Really, Freda, you are acting like a bad-mannered schoolgirl. Can't you realize that it's not amusing but merely rude to make personal remarks?'

'But they don't understand what we're saying—'

The note of almost unbearable irritation sounding through the deliberately calm tone in which he has just spoken penetrates her child's heart like a cruel needle of ice. Her face falls grotesquely, her mouth trembles, tears—the sudden, despairing tears of a hurt child—fill her eyes to the brim.

'All right, all right—there's nothing to cry about,' he says hastily, dreading a public scene.

Fortunately the waiter creates a diversion by bringing a dish of ice cream. Rushwood rests his chin on his hands and gazes across the small table at the girl who is now in-

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tent on the pink frozen substance upon her plate. Bitterness fills his being. Although his nature is cold and inflexible he is not a particularly unkind man, he wishes no ill to his wife; it is only that he can feel no sympathy, no toleration for her; his bitterness is directed against fate that has used him so evilly. He cannot understand why this disproportionate punishment should be inflicted upon him because he was once infatuated by a pretty face. 'But who could have guessed it would turn out like this?' he thinks wearily. He is glad that the meal is over, that the long, trying day has almost come to an end, that it is time to return his charge to the doctors' care.

The car is waiting for them outside the hotel. He is profoundly relieved because Freda raises no objection to going back to the clinic. In his gratitude he feels more warmly towards her than he has done all day long; in the dusky seclusion of the car he touches her hand.

'You never showed me your room in the hotel,' she exclaims suddenly, as they start to climb the steep, curving road from the lake.

It has come now, the dangerous moment, the moment he dreads. But the lights of the clinic are in sight; he is saved.

'I'm afraid I shan't be staying,' he says evenly. 'I have to get back to the office. It's not easy for me to get away even for a few days just now.'

There is dead silence inside the car. Even he, unimaginative and withdrawn as he is, feels the burden of silence.

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'Why doesn't she say something?' he wonders, peering at the averted whiteness that is her face. The car takes the final bend sharply and her body is thrown against his.

Suddenly she grasps his shoulders with both hands; he is surprised at the strength of her fingers; he feels her pointed fingers nipping into his flesh through the jacket and shirt.

'You can't leave me here . . . You must take me back with you!' she cries shrilly, against his chest.

'Now, Freda, do try and be reasonable. You know perfectly well that I can't take you—that the doctors say you must stay here for the present.'

He tries to disengage her fingers; but he cannot capture her hands which, like desperate sparrows, are beating all about him, clawing at his sleeve, his lapels, his tie, even his face. He can do nothing except dumbly defend himself against those clawing, beating hands, his ears deafened and appalled by the broken treble that fills the interior of the closed car with ceaseless, inarticulate lamentation.

They have come now to the entrance of the clinic. The chauffeur opens the car door and looks inside, then quickly shuts the door again with a muttered, 'One moment, monsieur.' He does not seem at all taken aback by what he sees in the car; probably he is quite used to such happenings. Almost at once he is back again with two nurses. 'If you will get out here, monsieur—that will be best,' he says to the confused husband, efficient and matter-of-fact.

The nurses prepare to restrain Freda in case she tries to

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prevent this move. But she, as if automatically giving up hope at the sight of authority, has already ceased all protest, all aggression, and is huddled unresistingly in the corner, limp as a doll, with tears running down her cheeks.

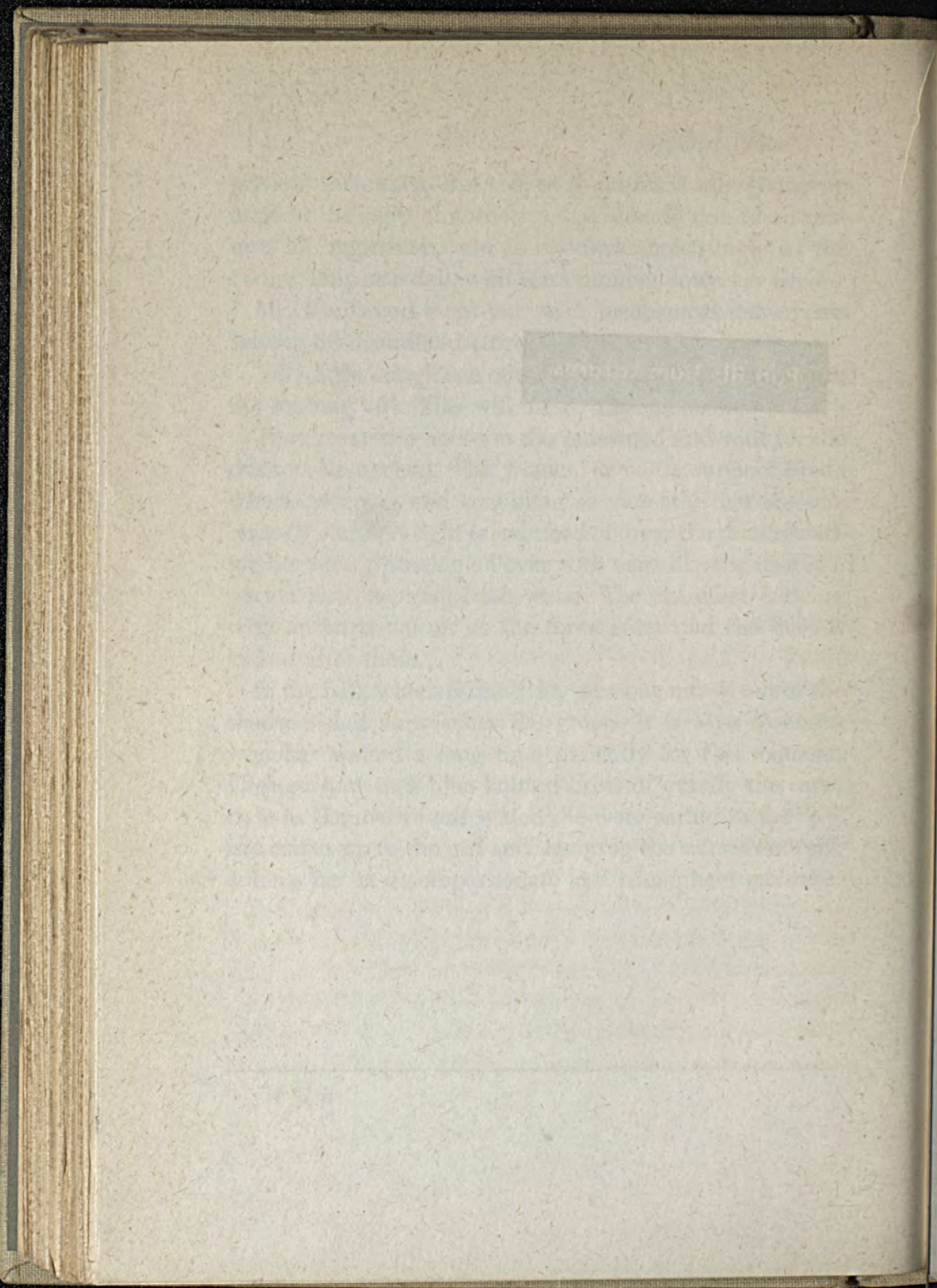
Mr. Rushwood steps out, with mechanical movements tidying his disordered attire. The car quickly drives on.

'Silly little thing!' one of the nurses says, quite kindly, to the sobbing girl. 'This will mean "La Pinède" for you.'

They reach the house, in the pinewood and wait for the door to be opened. The women in white support Freda who is weeping and trembling so violently that she can scarcely stand. A light is switched on over the door revealing her face glistening all over with tears like the face of a person just emerging from water. The chauffeur watches with an impartial air as the three enter and the door is locked after them.

In the hall, which is dimly lit, someone moves out of the shadows and approaches the group. It is Miss Swanson who has waited a long time patiently for this moment. Dressed now in a blue knitted dress of exactly the same style as the mauve one which she wore earlier in the day, she comes up to the girl and, ignoring the nurses entirely, enfolds her in a compassionate and triumphant embrace.

Part III: I am Lazarus



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I Am Lazarus

THE English doctor had not particularly wanted to visit the clinic. He distrusted foreigners and their ways, especially their medical ways. He distrusted anything he did not understand. In particular he distrusted this insulin-shock treatment there had been such a fuss about. Why should putting imbeciles into a coma make them sane? It didn't make any sense. He did not think and he never had thought that there was a cure for an advanced dementia praecox case like young Thomas Bow.

The English doctor was not a very good doctor. He was middle-aged and frustrated and undistinguished and he would never have been consulted by the rich Mrs. Bow if she had not happened to buy a country house near the village in which he practised.

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When Mrs. Bow had heard that the doctor was taking his wife for a motor tour on the Continent for their summer holiday she had suggested that he might call in to see her son if he should be anywhere near the clinic. The doctor realized that a suggestion from Mrs. Bow was practically a command. No one understood better than he did the importance of keeping on the right side of a wealthy patient. Besides, it would sound well when he visited his colleagues at home after the trip. He imagined himself drinking a glass of sherry with old Leigh and casually talking about it. 'Oh yes, I had a look round the Dessones clinic when I was over there. One must keep in touch with modern developments, you know.'

The English doctor thought about these things as he walked with the superintendent in the grounds of the clinic. He also thought of the time nearly a year ago when Mrs. Bow had told him that she had decided to send her son to this continental place someone had told her about. The doctor had opposed the idea. It was a useless expense. It couldn't possibly do any good. But she was determined. Well, she had plenty of money, so what did it matter? A pretty penny it must be costing her, too, he thought. The thought gratified him. He glanced at the beautifully kept gardens. The grounds were really magnificent, the watered lawns green in spite of the dry summer, every tree pruned to perfection, the borders brilliant with flowers.

Out of the blue foreign sky the sun lavishly and impartially poured itself upon the two doctors, the handsome

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grey-haired superintendent with his white coat, the Englishman in his hot-looking tweeds.

'Wonderful place you've got here,' the visitor said in the ungracious English way that made the remark sound patronizing.

The superintendent spoke English and four other languages with complete fluency. He gracefully signified his appreciation of the other's approval. He had exactly estimated the unimportance of his companion but it was his policy to treat everyone with polite attention. This was one of the secrets of his success.

'We're very proud of Mr. Bow,' he said. 'He's an outstanding example of the success of the treatment. He responded wonderfully well from the start and I consider him a quite remarkable cure. In a few months he should be well enough to go home. We're just keeping him under observation now.'

The English doctor began for the first time to think about Thomas Bow whom he was to see in a few moments and whom he had last seen hopelessly insane. He wondered how he would see him today. They walked on. Behind stood the big main building, white like a smart hotel with striped awnings and window boxes bright with scarlet geraniums. In front were the workrooms, the studios, where the patients were employed at various handicrafts.

The superintendent opened the door of a well-lighted room with a long table at which men and women were

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working. The sun came through the windows and shone on their hands moving over the table. Some of them were talking. There was a little froth of talk in the room which bubbled away into nothingness as the door opened. A man in an overall was in charge. He had a good-humoured face with freckles across his cheeks. He stood behind one of the patients showing him what to do. The different pairs of hands, large and small, rose and fell over the table.

'Quite a hive of industry, you see.' The superintendent was bland.

The Englishman looked uneasily at the faces and at the hands which seemed to be rising and falling of their own volition in the banded sunshine above the table.

The superintendent stepped up to the table.

'Good morning, Mr. Bow. I've brought you a visitor.'

A young man of about twenty-two, very neatly dressed in a grey suit, was sitting there with a strip of leather held in his hands. He had a pale, full, rather nice-looking face and dark hair brushed very smooth. His nose was aristocratic. He was well-built, on the big side; a little fleshy, perhaps. He looked squarely at the two doctors out of flat hazel eyes.

'You remember me, don't you?' the English visitor said, giving his name.

He held out his hand and after a slight pause the other man put down the piece of leather and shook the hand. He did not smile.

'Glad to see you looking so fit,' said the doctor, bringing

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into action his falsely hearty professional tone. He unobtrusively scrutinized the young man who sat stiffly correct in his place at the sunny table, holding the strip of leather again.

'What are you making?' the superintendent asked him.

'A belt,' said the patient, and smiled.

He liked making the belt and so it pleased him to have someone notice it, and he smiled.

'It's pigskin,' he explained. He liked speaking about the belt.

'Very nice,' the English doctor said, not quite at ease.

'Yes,' Thomas Bow said. 'I made another before but it was too narrow. This is a much better one.'

He looked satisfied, sure of being on safe ground. The superintendent patted his shoulder, a few more remarks were exchanged, and the doctors went out again.

'I should never have believed it possible,' the Englishman said with emphasis and repressed indignation. 'Never.'

He felt disapproving and indignant and uncomfortable without quite knowing why. Of course, the boy looks normal enough, he said to himself. He seems quiet and self-controlled. But there must be a catch in it somewhere. You can't go against nature like that. It just isn't possible. He thought uneasily of the young inexpressive face and the curious flat look of the eyes.

In the workroom the unsustained talk started again like the twitter of nervous birds in an aviary. Mr. Bow took no

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notice. He spoke to no one and nobody spoke to him. He methodically went on sewing the pigskin belt with steady, regular movements of his soft hands. It was satisfactory. What had he to do with talking? All around the table were different coloured shapes whose mouths opened and closed and emitted sounds that meant nothing to him. He did not mind either the shapes or the sounds. They were part of the familiar atmosphere of the workroom where he felt comfortable and at ease.

A buzzer set in the wall made a noise like an angry wasp. The patients rose from the table and went away, some singly, some in small groups. Now it was quiet in the workroom. The man in the overall started tidying up. He moved round the table arranging things neatly and putting other things away on the shelves.

Mr. Bow sat on in his place sewing the pigskin belt. He did not want to go out of the workroom where he felt confident and secure. Outside things were different.

The freckled man left him in peace until the whole room was tidy. Then he came up and touched his arm. 'Time to go to déjeuner, Monsieur Bow.' He put out his strong brown hand for the belt and the white hands of Mr. Bow reluctantly yielded it up.

'See, I take great care of it for you,' the man said kindly. He rolled the belt and wrapped it in a clean cloth and put it away in a special place at the back of one of the shelves.

Thomas Bow watched carefully. When he was sure that the belt was finally and safely disposed of he went out of

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the workroom. The other man followed him out and shut the door and locked it and dropped the key into his pocket and walked quickly away to his lunch.

Mr. Bow sauntered slowly in a different direction, towards the main building. Once or twice he glanced back at the workroom. Each time he saw the door still blankly closed against him and he sighed. He walked rather stiffly on a path that crossed a park-like expanse of ground. The grass here had not been cut but grew up tall between clumps of fine trees. Moon daisies grew in the grass. They had yellow eyes that squinted craftily through the grass.

The grass grew up tall and feathery. The grasses whispered together and turned their heads in the breeze. Mr. Bow touched the heads of the grasses with his soft fingers. The grasses responded felinely; like thin sensitive cats they arched themselves to receive the caress of his finger-tips. The young man stood still and picked one of the grasses and brushed it against his cheek. It touched his skin lightly, prickingly, like the electrified fur of a cat in a thunderstorm. He picked several more grasses.

Suddenly he was aware of a presence. The gym mistress cycling along the path had approached noiselessly. She skipped neatly off her bicycle. Like everyone else employed in the clinic she was big and healthy and strong. The sun-bleached hairs on her muscular brown arms glittered like gold. At the gymnastic class she often spoke sharply to Mr. Bow because he was clumsy and slow. Now, however, she spoke in a friendly way.

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'Why, Mr. Bow, what are you doing with those?'

The young man laboriously assembled words in his head. He wished to explain that the grasses turned into soft-furred cats and arched their backs under his hand.

The gym mistress did not listen to what he was trying to say. It was not the fashion at the clinic to listen to what patients said. There was not enough time. Instead, she put out her hand. Steadying the bicycle with her left hand, she stretched out her right and took the grasses away from Thomas Bow and threw them down on the path. A few seeds had stuck to his jacket and she brushed them off briskly.

'You don't want those,' she said. 'Nobody picks grass. We could pick some flowers though, if you like.' She reached down for a handful of moon daisies and offered them to him. 'There, aren't they pretty?' She was very good-natured about it.

Mr. Bow unwillingly accepted the flowers.

'Come on,' she said. 'You'll be late for lunch if you don't hurry.'

She walked strongly beside him wheeling the bicycle. Some part of the mechanism accompanied them with a soft whirring noise.

The young man glanced with dislike at the daisies he carried. Their yellow eyes had a base and knowing expression. When the gym mistress was not looking he dropped them and trod on them with his brown shoe.

Inside the clinic he went into the washroom. Several

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coats hung on the wall. Thomas Bow avoided the wash-basins nearest the coats. The hanging shapes filled him with deep suspicion. He watched them out of the ends of his eyes to make sure they did not get up to anything while he was washing his hands. Just as he was ready to go someone else came into the cloakroom, an Italian two or three years younger than he. He frowned and hurried towards the door. He did not like Sanguinelli who had eyes like black minnows that darted about in his face. Sanguinelli's face was never at rest; the muscles jumped and twitched like mice caught in traps under the skin.

'Goo-ood morn-eeng,' he said. He grinned. He only knew a few English words.

The other man did not answer but hastily opened the door. The Italian arrested him with a shrill whistle and pointed mockingly towards the Englishman's lower middle. Mr. Bow looked down guiltily. Sometimes he forgot to do up his fly buttons and when this happened one of the doctors would reprimand him. The buttons were fastened now. Sanguinelli let out a hoot of derision.

In the passage a nurse was going towards the door that led to the staff-rooms. The door-female situation was one with which Thomas Bow was quite familiar. The doctors had impressed upon him what he must do whenever it presented itself. He stepped forward politely and opened the door. He smiled. It pleased him that he knew so well what to do. The nurse smiled back. She thanked him and said how well he was looking. Then she went through the door and shut it behind her.

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'Flirting with Mr. Bow?' said her friend who was passing by.

'I'm sorry for him,' said the nurse. 'He does try so hard to do what he's told. He's a nice-looking boy, too. It's a shame.'

'He gives me the creeps,' said the other girl. 'Like an automaton walking about. Like a robot. When you think what he was like when he first came it's uncanny. And he always looks so worried. I believe he'd have been happier left as he was. What d'you suppose goes on inside his head?'

'Heaven knows,' said her friend.

Mr. Bow was sorry that there were no more doors which he could open for ladies to pass through. He went into the hall where most of the patients were already assembled. He sat down on a hard chair in the background. He was relieved because nobody spoke to him. There was the same sort of noise here as there had been in the workroom, the sort of sporadic twittering that might come from a collection of timid cage-birds. The young man looked round cautiously. The pretty dresses of the women gave him pleasure but he was not at ease. At any moment something might pounce on him, something for which he did not have the formula. He waited tensely, on enemy ground.

The gong sounded, the doctor on duty appeared, and the patients flocked after him into the dining-hall. The table places were altered at every meal and each patient's place was marked with a card on which was written his

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name. The waiters, like well-trained sheep-dogs, skilfully manœuvred the patients towards their chairs. Mr. Bow was glad to find that he was not to sit beside one of the so-called hostesses who were spaced round the big table to watch what went on. The patients stood at their places, waiting for the doctor to sit down. The doctor glanced round to make sure that everybody had found the right seat. Then he sat down. It was the signal. The room was full of loud scrapings as the patients pulled back their chairs.

Mr. Bow prepared to sit down with the rest but there was an obstruction; something impeded him. Sanguinelli had slipped quick as an eel between him and his chair. The Italian's eyes, full of malice, writhed like insane tadpoles from side to side.

'Excuse—my place.' He pointed towards the name card with a thin yellow finger.

'No,' said Thomas Bow, frowning. He was angry. He was tormented and persecuted and he would not endure it. He snatched at the back of the chair but Sanguinelli was seated in it already. Everyone was sitting down now except the waiters and Mr. Bow.

A hostess two places away took charge of the situation. Her hair went in hard, regular waves.

'This is your seat here, Mr. Bow,' she said amicably. There was a chair empty beside her.

'No,' said the Englishman slowly. 'No.' He frowned deeply. 'My card is here.'

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The Italian burst out laughing. He triumphantly displayed the card in front of him on which was written the name Sanguinelli. The hostess looked down and saw that the card next to her was indeed the name card of Thomas Bow.

'Come along, Mr. Bow. You've made a mistake,' she said in a firmer tone.

The young man recognized the firmness that was in her voice. He moved obediently and sat down in the empty chair and spread his table napkin widely over his knees as he had been shown how to do. He ate what was put before him, looking carefully at his neighbors to make sure that he used the same knives and forks as they did. All the time he was eating he felt angry and sad and confused. Something had happened which he did not understand. The card with his name had been there, he had seen it distinctly, but when he looked at it again Sanguinelli's name had appeared. Sanguinelli had triumphed over him in front of the whole room and it was unfair. He had heard the laughter go round the table. His heart was full of sorrow and shame. From time to time the Italian boy leaned forward and grinned at him from the stolen place, triumphant because no one had seen him exchange the cards.

After lunch the patients went out into the grounds. Games were organized. Mr. Bow was directed to take part in the simplest game which consisted in throwing large wooden balls at a smaller ball some distance off. Mr. Bow did not understand the game. He did not understand why

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some of the balls were brown and some black or why one player threw before another. He stood with the large shiny ball in his hand, waiting till he should be told to throw. He was not thinking about the game. He was thinking about the pigskin belt he was making. It seemed to him that the belt was his friend. Only the feel of the cool leather could assuage the hurt and the anger inside his heart.

The time came for him to make his throw. He held the ball cupped in his hand as he saw the other players do. He aimed conscientiously at the little ball lying out on the grass but his ball disobeyed him and flew far beyond. There was laughter. 'Champion! Champion!' jeered the Italian voice.

Thomas Bow wandered away from the game. No one noticed him going. He wandered towards the workroom. He held out his hands to the grasses, but now they did not caress his skin like soft fur but pricked sharp as needles. As he walked he hoped very much that the workroom door would be open. It was shut, and blinds were drawn over the windows.

The young man sat down on the step in front of the workroom door. He looked bewildered and worried and very sad. He did not know what to do. It troubled him that the belt was locked away in there. He felt the belt lonely for him as he was for it. He glanced up. A cloud had passed over the sun. He would have liked to share his worry with the cloud but the cloud would not stay. He sat disconsolate on the step staring flatly ahead.

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Presently he heard voices and two men came round the corner of the building. One of them was a man who visited the clinic periodically to do X-ray work. The other was a doctor with black hair and a bluish chin. Mr. Bow was afraid of the doctor who for many months had put him into a hideous sleep with his poisoned needle.

'Hullo, what are you doing here?' the radiologist asked.

'I came for my belt,' he answered. He stood up.

He was afraid of the doctor and wanted to get away in case he should be trapped and put back again into the nightmare sleep.

'Your belt?' The other man did not understand.

'He's doing leather work at occupational therapy. I suppose he's making a belt,' the doctor explained. He came up to the patient. 'Don't you know that the workroom's closed in the afternoon?' he said to him. 'It's recreation time now. Get off and join the others.' He gave him a friendly push. Mr. Bow started back in alarm.

'I only wanted my belt,' he said, starting to move away.

The other two watched him go.

'He doesn't know how lucky he is,' said the dark doctor. 'We've pulled him back literally from a living death. That's the sort of thing that encourages one in this work.'

Mr. Bow walked carefully in the sunshine. He did not know how lucky he was and perhaps that was rather lucky as well.

Palace of Sleep

THE wind was blowing like mad in the hospital garden. It seemed to know that it was near a mental hospital, and was showing off some crazy tricks of its own, pouncing first one way and then another, and then apparently in all directions at once. The mad wind sprang out with a bellow from behind a corner of the nurses' quarters, immediately tearing round the back of the building to meet itself half-way along the front in a double blast that nearly snatched the cap from the head of a sister hurrying towards the entrance. With a clash and a clatter the door swung to admit her indignant figure huddled in its blue cloak. The wind came in, too, with a malicious gusto that died drearily in the recesses of the hall where the two doctors were talking.

The physician in charge glanced round as if he resented the uncereemonious way the wind burst into his hospital.

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He was a man of about sixty-five, with a red, cheerful face and white hair. Magnanimously passing over the wind's interruption, he went on with the story he was telling.

'When I went in next morning she was trying to tear up the sheet. So I said to her in a quiet, friendly way, "Don't you think that's rather a silly thing to do?" And she answered me back as quick as lightning, "If I can't do silly things here, I'd like to know where I can do them."' The red face creased into a net of jovial lines, the broad shoulders shook with laughter. 'Pretty smart, wasn't it?'

The young doctor echoed the laugh politely. He was a visitor from the north who was being shown round the hospital. Himself a reticent man, he wished that the superintendent were a little less genial and expansive. So much good-humour aroused in him some disquietude, some slight distrust. He turned his lean, sensitive face, and his eyes rested reflectively on the other for a moment. What they saw was not altogether reassuring. There was something which they found faintly suspect about the appearance of the elderly man. His hair was too white, his face was too genial, his expression was too optimistic. He looked more like a country parson than a psychiatrist.

The visitor looked at his watch and said tentatively, 'I'm afraid I haven't much time left. I think you were going to show me the paying block—?'

'Yes, yes. The paying block. You must certainly see that before you go. We're very proud of our private wards.'

The swing doors clashed behind the two men, who low-

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ered their heads against the attack of the wind. The wind leaped madly upon them, with malice, with joy, as they walked on the covered way that crossed the impersonal garden. In the empty flower-beds the earth lay saturated and black, the wintry-looking, acid-green grass rippled under the wind, the bare trees lashed their branches complainingly.

The two doctors walked briskly along side by side, the one tall, contemplative, reserved, turned in upon himself against the onslaught of wind, the other with white hair blowing about and a look of determined good-nature which seemed to set the seal of his approval upon the rough weather.

The long brick building felt quiet as a vacuum after the windy tumult outside. The superintendent paused for a moment inside the door, smoothing his beautiful white hair with his fingers. He was slightly breathless.

'Welcome to the palace of sleep,' he said with his cheerful smile, speaking and smiling partly for the benefit of a young nurse who was passing by. 'All the patients in this wing are having partial or prolonged narcosis,' he went on in a more confidential tone as the girl disappeared through one of the many doors.

The wide corridor was coldly and antiseptically white, with a row of doors on the left and windows on the opposite side. The windows were high and barred, and admitted a discouraging light that gleamed bluishly on the white distemper like a reflection of snow. Some grey rub-

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ber composition which deadened sound covered the floor. A hand-rail ran along the wall under the high windows.

One of the doors further down the corridor opened, and a nurse emerged, supporting a woman in a red dressing-gown. The patient swayed and staggered in spite of the firm grip that guided her hand to the rail. Her head swung loosely from side to side, her wide-open eyes, at once distracted and dull like the eyes of a drunken person, stared out of her pale face, curiously puffy and smooth under dark hair projecting in harsh, disorderly elf-locks. Her feet, clumsy and uncontrolled in their woollen slippers, tripped over the hem of her long nightdress and threw her entire weight on the nurse's supporting arm.

'Hold up, Topsy,' the probationer said, in a tolerant, indifferent voice just perceptibly tinged with impatience, speaking as if to an awkward child. She hoisted her companion upright, and the pair continued their laborious progress towards the bathroom, the sick woman stumbling and reeling, and gazing desperately, blankly ahead, the nurse watchful, abstracted, and humming a dance tune under her breath.

'That patient will finish her treatment in another day or two,' the physician-in-charge told the visitor. 'Of course she won't remember anything that's happened to her during the period of narcosis. She's practically unconscious now, although she can manage to walk after a fashion.'

He continued to discuss technicalities as they moved together along the corridor. The young man listened and

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answered somewhat mechanically, his eyes troubled, disturbed by what they had seen.

A door opened as the two doctors were passing it, and the red-faced senior paused to speak to the nurse who was coming out, holding an enamel tray covered with a cloth from beneath which emanated the nauseous stench of paraldehyde. He noticed the other man's instinctive recoil, and his face wrinkled into its jolly folds.

'Don't you like our local perfume, then? We're so used to the smell of P.R. here that we hardly notice it. Some of the patients say they actually get to like it in time.'

They went into the room, which was heavy with the same sickening odour. Under the white bedspread pulled straight and symmetrical, like the covering of a bier, a young woman was lying quite motionless with closed eyes. Her fair hair was spread on the pillow, her pale face was absolutely lifeless, void, with the peculiar glazed smoothness and eye-sockets darkly circled. The superintendent stood at the bedside looking down at this shape which already seemed to have forfeited humanity and given itself over prematurely to death. His face wore a complacent expression, gratified, approving; the look of a man well satisfied with his work.

'She won't move now for eight hours, and then she'll come round enough to be washed and fed, and then we'll send her off for another eight-hour snooze.'

The visitor had come close to the bed and was also looking down at its occupant. The vague distress accumulat-

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ing in his mind crystallized for some reason about this inanimate form which seemed, to his stimulated sensibilities, to be surrounded by an aura of inexpressible suffering.

'I don't know that I altogether approve of such drastic treatment for psycho-neurotics,' he was beginning, when suddenly a tremor disturbed the immobility of the anonymous face, the eyelids quivered under their load of shadows. The man watched, fascinated, almost appalled, as, slowly, with intolerable, incalculable effort, the drugged eyes opened and stared straight into his. Was it imagination, or did he perceive in their clouded greyness a look of terror, of wild supplication, of frantic, abysmal appeal?

'She's not conscious, of course,' the superintendent remarked in his benevolent voice. 'That opening of the eyes is purely a reflex. She can't really see us or hear anything we say.'

Smiling, white-headed like a clergyman, he turned and walked across to the open door. The other doctor hesitated for a few seconds in the ill-smelling room, looking down at the patient, held by an obscure reluctance to withdraw his gaze from those unclear eyes. And when he finally moved away he felt uneasy and almost ashamed, and wished that he had not come to visit the hospital.

Who Has Desired the Sea

THE late autumn sun came into the ward about two in the afternoon. There wasn't much strength in the sun which was slow in creeping round the edge of the blackout curtains so that it took a long time to reach the bed by the window.

He lay on the bed fully dressed and watched the sun clamber feebly from one empty bed to another all down the ward, rasping the folded dark army blankets with bristles of light. When it had investigated each iron bedstead the sun slipped down and stretched itself on the floor. The floor was polished and shiny, but where the sun lay a film of dust was revealed. Bars of shadow crossed the pale sun on the floor because of the paper strips pasted over the window. He noticed, as he had noticed on previous afternoons, how the horizontal lines looked like the shadows of prison bars. The association was vaguely un-

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pleasant, and a vague uneasiness disturbed his preoccupation. There was no sense in the paper, anyhow, he thought. It wouldn't prevent the glass splintering if a bomb dropped anywhere near.

He turned his head to the window and the uneasiness disappeared. On the window itself the paper strips were translucent and honey-coloured and no longer suggestive of prison bars.

Outside the window he could see the park with trees and grass and a drive curving through. There was a white board shaped like an arrow at the edge of the drive, pointing to the hospital with the words *Neurosis Centre* painted on it. The tall trees were practically leafless and their black branches swayed gravely and delicately in the wind. The short grass underneath was patched with tarnished brown-gold by the fallen leaves. In summer it would be an agreeable English scene; but now the dying autumnal leaves and the sea wind gave it some desolation.

The man on the bed knew that he ought to be with the other patients, many of whom were walking about outside, their bright hospital trouser-legs showing under their khaki greatcoats. He ought to get up and put on his own overcoat which hung neatly on the hook by his bed, folded in the regulation way with the buttons fastened. He knew this was what he should do. But the knowledge had no relevance. It did not seem to apply directly to him. Something like glass came in between, dividing him from it. He lay quietly looking out of the window.

Who Has Desired the Sea

It was pass day, the day visitors were allowed, and some of the soldiers out there had civilians with them, friends and relatives with whom they were going out for the afternoon. Some couples walked arm-in-arm, and there were a few family groups with children scuffing their feet through the fallen leaves. Most of those who had no visitors stepped out briskly towards the road leading to the shops and the cinema. Only here and there an isolated patient walked slowly, with bent head, looking down on the ground, or wandered aimlessly on the grass as if he did not notice where he was going.

Before the eyes of the man in the ward the scattered figures outside moved in a pattern as remotely impersonal as that of the weaving branches or the seagulls circling against the sky.

He saw these things with his blue, away-looking eyes, but he was not attending to them. He was looking for something, or rather someone, quite different: he was looking for a young man with thick brown awkward hair and a small scar on his cheek. For a long time he had been looking for this young man. It was absolutely necessary that he should find him. The man on the bed did not know how it was that he, whose life had become a lonely uncertainty, was so certain of this one thing. He did not at all understand it, but he did not question it either. He only knew with complete conviction that it was essential to him that this man should be found. Then, and not till then, he himself would be able to get outside the glass.

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The sun was crawling weakly across the ward. The man stretched out and held his hand in the sun. He saw the sunshine on the back of his brown strong-fingered hand and felt the faint warmth. He felt the sunshine and saw it, but it was beyond the glass, it was not touching him really. After a moment he put his hand down again on the blanket beside him. He did not feel disappointed or troubled about the glass. He was used to it. It was queer how you got used to things, even to living inside a glass cell.

A picture of a clock drifted in front of him. It was an electric clock that had belonged to one of his aunts, it was made of brass with all its works showing, a skeleton of a clock inside a glass dome, and it never required winding. When he was a small boy there had seemed to him to be something horrific and fascinating and pathetic about the sight of the pendulum frantically swinging, swinging, swinging, perpetually exposed and driven in that transparent tomb.

A gust of wind rattled the window and blew the clock thousands of miles and days back to its mantelpiece. The man on the bed listened for the sound of waves in the wind. Although the sea was a good distance off it was possible sometimes to hear the waves break on the rocky shore. Now, as on every occasion when he was aware of the sea, a vague disquietude, restlessness, creased his forehead in anxious lines.

Now he was not able to attend to his watching, was the

Who Has Desired the Sea

fear behind the anxiety. Now if the young man came near he might not be aware. The sea-sound was a distraction, interrupting his vigil.

The wind died down again and the noise of the waves was no longer distinguishable. With the patients all out on passes the hospital seemed unnaturally still. The murmurous confusion of steps and voices, the opening and closing doors which normally went unnoticed became in absence obtrusive.

Without moving his body the man turned his head from the window and looked down the empty ward. The sun had now reached the wainscot and was starting to pull itself up the wall. Soon it would catch his greatcoat and mount above it and move on up to the ceiling. Then it would go altogether and leave the ward to the strengthening shadows. But before that happened he himself would be gone. There was something which had to be done. Something immensely difficult that had to be done by him while the afternoon sun still shone. It was something he would not be able to do. It was too difficult. It was impossible. But it was required of him. He would be obliged to attempt this impossible thing. He would not be allowed to evade the foredoomed attempt. They would come to the ward and fetch him away to make it.

So for these last few minutes he must wait with his whole attention for the young man with the thick untidy hair and the little scar. So he must hope that his twelfth-hour arrival would make everything plausible. Since the

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sea was quiet he had no more anxiety, and with the anxiety and the restlessness gone all that he felt was a great preoccupation and longing that the young man should appear. From the effort he would soon have to make he was now dissociated. For a moment it had seemed urgent; but now the glass shut it off. It was strange how dim and unurgent the glass made it.

If only he would come now, the man thought. He was looking along the length of the ward, and watching the door. He always felt that the young man with the scar was more likely to come when there was no one about. Maybe he had something private to say, and that was why he would come when things were quiet. Well, the place was deserted enough now.

But then, inside the glass, the pendulum began madly swinging, swinging, making him feel confused. Pictures and confusion crowded inside the glass.

Now in the distance he saw the beach at Mairangi and the young man was standing there very tanned in his bathing slips and that was the small scar on his cheek that he had got from the oyster shell on the rock swimming under water when he was eight years old. That was one of the things he was seeing, with, in the background, Cape Promise and all the islands, the Sugar Loaf and The Noises, the little ones where the penguins went, and the one which was an extinct volcano. It was the strong southern sun that made the wattle burn like a yellow fire all along the creek. In Mairangi at Christmas time the sun

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was so strong it hurt your eyes for the first few seconds when you came out of the bath in the morning and ran down the beach to swim. That was the place where they dragged the boat over the warm sand, shells sharply warm on the foot soles, and where they had those great fishing trips out to the Barrier, the water as smooth and solid to look at as kauri gum and as blue as sapphires, and he remembered the clean splashless opening of the water as you dived into it like a knife.

But then the water was piled-up and ugly, another colour, another ocean, and that was another thing in the sky he was seeing and Shorty asking him if it were an F.W. and he looking up at it over the gun and saying, No, that's one of the escort planes. We're not in the range of the F.W.s yet. And Shorty repeating to the boys on the gun, No, it's one of ours. We're not in the range yet, and the others all saying, Must be one of the escorts. But it was a Focke Wulfe all right swooping over that evil water and it delivered them to it when the tanker's deck twisted, splintered and pulped and exploded in flame, and he remembered how the black water towered up and then the thousand-ton icy weight of it smashing down on them like a whale, the freezing, murderous bastard.

And now suddenly there was nothing but the skeleton in the transparent cell, brass midriff and spine, wheels and frangible springs, the hollow man, bloodless, heartless, headless; only the crazy pendulum swinging in place of head.

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'Why are you up here? Don't you feel well?' the nurse said, coming into the ward.

'I'm all right,' he said. He looked at her and was glad because it was this nurse who had come for him, the pretty fair one, who would not make a fuss or ask too many questions.

'You haven't forgotten you've got a visitor, have you?' she said. 'You surely haven't forgotten about your fiancée coming? She's downstairs now and you ought to have been there to meet her. Did you forget today was visiting day?'

So, he thought, here it is: it's come now, the time when I have to do the impossible thing. And for a second he felt sick inside, but that passed, and he was behind the glass and feeling nothing at all.

'No, I hadn't forgotten,' he said.

He swung his legs off the bed and stood up tall and lean, and unhooked his coat while the nurse straightened the pillow and then came with him down the ward and waited while he held his comb under the tap at the wash-basin and tugged at the unmanageable brown hair that never would lie flat whatever he did to it with water or brilliantine.

He saw the nurse watching, and said, 'This is a kind of experiment, isn't it? To see how I get on with Nora, I mean.'

'Doctor thinks it will do you good to see her,' she said. 'That's why he told her she could come down from Lon-

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don today. It's not going to be very easy for her, you know. She's been awfully worried about you. It's up to you to show her that you're going to be quite all right.'

'Yes,' he answered, out of the glass.

They were downstairs now at the door of the waiting-room. The nurse opened the door and stepped back and he went into the room which was empty except for the girl standing close to the window; quick-smiling face and tapping heels, he watched her come quickly towards him now. Again he felt hollow sick because of the hopeless attempt, the effort which had to be made, thinking inside himself, Do I have to do this? Is it absolutely necessary to try this impossible thing? But then it passed, he felt her breath and her light kiss on his cheek, it was over, he was in his glass cell and it seemed quiet there and he felt nothing at all.

'It's a lovely afternoon,' the girl said presently. 'Shall we go for a walk?'

'All right.'

She was nervous, not knowing how to begin knowing him again, and, remembering his loose colonial stride and how he liked being out in the open places, she walked with him away from the town and the cinema where she would have felt at home.

She's a sweet girl really, he thought with a vague pang that was gone almost before he felt it at all. It was not her fault that he could not even feel sorry because she had come to him when he was no longer there. She was not in

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the least to blame. How could she know that he was a hollow thing; only wheels and a pendulum working inside a case? Because he had not found the young man with the scarred cheek he could not come to her through the glass.

She was talking to him as they walked in the thin sunshine beyond the hospital grounds. The sun was getting very low and the seagulls were flying low over the downs where they walked. He looked at her face between him and the sky. She was walking with her head turned to him and the sinking sun shone on her pleasantly powdered face and he could see that she was trying hard to make contact with him. He heard the sea make a noise just over the rise of the hill.

'No further,' he said, standing still. 'I don't want to go on any further.'

She looked at him with surprise and said, 'Don't you want to look at the sea? Let's just walk up to the top where we can see it now that we're here. It's quite close now.'

He felt the bad feeling come on him again, but this time there was no sickness, only a sudden sinking and emptiness, as when a small ship lurches and rolls suddenly, so that he waited for the crash and slither of loose objects falling; but there was only the wind and the gulls and the waves breaking below the edge of the hill. It passed, and he started to walk on again up the slope, because it did not matter really. Nothing mattered, he thought, because nothing could reach him while he was inside the glass.

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'All right,' he said. 'Let's go and look at the sea.'

And really when he saw it it did not matter: it was quite easy to look at the agitated empty pale sea that was faintly touched with lilac feathers under the sunset sky. Except that he would rather not have seen the breaking waves on the rocks at the foot of the cliff. It was quite a high cliff to which the track had led them over the downs. The girl was looking out to sea and smiling with the wind blowing back the short bits of hair round her face.

'It's fine up here, isn't it?' she said to him.

'No,' he said, 'it's the wrong sea.'

He saw the bewilderment and distress and incomprehension come instead of the smile on her face because of what he had said; and he thought that he ought to try and explain something, but it was impossible because there was nothing but the swinging pendulum with which to explain.

And at the same time he saw on sunnier cliffs bare-legged girls, perhaps his sisters, riding barebacked on ponies with rough manes flying; he saw the bleached gilt hairs on the brown girls' legs and heard girls' high voices calling and laughing often.

'You've always been mad on the sea,' a girl's voice was saying.

Yes, the sea was the one thing he had always been crazy about. But what had become of those other oceans? What had become of the sapphire blue deep water, the quick, clear small waves on the beaches, the purple sub-

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merged peninsulas of the reefs? Now he remembered the steady smooth rush of the sailing boat through blue sunlit water and the satisfactory slap of water on the sides of the boat. He remembered the huge seas marching past the tanker, huge and heavy and whale-coloured, marching in manic persistence, the staggering deck, the water bursting endlessly over the catwalk. And for a second he remembered the time on the gun when they brought the plane down at sunrise, and for a second he was that young gunner triumphant and in his glory, the sea lunging pink-stained into oblivion past the gun sights. Then he remembered the horror that came later, the freezing, strangling, devilish masses of water, the horror of blazing oil on the water and Shorty screaming out of the flaming water. Then the cold blankness settled again and he could not remember whether he had known these things or what had become of them.

Now it was this town girl he had met on leave in the city to whom he had to attend. She was a good-looking girl; and perhaps before the glass closed round him he had felt something for her, but now there was just this impossible thing, this effort he could not make. He knew he ought to explain something. She was trying to be sweet and kind to him. But he knew he could never do the impossible thing. And just then it occurred to him that he was shaking under his khaki coat.

'What is it, Lennie?' she asked him.

'Nothing,' he said. 'It's cold standing around. Let's walk

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into town and get tea there. Let's get away from the sea.'

'Don't you like the sea any more?' she asked. She was looking at him walking away from the cliff, and biting her lip.

'No,' said the man. 'I don't think so. I think I hate it.'

But then, feeling the hollow, vague coldness inside the glass, and going away from the sea, there was nothing at all left and nothing mattered at all.

'I don't feel anything about it,' he said. 'I don't feel anything about anything.'

On the way to the town she took his arm and they walked like that for a bit while he thought of the effort which he was required to make. He had known all the time he would not be able to make it. He knew that he had to do this tremendous thing and he wanted to do it and it was his duty to do it; but he knew that it was impossible, that he would never make the attempt now, and soon she unlinked her arm and began telling him about a picture with Spencer Tracy.

In the tea place where they sat down together it was half dark already and lamps were lighted. Drinking strong tea, with no anxiety left except the ache of the unmade and abandoned effort, the girl pouring the tea, the warmth of it spreading through him, he could feel the beginning of comfort after the dusk and the sea wind. While the waitress fastened the blackout they drank and just as the blackout was fixed and it was impossible to see out any longer, something thundered outside with a noise like a

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heavy sea and the man started and slopped his tea in the saucer.

'The buses stop just outside here,' the girl said. 'It's the market place and they all stop here.'

'What a filthy row,' he said, feeling the evil sickness on him again, knowing that he was shaking again under his coat. So this was how he lived now, getting jittery because a bus pulled up near. Well, he was not going on like that. It was not good enough. The one person who could help him had not appeared. He probably never would. But there must be some other way. He knew that there was another way although for the moment he couldn't think what it was. Soon it would come back to him, in a minute he would remember the way out, the way where he was going.

'Are you feeling all right?' the girl said. She had put her arms on the table and was leaning towards him.

'Of course.'

'Why don't you eat your cake?'

'I'm going to.'

The cake was too dry. He had to hold it in his mouth after he'd chewed it and then by taking a gulp of tea he was just able to wash it down without retching.

He put the cup carefully back on the saucer so that it didn't rattle. The girl touched his hand with her fingers.

'Don't you like me any more either?' she said.

'I can't explain,' he said. 'I can't help it.'

The sickness had come up in his throat now and his

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lungs, and he could feel it strangling him and he was drowning again in the four-mile-deep icy horror of sickness or water. He looked at the girl and saw that she was crying.

'It's no good. I can't do it,' he said.

Then he pushed back his chair and stood up quickly because, just then, he saw the young man's face in a mirror up on the wall, he saw the thick wind-ruffled hair and the little scar on the cheekbone. The face moved in the mirror and when he looked round he could not see it anywhere in the room, and when he wanted to call out the sickness choked him, and now he tried to fight off the icy sickness, but like whales the waves of it fell on him till he was pounded and drowned, and while he froze suffocating and could not move or breathe, he heard the girl say, 'Where are you going?' and then he was able to move suddenly, and he got out of the tea-room.

It was evening and too dark to distinguish faces when he was in the street.

I wouldn't recognize him even if I knew which way he had gone, the man thought, hurrying along the dark streets, looking at the strange people he passed in the dark, who passed without looking at him. Once a bus went roaring by with a smell of burnt oil and he felt the sickness coming at him again but he fought it back and walked faster and it was all right and he was only a hollow man walking in the darkness without objective. Once a stranger asked him where he was going, but he went on

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without stopping to think that he did not know the answer. And once somewhere far off in the dark something hurt for a second because of the girl left alone and crying: but that was over immediately.

Then he was out of the town and the moon was up but behind cloud and it was less dark, and then he was walking on grass and he could see the heavy black swelling shapes of the downs, and the clouds sculptured in towers and bastions and battlemented with the light of the climbing moon. Then there was first the smell and then the sound of the sea. Then there were cliffs and the cold tumultuous restless water beneath.

Then instead of hurrying he was standing still, he was very tired now and sweating under the heavy coat, and looking up he saw a white shining fan, spreading over the sky, like light from a door slowly opening, and he knew the moon was coming out of the clouds. Then he looked over the sea and there were islands it seemed, and then a great migration of birds thickened the air and he was in a rushing of wings; the wings beat so dark and fast round him he felt dizzy like falling and the moon disappeared. And then it was clear again, brilliant moonlight, and there, ahead, bright as day, were all the small islands, Cape Promise, and the bay of Mairangi, wide, still, unbelievably peaceful under the full moon. And then he did know where he was going.

The Blackout

'I CAN'T remember anything that happened,' the boy said. 'It was like a blackout, sort of.'

He twisted his thin body uneasily on the couch where he was lying, and for a second his face, which seemed much too startled and meek and vulnerable for a soldier's face, was turned up towards the doctor sitting beside him; then he looked very quickly away.

Queer sort of looking bloke for a doctor, he thought, noticing transiently beside his shoulders the crossed legs in shabby grey trousers, the worn brogues with mended soles. He wished that the doctor were not there. The doctor's presence made him uneasy, although there was nothing to cause uneasiness about the look of the man.

The couch was comfortable. If he had been alone in

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the room the boy would have quite enjoyed lying there with a pillow under his head. The room was small and there was nothing at all alarming about it. The walls were pale green, enclosing no furniture but the couch, the chair on which the doctor sat, and a desk. There was a calendar with a bright picture hanging over the desk. The boy could not see what was in the picture because, in order to look at it properly, he would have had to turn his head round in the doctor's direction. The sun was shining outside the window which was open a bit at the top. The glass panes had been broken in a raid and replaced by an opaque plastic substance so that you couldn't see out. The boy wondered what was outside the window. He thought he would like, vaguely, to get up, open the bottom half of the window, and have a look; and also to examine the picture on the calendar. The presence of the doctor prohibited him from doing these things, so he looked down at his hospital tie and began fidgeting with the loose ends of it. The tie had been washed so often that it had faded from red to deep pink and the cotton fabric had a curious dusty pile on it, almost like velvet, which communicated an agreeable sensation to the tips of his fingers.

'Which is the last day you can remember clearly?' the doctor asked.

'The day I was due to rejoin my unit,' the boy said, reluctantly detaching a fragment of his attention from the pleasant feel of the tie.

'Do you remember what date it was?'

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'September the eleventh.' He wasn't likely to forget that date, so hypnotically, fascinated with dread, he had watched it racing towards him through the telescoped days of his embarkation leave.

'Do you know what the date is today?'

He shook his head, looking down at the tie, and his very fine, limp hair fluffed on the pillow where it was longest on the top of his head.

'It's the eighteenth. You started remembering things when you were brought in here yesterday: so that means your blackout lasted five complete days, doesn't it?'

'Yes, I suppose so,' the boy said; and waited, in apprehension, for the bad part to begin.

Why can't they leave you alone? he was thinking. Why must they go on poking and prodding at you when all you wanted was to be left in peace? It wasn't as if you would ever be able to tell them what they wanted to know, or as if they'd ever understand if you did. His fingers, pleating the ends of the tie, gripped more abruptly the softness from which they no longer derived any satisfaction.

'You remember everything that happened while you were on leave quite distinctly?' the doctor asked him.

'Yes, oh yes,' the boy said at once, speaking fast, as if he hoped, by bringing the words out quickly, in some way to terminate the matter without touching on what was most painful.

'And where did you spend this leave?'

There now, it's begun now, the bad part's beginning, he

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thought in himself. And recognizing helplessly the preliminary movement of that thing which from the outset had filled him with a profound unease he remained silent now, while his mind ran from side to side, seeking the unknown avenues of defence or escape.

'Well, where did you spend your leave?'

The doctor's voice was casual and almost friendly, but there was much firmness in it, and also there came along with it the dangerous thing preparing to launch its attack, which could not be trifled with.

'I went home to my auntie,' the boy said, whispering.

Like looking back down a long tunnel he began remembering now that tenement place off the Wandsworth Road, the water-tap out on the landing and the room always chockablock with the washing and cooking and the dirty dishes and pots that his mum never could keep up-sides with, what with her heart, and his dad coming in drunk as often as not and knocking her about till the neighbours started opening their doors and threatening to call a policeman; and himself feeling shaky and sick and trying not to make a noise with his crying as he hid there crouched up in a ball of misery under the table. His auntie used to come visiting sometimes when his dad was away, and she was not old at all, or frightening or frightened at all, but so pretty and young and gay, that maybe that was the reason he always thought the word auntie was a word you used as a kind of endearment, in the way

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sweetie and honey were used. When he was eight years old his dad got t.b. and gave up the drink, but it was too late then, his mum was dying already, and when his dad died later on in the san he felt only happier than he had ever been in his life because he was going to live with his auntie for ever and ever and there would be no more shouts or rows or crying or staring neighbours.

He remembered the little dark house where the two of them lived then in Bracken's Court; tiny and old-fashioned and a bit inconvenient it was with those steep stairs with a kink in them where his dad would surely have broken his neck if he'd ever come there after closing time, but cosy, too, like a dolls' house, and they'd always been happy in it together, even after the arthritis stopped his auntie from going out to her dressmaking. When he left school he'd been taken on as messenger at the stationer's, and later had got a salesman's job inside the shop and worked hard and was getting along well, so that it hadn't seemed to matter too much that she could do less and less of the work they sent her at home, because he was earning almost enough to take care of them both and soon it would be more than enough the way things were going. Then the war had come, and she had got worse, she had those bad headaches often and couldn't manage the crooked stairs. Then he had been called up and he had hated it all, hated the army, hated leaving home, hated losing his good job, hated the idea of being sent overseas

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to fight; but most of all hated leaving her badly off now, financially insecure, bombs falling perhaps, and she alone with her crippling pains and no one reliable to take care of her; she who had always been sweet and lovely to him, and deserved taking care of more than anyone in the world. When he thought of what might become of her if he were taken prisoner or killed it was more than he could bear and he almost wished she were safely out of it all. Yes, when she went down with 'flu or whatever it was during his last leave, he almost hoped she wouldn't get well, it broke his heart so to leave her like that. But these were some of the things which never could be explained and he only wished to be left alone and not be made to remember.

But the questions had to go on.

'What are the last things you remember doing before you left your aunt's house that final day?' the doctor wanted to know.

'I spent a goodish time straightening up and cleaning the place so as to leave everything shipshape,' the boy said. 'My auntie being an invalid more or less I wanted to leave things as easy for her as I could.'

Out of the end of his left eye he could see the doctor's crossed knees and the feet in their mended shoes, and for an instant rebellion rose in him because this was a man no different from himself who by no divine right of class or wealth or any accepted magic sought to force memory on him. But there was something beyond that: beyond just the man who could be opposed with obstinacy there

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was the frightening thing which he had to fight in the dark, and he knew that he dared not remain silent because his silence might be to that thing's advantage, and he went on, speaking low and mumbling as if the words came out against their will.

'We had tea about four. Then I went up and packed my kit. Then it was time to go for the train. I said good-bye and started for the station. King's Cross I had to go from.'

There was a long pause, and at the end of it came the doctor's voice asking if that was the last thing he could remember, and the boy's voice telling him that it was, and then there was silence again.

'That's queer,' the boy said suddenly into this silence. And now his voice sounded changed, there was astonishment and dismay in it, and the doctor uncrossed his knees and looked at him more closely, asking him, 'What's queer?'

'I've just remembered something,' the boy said. 'That time I told you about when I left the house, it wasn't the last time, really.'

'Not the last time you were in the house?'

'No. I've just remembered. It's just sort of come back to me somehow. When I'd gone part of the way to the station I found I'd left something important behind, my pay-book I think it was, and I had to sprint back to fetch it.'

The doctor took a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket and lighted one with his utility lighter which never

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worked the first time he thumbed it, and blew out a little smoke. He seemed in no hurry at all about asking the next question.

'Can you remember how you were feeling when you went back?'

'I suppose I felt a bit flustered like anyone would about leaving my pay-book,' the boy said, defensive suddenly, and blindly suspicious of some unimagined trap.

Looking into the tunnel, he remembered fumbling under the mat for the key which was left there for the next-door woman who came in to give a hand. Was it as he came in or as he was going out again that he stood at the foot of the stairs where they crooked in the angle of a dog's hindleg out of the living-room? It was dusk, and he remembered the silence inside the house as though there were a dead person or somebody sleeping upstairs. Yes, she must have been asleep then, he thought; but whether he went up to her was not in the memory, but only the noise of his army boots clattering away on the paving-stones of the court, and as he came out into the high street a church bell was ringing.

The doctor asked, 'What happened afterwards?'

'I can't remember anything more,' the boy said.

'Nothing whatever? Not even some isolated detail?'

'Yes,' he said, after a while. 'I think I remember looking for the station entrance, and a big bridge with a train shunting on it up high.'

He was aware, just then, of danger skirmishing all about

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in the green-walled room, and lying there on the couch his eyes were still down where they seemed safe on the pink ends of the tie, his hands clenched now and his neck and shoulders gone tense; and he not knowing if it were through his words or his silence that the danger would strike.

Why did a church bell keep ringing in the tunnel like that? It was a very deep tunnel into which he was being forced. He did not want to go down in the tunnel again. He was afraid. But because of the unknown thing whose immediate agent was the casual, near-friendly voice nothing could save him from that black exploration split by the doleful and ugly clang of a distant bell.

'As if someone had died,' he said out loud.

'Who do you think might have died?'

No, no. Not that. Don't let it come, the boy thought, fighting desperately against what had all the time been waiting there behind every word; the worst thing, the intolerable pain, the fear not to be borne. And at once his nerves started to twitch and tears sprang in his eyes in case she might not have been sleeping but dead in the silent room at the top of the steep stairs, investigated or not by him he was, agonizingly, somehow unable to know.

Running in panic along the tunnel, he remembered the alley-way, like something in a film he'd seen once, blank walls leaning nearer and nearer to suffocation, and, at the bend, a lamp-bracket sticking out with a dangling noose; only no corpse was at the end of the rope. And always the

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hurrying army boots and the bell ringing, till he did not know if it was the noise of his own steps or the church bell clanging inside his head. The noise was part of his hunger, and he remembered, further along the tunnel, scrounging about at night where a street market had been and finding, finally, in the gutter, a piece of sausage, grey, slimy, like the wrist of a dead baby, and the terrible thirst that came on him afterwards, and how he drank out of a horse-trough, scooping the water up with his hands, and it seemed all wrong because they killed animals painlessly. Then there was that open space, a heath or a common, where he had vomited and lain on the ground, his hair in the rough grass. He felt weak and stiff from the vomiting and clouds of insects were round him, settling on his face and hands and crawling over his mouth because he was too weak to flap at them, but in the end it got dark and the insects went away then and left him in peace.

Faster and faster he ran to escape from the tunnel and the tolling noise of the bell. And at last he was outside, the tunnel was getting smaller and smaller until it vanished, and there was respite from the tolling, nothing left now but the room with the doctor quietly smoking, sunshine outside the window, the calendar on the wall.

The boy was not lying on the couch any more but bending over with hunched shoulders as if hiding from something, his head on his raised knees in the posture a person might take crouching under a table; and though he was crying he was no longer thinking of the tunnel or of the

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dangerous secret thing which had scared him so terribly, or about anything he could have put into any words.

'It was like a blackout. A blackout. I can't remember,' he kept on hopelessly mumbling, amongst the tears.

Glorious Boys

WHY do I do this? she thought, walking with Mia in the cold London dark vibrant with the resonance of out-going bombers. Why do I ever go to a party, not knowing what to say or what to do with myself? Hands were easy with glasses and cigarettes, but the rest of the body, embarrassingly material, intractable, and absolutely unwilling to dissolve itself into a dew; how did one cope with it? How did one recognize the correct moment for putting it into a chair, opening its mouth and emitting appropriate sounds, propping it against the end of a sofa, getting it up and moving it across the room to confront some stranger's alarmingly expectant, or self-assured, and in every case utterly inaccessible countenance?

The terrifying independence of the body. Its endless opposition. The appalling underground movements of the

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nerves, muscles, viscera, upon which, like a hated and sadistic gauleiter, one unremittingly imposed an implacable repressive regime, threatened eternally by the equally implacable threat of insubordination. The perpetual fear of being sabotaged into some sudden shameful exposure.

Ahead the house waited uncompromising, the imminent dark objective. Why did I come here?

It was Mia, naturally, who had brought her. Mia, like a little infanta, like a little fantastic princess, not quite human exactly, daughter, not of a golden shower, but of a black-pearl passion, smoky dark hair and cheeks the lustrous blurred pink of the inside of those very elaborate shells, bright dress and improbable buckled shoes. Mia shooting her arrowy kindness not of earth or humanity into the heart; no warmth but only darting gleams from the progeny of a pearl. Why was I persuaded?

Can't say no, she was thinking while Mia opened the door and the noise, the special noise, smell, atmosphere, of a party came down to them from the top of the short white staircase leading directly into the large light smoky room. Can't say no; non-specific depressive trait. The tedium of these everlasting psychological pigeonholes. And it wasn't true in her case either; at least, not entirely true. It wasn't only slackness, weak moral fibre, whatever you liked to call it. There was that other thing too, the force always driving one to open every door, cross every bridge, walk up every gangway.

They added their coats to the winter coats already piled

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and slipping from hidden pieces of furniture at the foot of the stairs. Now I would like to stop here for a little, the back of her mind reflected. Now I would like to spend a little time with the coats, knowing them, knowing their different characters, textures, smells, getting the feel through my fingers of the essential essence of coat, getting to know how it feels to be fur or tweed. But it won't do. Or rather, it isn't done. It simply is not done in normal society to waste time feeling oneself into a pile of coats. Odd how normal people have no time except for other people. Unless you're alone it's practically impossible ever to get to know the non-human things: it simply isn't allowed. There's something queer about you, people said if you tried to explain.

'Let's go in now,' the little clear voice of Mia said, rather high, like some blithe warm-country-frequenting bird; the jewelled kinglet, perhaps?

'I'm ready,' she said.

The preliminary staircase was much too short. Through introductions she was still back there on the stairs watching Mia's newly combed hair floating so fine and like a darker smoke on the cigarette-smoke-thickened air. The dark downward smoke drifted past backs and bosoms; with confident and infrangible sprightliness the buckled shoes twinkled into the crowd.

The party, she said to herself, following on reluctant. I must be in the party. No more dreaming now. She had always dreamed too much in her life, dreamed when she

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ought to have been attending to people, and so lost all the prizes and antagonized everyone.

She thought how she had antagonized Frank by dreaming herself into this that seemed a crazy journey to him, to this country, away from safety and warmth, all across the world. She thought about being alone in the raid on the night she arrived, the night the post office was hit. She had stood watching out in the street, and while the big building burned, and she was feeling the anguish of exploded walls, burst roof, torn girders wrenching away, smoke, flames, blinding up, spouting up through the crazy avalanching of stone, the crashing, ruinous death of all that mass of stone and durability struck down with a single blow, a warden had shouted to her from the post not to stand woolgathering but to get under cover away from the shell splinters that were coming down. There had been rage in his voice to blast her out of the dream. But the warden's anger and Frank's anger couldn't be helped and were irrelevant really, since she knew she could never cure herself of the woolgathering.

The man talking to her now had a red face and his hair was curly, sandy and grey mixed, like wool.

If only he doesn't start asking questions, she thought. If only he doesn't know or care that I've only been over here a few months. If only I don't have to try to say something convincing. As she was merely doing her own work and was not on a war assignment, people wondered why she had come all that difficult voyage from the safe underside

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of the world. For the questions which followed then she had no adequate answers. All her life the force had been operative in her, the insistent unknown thing that drove her to open the doors, to walk up the gangways, to leave security when it became familiar, in no spirit of gallant adventure, but terrified; though the terror, certainly, was inside the dream where also the inexorable voice commanded, Move on there, traveller; other places, experiences, wait for investigation. It was obvious that no explanation was possible.

Someone gave her a glass with punch in it, hot and faintly steaming, and she felt the comfortable warmth of the glass in her hand and lifted the glass and smelled the sweet, warm, raffish smell of the rum which had a curl of apple peel floating in it. There were lighted candles about the room and silver stars because it was Christmas time.

'They've got some interesting pictures here,' she said. And because it was all right and allowed to be interested in pictures and to get to know them she moved over to stand in front of the canvas, pale bird's egg sea, sand, and a pink house—it looked like a Christopher Wood, and the woolly man moved, too, and looked for a moment and murmured and moved away, set free to talk to some more congenial guest.

What exactly is it that's wrong with me? What is the thing about me that people never can take? her thoughts wandered, although she knew the answer perfectly well. It was the woolgathering, of course, the preoccupation

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with non-human things, the interest in the wrong place, that was so unacceptable. People took it as an insult. Intuitively they resented it even if they were unaware of it. And fundamentally they were right: it was insulting from their point of view. But why did she care what they felt? There was nothing to be done anyway. The woolgathering was far stronger than she was.

She stood and looked at the picture a little; gradually, as she saw no one noticing her, allowing her eyes to stray to less approved objects, the candelabra, the stars, the pagodas on the long yellow curtains. A carnation pinned to a dress with the coloured badge of a regiment came between, and behind this the known and utterly unlikely face from another country suddenly sprang out at her in the room like a pistol pointed over the noise and smoke and the atmosphere of a party, and for a second she felt cold and confused with the countries running wildly together.

Then he came forward, blocking out the carnation and standing in front in the blue flying uniform that was different only in the word on the shoulder from the uniform an English pilot would wear. He had a very young face and bright bloodshot eyes that did not look quite natural. His face still looks so young, she thought; but his body was different. Over there his body had been self-conscious in uniform and had looked inappropriate in that dress, but now the uniform was part of him and did not look strange on him in any way. He and she and Frank had laughed

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together about the uniform over there, calling him the blue orchid, but now there was nothing to laugh at at all and she wondered how it could ever have seemed funny that he should be wearing it.

'I don't believe it. I just don't believe it's you,' he was saying.

'Hello,' she said. 'What an incredible meeting. What are you doing here?'

'Week-end leave.'

'Do you know these people, then?'

'A friend brought me. I thought I'd like some social life for a change.'

'I'm very glad to see you, Ken.'

'I'd have got in touch with you if I'd known your address. Now I've got to go back tomorrow. Too queer running into you this way.'

'It's extraordinary. Absolutely extraordinary.' While they were speaking she saw on his face small new lines of eye-strain but otherwise nothing altered. But the eyes themselves looked like the eyes of a man waiting to ride a difficult race. There was the same fixity and the brightness did not seem natural.

'Do you remember the last time we saw each other?' she asked him.

'The morepork,' he said, smiling.

She did not smile. She was very startled, somehow, that he should remember and more startled that the picture should come up so clearly then. Sometimes the picture

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was there at night and sometimes it came when she was alone and she could understand that; but now in the noise of the party it came so much stronger and clearer than it should and there was the low house at the end of the point with water on three sides and there were the big trees with cormorants in them, and she had been happier there with Frank than with other men she had been around with but she had left it as she left every place; and there it was clear in the picture, only it startled her now. That picture was part of the woolgathering and most nights she saw it. It was very familiar but it startled her still, especially coming clear in the crowded room with the lights and the party voices; the room inside it wasn't like this room. It was plainer and emptier, no stars or candles although there were glasses, only the three people there, the troopship waiting for Ken down in the harbour, she herself waiting to travel towards the war in another ship, the morepork calling outside, the ill-omened bird of disaster. Frank laughing about the native superstition, holding his hands tight on the arms of the chair to keep from getting up and shouting to scare the bastard away. Knowing all the good well-known things that were ending. Knowing the danger and the loss and all the rest that mustn't be spoken. Knowing exactly what bad-luck symbols were worth. One could scare the morepork away but that would make everything worse. And there was Frank, gruesomely enough, joking badly about it, for whom the morepork calls; and perhaps it was calling out for all three of us really; we used to

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watch between the trees on the point when the ships lined up for the convoys and she could see those trees every time in the picture with the cormorants, wings held out stiff to dry, like small scarecrows. But that was another country and why was it here now? When it came at night or when she was by herself that was all right. But coming sudden and inopportune it confused her as now, she standing glass in hand at a party, talking to Ken with his unnatural eyes and he looking entirely too natural in the damned uniform. She lifted her glass and drank out of it; the punch had gone cold. Ken was still smiling. She lowered the glass again.

The woolgathering was part of her and she was not troubled by it except when it came between her and the people she wanted; and the fear that she would finally lose the last chance. That was all that was troubling in that. Being queer didn't matter much. She didn't worry about being different and queer, but what startled her so that she felt cold in the warm room was the low brown house appearing and the morepork calling outside. The picture could not really be at the party, she had heard the morepork call, and there was no morepork. Nor was there any sense in believing in evil omens. Then what was she hearing and looking at and what was disturbing, and why did she feel colder than she had felt in the cold streets because of a picture and a bird's mournful cry thousands of miles away underneath the world?

She put her glass down on a little table amongst cac-

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tuses. It must be obvious, she was thinking. It must be obvious to everyone that she felt the way she was feeling. Ken surely would notice something. It was suddenly imperative that she escape from the eyes that were surely collecting. This was the sort of thing you got let in for by being the way she was. This was the work of the saboteur in the nerves.

'I must go, Ken,' she said, hoping it didn't sound stupidly urgent.

He did not express surprise. He said, 'I wanted to talk to you.'

'Come back to my place, then. It's not far and we'll have something to eat there. One can't talk at a party, anyway.'

The words came without thought, and then, seeing the hesitation or whatever it was on his face, she remembered to think and said, 'Oh, but of course you don't want to come away from the party. Good-bye.'

But he was behind her when she said something to the host and to Mia, and when she went downstairs and pulled her coat from the pile he was still there and held it up for her while she put it on. Only when the closed door shut out the noise of the party and the sinister noise of the bombers was back again deep and strong and inevitable, as if it would always be filling the sky day and night, as if it were the noise of the earth's self revolving, he hesitated and seemed to hold on to the handle of the closed door so that she wondered if he would really rather have stayed. But he came with her into the street.

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'Shall we go by bus or by tube?' she asked him. With distant surprise she heard him answer at once, 'By tube,' when he couldn't have known which was better, not knowing where she lived.

The moon was up now showing the empty bed of the street and the black bank of the opposite houses and the whitened, moon-frosted roofs which might have been snowy escarpments. It was all very drear and deserted and becoming traditional and no different from the other cities unlighted and waiting amongst their ruins under the moon. In her travelling she had seen so many cities change over from darkness to light, and she remembered suddenly and completely a harbour at nightfall, the waterfront brilliant with lights, the lost sun still ghostly gold on the Kairoura mountains across the Strait.

'It's queer how it grows on you,' he said. They were walking towards the tube station.

'What?'

'Having one's life up there instead of on the ground.' She saw his face lifted up to the noise of the planes and his head tilted. 'I don't feel at home down here. I don't belong any more. There seems to be no place where I fit in. I wanted to feel like other people again, so I thought I'd go to parties and talk to women and that would make it all right. But it doesn't work out somehow. I still feel outside. I'd like to be the same as I used to be and feel like other people again.'

'I suppose you never write anything now?'

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'Good God, no.'

What a fiendishly efficient machine war is, she thought, remembering him as he was and the writing, a bit immature but sensitive and direct and with much integrity. Now he would never write the things he might have written when he had learned to write well enough. It destroyed very thoroughly this war machine, this incinerator of individuality and talent and life, forging the sensitive and creative young into the steel fabric of death, turning them out by the million, the murder men, members of Murder Inc., the big firm, the global organization. Suddenly she felt acutely angry with him.

'How could you let them do it to you?' she said. 'How can you let us all down?'

He was not listening, walking beside her in the uniform that he wore as if he had never worn anything else. He was walking too fast for her, like a man in a hurry to get somewhere, and now he said, looking up still at the throbbing sky, 'They've got a great night for it,' and she said, 'The others have, too.'

'I'd hate to be on the ground in a bad raid,' he said. 'I certainly would hate to be down here.' He stared up at the sky.

'Don't you ever think what it is you're doing up there?' she asked him.

They were at the tube station, and going into the light she noticed again in his eyes the nervous, intent look of a rider waiting for the start of a hard race, his movements

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rather jerky and stiff, and she began to feel sorry because something was wrong somewhere. She looked to see what was wrong, but in place of the man with the young face who looked at her with bright bloodshot eyes there came the house in another country and the trees with cormorants in them and the morepork was calling and there was no way of seeing anything else.

Then in the train it was gone and she attended to him again; but now with anger reviving in her he was only the murder man, and having no clear idea of the inside of a plane, she saw only an anonymous robot, padded, helmeted, hung about with accoutrements and surrounded by switches and dials, sowing catastrophe from a lighted box in the sky.

'How do you ever sleep?' she asked the man who was sitting by her in the blue clothes, here, in the underground. 'Don't you feel frightened to go to sleep?'

'It's our people or theirs. You know that.'

'I know that because there's a murder committed next door all the rest of us in the street don't have to start killing our neighbours.'

'It's war,' he said. 'I simply do my job. Do you suppose I enjoy bombing civilians? Is it my fault?'

'Yes,' she said. 'If you know what you're doing and acquiesce in it that makes you guilty.'

'No. You're not fair.'

She looked at him and saw his eyes screwed up painfully as they would be when he looked into the sun. The

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wrinkles around his eyes looked strange on the young face, almost like painted lines.

'Listen,' she said. 'The morepork was calling for you all right. This is the worst badness that could have happened to you, that you should turn into a murderer.'

The train was stopped in a station and a woman, hearing, turned in the doorway as she was getting out and said, 'How dare you speak like that to one of our glorious boys?' Then the doors slid shut in front of her outraged face and Ken made a sound like a laugh that was not really amused and she, sitting beside him, laughed, too, and said, 'Spreading dismay and despondency among His Majesty's forces. I could be put in jail.'

And, because of the laughter, she recognized the young face for which, somewhere, she had had some affection, regretting again dimly the eyes strained and screwed up as if they were hurting, and said, 'Don't take any notice of me; I suppose I'm a bit crazy,' falling easily into the pattern she ran her life by.

That was the easy pattern, to let people think she was a little mad. And it was true that she was a way they never would be able to understand, with the woolgathering, and now the picture and that bad luck bird that had come with Ken in the light in front of them all. She heard him say, 'It's all right,' and then there was nothing more said and it was time to get out of the train.

The platform was crowded and most of the bunks occupied. Here and there people slept already and a man

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near the tea urns was wandering up and down selling buns from a tray slung on a strap round his neck. There were more shelterers than there usually were.

'Warning's just gone,' one of them said, close to her, as they passed, and Ken said quickly, 'What?'

'The warning,' she told him, stopping because he had stood still suddenly. 'The glorious boys in the different uniform.'

Of course it's lunacy: we've all of us gone insane, she said to herself, thinking of the planes streaming out, crossing the incoming enemy stream up there in the freezing sky. Did they signal like passing ships or just ignore one another? The demented human race destroying itself with no god or external sanity intervening. Well, let them get on with it. Let it be over soon. She was very tired of the war-world and only wanted everything to be over. It seemed not to matter any more what happened. There had been far too much happen already. Queer how tired apprehending a war made you. The war had always been there in the different countries, but it had taken London to bring her the apprehension of war. This can't go on, she thought sometimes, waking suddenly in the night or moving about a room; this can *not* go on. But it went on and on and she went on somehow, only feeling always more and more tired. She thought a little about how tired she was.

Walking along the platform, keeping pace with Ken who walked slowly now, the woolgathering took posses-

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sion of her, and all the way up in the lift she was dreaming the double stream of destruction, feeling the composite entity of the bomber-streams, gigantic cruising serpents of metal horror circling and smashing the world.

Guns were firing and searchlights were setting their geometrical snares when they came out of the station. The searchlights had not caught anything. They closed and opened and closed and drew blank again.

'Hadn't we better wait a bit?' Ken said.

'It's only a minute from here and there doesn't seem to be any shrapnel,' she answered, not quite out of the wool-gathering.

She started along the pavement in black shadow. There would be moonlight on that side of the street when they turned the corner. The moon was just past the full. It was under this moon that, walking home by herself, she had seen the morepork perched on the roof and calling its ominous cry. The budgerigars in their cage twittered with fright. No, that was somewhere else. Where was that? Her eyes refusing the lighted sky, she was not sure what part of her life she was in; and then she was back from wherever it was to the war and the war-locked town.

The gunfire died down briefly and a plane began making its familiar maddening, hysterical, unescapable sound. She did not notice at first that Ken had stopped walking beside her. Then the noise of the plane got louder and she remembered about him and he was not there and that startled her and the night seemed unreal. Looking back

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then, she could see a darker bulk against the dark wall of a house, and she got the torch out of her bag and flashed it and saw his face lifted and turned to the sky. The light fell full on his face and she looked once and switched off the torch quickly and went to him and said, 'Ken.' But the guns started again and he did not look at her but moved away fast, looking up, back towards the tube station, the way they had just come.

She called, 'Ken, Ken.' And then, not knowing where the words came from or thinking them even, 'Oh, no, no. Oh, please no. Oh, Ken.'

There was no answer, it was hard to hear anything in the barrage, but she heard footsteps running.

In the sky, the laborious searchlights exultantly caught and clamped a desperate plunging speck in their trap. But she did not see it because quite suddenly her eyes were too full of tears.

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BEFORE they took over the big house and turned it into a psychiatric hospital the room must have been somebody's boudoir. It was upstairs, quite a small room, with a painted ceiling of cupids and flowers and doves, the walls divided by plaster mouldings to simulate pillars and wreaths, and the panels between the mouldings sky blue. It was a frivolous little room. The name Dr. Pope looked like a mistake on the door and so did the furniture which was not at all frivolous but ugly and utilitarian, the big office desk, the rather ominous high, hard thing that was neither a bed nor a couch.

Dr. Pope did not look at all frivolous either. He was about forty, tall, straight, muscular, with a large, impersonal, hairless, tidy face, rather alarmingly alert and determined-looking. He did not look in the least like a holy

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father, or, for that matter, like any sort of a father. If one thought of him in terms of the family he was more like an efficient and intolerant elder brother who would have no patience with the weaknesses of younger siblings.

Dr. Pope came into his room after lunch, walking fast as he always did, and shut the door after him. He did not look at the painted ceiling or out of the open window through which came sunshine and the pleasant rustle of trees. Although the day was warm he wore a thick dark double-breasted suit and did not seem hot in it. He sat down at once at the desk.

There was a pile of coloured folders in front of him. He took the top folder from the pile and opened it and began reading the typed case notes inside. He read carefully, with the easy concentration of an untroubled singlemindedness. Occasionally, if any point required consideration, he looked up from the page and stared reflectively at the blue wall over the desk where he had fastened with drawing pins a number of tables and charts. These pauses for reflection never lasted more than a few seconds; he made his decisions quickly and they were final. He went on steadily reading, holding his fountain pen and sometimes making a note on the typescript in firm, small, legible handwriting.

Presently there was a knock and he called out, 'Come in.'

'Will you sign this pass, please, for Sergeant Hunter?' a nurse said, coming up to the desk.

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She put a yellow slip on the desk and the doctor said, 'Oh, yes,' and signed it impatiently, and she picked it up and put a little sheaf of hand-written pages in its place and he, starting to read through these new papers with the impatience gone from his manner, said, 'Ah, the ward reports,' in a different voice that sounded interested and eager.

The nurse stood looking over his shoulder at the writing, most of which was her own.

'Excellent. Excellent,' Dr. Pope said after a while. He glanced up at the waiting nurse and smiled at her. She was his best nurse, he had trained her himself in his own methods, and the result was entirely satisfactory. She was an invaluable and trustworthy assistant who understood what he was trying to do, approved of his technique, and co-operated intelligently. 'Really excellent work,' he repeated, smiling.

She smiled back, and for a moment the identical look of gratification on the two faces gave them a curious resemblance to one another, almost as if they were near relatives, although they were not really alike at all.

'Yes,' she said, 'we're certainly getting results now. The general morale in the wards has improved enormously.' Then her face became serious again and she said, 'If only we could get Ward Six into line.'

The smile simultaneously disappeared from the doctor's face and a look that was more characteristic appeared there: a look of impatience and irritation. He turned the

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pages in front of him and re-read one of them and the irritated expression became fixed.

'Yes, I see. Ward Six again. I suppose it's that fellow Williams making a nuisance of himself as usual?'

'It's impossible to do anything with him.' The nurse's cool voice contained annoyance behind its coolness. 'He's a bad type, I'm afraid. Obstructive and stubborn. Unfortunately some of the youngsters and the less stable men are apt to be influenced by his talk. He's always stirring up discontent in the ward.'

'These confounded trouble-makers are a menace to our whole work,' Dr. Pope said. 'Rebellious undesirables. I think friend Williams will have to be got rid of.' He pulled a scribbling pad across the desk and wrote the name Williams on it, pressing more heavily on the pen than he usually did so that the strokes of the letters came very black. He underlined the name with deliberation and drew a circle round it and pushed the pad back to its place and asked in a brisker tone:

'Anyone else in Six giving trouble?'

'I've been rather worried about Kling the last day or two.'

'Kling? What's he been up to?'

'He seems very depressed, Doctor.'

'You think his condition's deteriorating?'

'Well, he seems to be getting more depersonalized and generally inaccessible. There's no knowing what's in his

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head. It's not the language difficulty either; his English is perfectly good. But he's hardly spoken a word since that day he was put in the gardening squad and got so upset.'

'Oh, yes; the gardening incident. Odd, getting such a violent reaction there. It should give one a lead if there were time to go into it. But there isn't, of course. That's the worst of dealing with large numbers of patients as we are.' A shade of regret on the doctor's face faded out as he said to the nurse still standing beside him:

'You see far more of Kling than I do. What's your own opinion of him?'

'I think, personally, that he's got something on his mind. Something he won't talk about.'

'Make him talk, then. That's your job.'

'I've tried, of course. But it's no good. Perhaps he's afraid to talk. He's shut himself up like an oyster.'

'Oysters can be opened,' the doctor said. He twisted his chair round and smiled directly up at the good nurse he had trained. He was very pleased with her and with himself. In spite of troublesome individuals like Williams and Kling the work of the hospital was going extremely well. 'Provided, naturally, that one has the right implement with which to open them.'

He got up and stood with his back to the window which to be in keeping with the room's decoration should have had satin curtains but instead was framed in dusty black-out material. He had his hands in his trouser pockets and

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he was still smiling as he went on, 'We might try a little forcible opening on oyster Kling.'

The nurse nodded and made a sound of agreement and prepared to go, holding the signed pass in her hand.

'Lovely day, isn't it?' she remarked on her way, in order not to end the interview too abruptly.

Dr. Pope glanced into the sunshine and turned his back on it again.

'I'll be glad when the summer's over,' he said. 'Everyone's efficiency level drops in this sort of weather. Give me the cold days when we're all really keen and on our toes.'

The nurse went out and shut the door quietly.

The doctor swung round again in his energetic fashion and opened the window as wide as it would go, looking out over grassy grounds dark with evergreens. On a hard tennis court to the right a circle of patients in shorts clumsily and apathetically threw a football about and he watched them just long enough to observe the bored slackness of their instructor's stance and to note automatically that the man was due for a reprimand. Then he went back to his desk under the smiling loves.

As if he were somehow aware of the doctor's censorious eye, the instructor outside just then straightened up and shouted with perfunctory disgust, 'You there, Kling, or whatever your name is; wake up, for Christ's sake, can't you?'

The man who had not been ready when the ball was thrown to him, who had, in fact, altogether forgotten why

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he was supposed to be standing there on the hot reddish plane marked with arbitrary white lines, looked first at the instructor before bending down to the ball which had bounced off his leg and was slowly spinning on the gritty surface in front of him. He picked up the big ball and held it in both hands as though he did not know what to do with it, as though he could conceive of no possible connection between himself and this hard spherical object. Then, after a moment, he tossed it towards the man standing next to him in the ring, not more than two yards away, and at once forgot it again and nothing remained of the incident in his mind except the uneasy resentment that always came now when anyone called out to him.

For many months he had been called Kling, that being the first syllable and not the whole of his name which was too difficult for these tongues trained in a different pronunciation. To start with he had not minded the abbreviation, had even felt pleased because, like a nickname, it seemed to admit him to comradeship with the others. But now, for a long time, he had resented it. They've taken everything from me, even my name, he thought sometimes when the sullen misery settled on him. By 'they' he did not mean the men of another race with whom he shared sleeping room and food and daily routine, or any particular individuals, but just the impersonal machine that had caught and mauled him and dragged him away from the two small lakes and the mountains where his home was, far off to this flat country across the sea.

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And then there was that other reason why the sound of the short syllable was disturbing.

The game, if it could be called that, came to an end and the patients slowly dispersed. There was a little free time left before tea. Some of the men walked back to the hospital, others lighted cigarettes and stood talking in groups, several lay full length on the grass or dawdled where evergreens spread heavy mats of shade.

Kling sat down by himself on the top of a little bank. He was young, very big and broad, very well built if you didn't mind that depth of chest, dark, his hair wiry like a black dog's, arms muscled for labour, his eyes only slightly decentred. He did not look ill at all, he looked enormously strong, only his movements were all rather stiff and slow, there was a marked unnatural rigidity about the upper part of his torso because of the lately healed wound and because of that heavy thing he carried inside him.

The bank was in full sunshine. Kling sat there sweating, dark stains spreading on his singlet under the arms, sharp grasses pricking his powerful, bare, hairy legs, his breast stony feeling, waiting for time to pass. He was not consciously waiting. His apathy was so profound that it was not far removed from unconsciousness. A breeze blew and the tall grass rippled gently but he did not know. He did not know that the sun shone. His head was bent and the only movements about him were his slow breaths and the slowly widening stains on the singlet. His chest was hot and wet and gloom ached in the rocky weight the black

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stone weighed under his breastbone, and his big blackish eyes, dilated with gloom, stared straight ahead, only blinking when the sun dazzle hurt, and sweat stood in the deep horizontal lines on his forehead.

While he sat there a row of patients with gardening tools, spades, rakes, hoes, on their shoulders, came near. They walked in single file in charge of a man walking alongside, himself in hospital clothes, but with stripes on his sleeve. Kling watched them coming. All of him that still lived, resentment, gloom, misery, and all his clouded confusion, slowly tightened towards alarm. He could see the polished edges of spades shining and he shuddered, all his consciousness gathering into fear because of the danger signals coming towards him across the grass. As he watched his breathing quickened to heave his chest up and down, and, as the gardening squad reached the foot of the bank, he made a clumsy scramble and stood up.

Standing, he heard the clink of metal, and saw a shiny surface flash in the sun. The next moment he was running; stumbling stiffly, grappling the weight inside him, running from the men with the spades.

He heard the *Kling!* of his name being shouted, and again a second clattering *kling!* and running heard the spade kling-clink on the stone; he seemed to be holding it now, grasping the handle that slipped painfully in his wet hands, levering the blade under the huge ugly stone and straining finally as another frantic *kling!* came from the spade, and the toppling, heavy, leaden bulk of the stone

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fell and the old, mutilated face was hidden beneath, and Kling, stopping at the door of Ward Six where he had run, choking with strangled breath, while two men passing gazed at him in surprise, felt the dead mass of stone crushing his own breast.

He went into the ward and lay down on his bed and closed his eyes against the drops of sweat which trickled into the ends of his eyes. Then for a time there was nothing but the soreness of breath struggling against the stone.

This was what he had known a long while, ever since the truck had been blown thirty feet down into the ravine and he had seen the falling stone and felt it strike, felt it smash bone, tearing through muscle, sinew and vein to lodge itself immovably in his breast. Ever since then the stone had been there inside him, and at first it had seemed a small stone, just a dead spot, a sort of numbness under the breastbone. He had told the M.O. about it and the M.O. had laughed, saying there was no stone or possibility of a stone, and after that he had not spoken of it again; never once. But from the start he had been very uneasy, oppressed by the stone and by the heaviness that could come from it suddenly to drive away laughter and talk. He had tried not to think of the stone, but it had grown heavier and heavier until he could not think of anything else, until it crushed out everything else, and he could only carry it by making a very great effort. That was not so bad really, because with the weight of the stone crushing him he was nothing and that was not painful or frighten-

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ing—it was just a waiting and that was nothing as well. But sometimes, perhaps at the moment of going to sleep, the dead weight lifted a little and then there were all the uncovered faces, the stone and the digging, and the old man would come back.

And so he lay very still on the bed, waiting for the deadness to overlay him, lying there in the knowledge that if the dead weight of the stone lifted to let him breathe the old man would come.

Strange how it was always this one who came and never one of the others.

The stone weight was lifting now and Kling, who had dozed a little while after his breath had stopped struggling, woke suddenly, frightened by the return of the bloody-faced man lying in brown leaves with hairs growing out of his nostrils and a torn shirt fluttering.

That was his father who had lain dead in the room beside the Blue Lake. No, not that man. When he thought of his home he couldn't see any faces, only the jagged line of the mountains like broken eggshell against the sky; and the two lakes, the Blue Lake and the lake shaped like a harp. That, and sometimes the inn with the acid wine of the district greenish in thick glasses, the swarming trout in the small tank on the wall, crowded sleek fish bodies slithering past the glass. But no faces ever. The stone blocked out all the home faces.

When he thought of the war it was always the digging he thought of because, seeing him so strong and used to

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work with a spade, they had put him on that job from the beginning; and then there were faces, wrecked or fearful or quiet or obscene faces, far too many of them, how he had laboured and toiled till his saliva ran sour, desperate to hide the faces away from the brutal light.

How many faces had he covered with earth and stones? There surely were thousands; and always thousands more waiting; and he all the time digging demented, always the compulsive urge in him like a frenzy, to hide the ruined faces away. And sometimes he remembered that officer in charge of the burying party, the one who joked and sang all the time; he must have been a bit cracked really, boozed or something, but they had dug and shovelled till their hands were raw blistered and hardly noticed the pain because of his Hey! Hi! Ho! and the jolly loud voice that he had.

There had been no singing that afternoon in the gully where the corpses, boys and old men among them, sprawled in the withered oak leaves between the rocks. Only haste then and the bitter taste in the mouth and the aching lungs, hacking the stony ground that was hard like iron to the weak bite of the spade, and the sky grey and muggy and flat and quiet. In the end someone had shouted and the others all started running back to the truck and he had run, too, and just then he had seen the old man lying flat on his back with blood congealing all down one side of his shattered face and the dry leaves gummed and blackening in the blood.

Face of My People

Kling was looking now at this object that the stone had rolled aside to reveal. There was no stone weighting him any more as he watched the object, feeling the bed shake under him as he shook and the muscles twitching in his forearms and thighs.

Then watching the object, while his heart pounded, he saw the hairs sprouting in his father's nostrils as he lay dead on the wooden bed that was like a wagon without wheels; he saw a movement detach itself from this man in the gully, or perhaps it was the torn shirt which flapped in the wind, only there was no wind, and he did not stop to investigate but, knowing only the obsessional urge to hide at all costs that which ought not to be exposed to the level light, hoisted his spade and shoved and battered and fought the topheavy rock until he heard a grinding crash and knew the torn face bashed out of sight, shapeless-smashed and hidden under the stone; and was it the same stone that burst his own chest and sank its black, dead heaviness in his heart?

The weight fell again now so that there was no more pain or fright and the bed did not shake; there was only the waiting that was nothingness really, and the men in blue talking and moving about the ward.

That was all that he knew, sweat slowly drying as he lay on the bed, and the old man buried mercifully by the stone. The others took no notice of Kling nor he of them, and he heard their talk and did not know that he heard until a woman's voice cut through sharp, 'Williams, and

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the rest of you, why are you hanging about in the ward?' He turned his head then to the nurse who had just come in; she was speaking to him, too: 'Kling, you're to go to Dr. Pope after tea. You'd better get up and make yourself decent,' and he saw her pale, cold eyes linger on him as she went out of the door.

'Get up and make yourself decent,' the man called Williams said. 'That's a way to talk to a fellow who's sick.'

Kling said nothing but looked up at him, waiting.

'To hell with them,' Williams said. 'To hell with the whole setup. Bloody racket to get sick men back into the army. Cannon fodder, that's all they care about. Taking advantage of poor mugs like us. Pep talks. Pills to pep you up. Dope to make you talk. Putting chaps to sleep and giving them electric shocks and Christ knows what. Lot of bloody guinea pigs, that's what we are. Bloody, isn't it?'

Kling was staring at him with blank eyes.

'Look at Kling here,' Williams said. 'Any fool can see he's as sick as hell. Why can't they leave him in peace? Why should he go back into their bloody army? This isn't his country anyway. Why should he fight for it?'

From the far reaches of his non-being Kling looked at the faces round him. They were all looking at him but they had no meaning. Williams had no meaning any more than the others. But he heard Williams go on.

'Damned gestapo methods. Spying and snooping around listening to talk. Bitches of nurses. Why the hell do we stand for it?'

Face of My People

A bell was ringing and the patients started to move out of the ward. Kling, staring up, saw the shapes of their meaningless faces receding from him. He looked at Williams who was still there, and Williams looked back at him, smiling, and said, 'Coming to tea, chum?' And in the words Kling half recognized something forgotten and long-lost, and some corresponding thing in him which had died long ago almost revived itself; but the stone was too heavy for that resurrection, and he could not know that what he wanted to do was to smile.

'So long, then, if you're stopping here,' Williams said. He pulled a packet of Weights out of his pocket and put a cigarette on the bed beside Kling's hand which did not move. 'Don't let that bastard of a doctor put anything over on you,' Kling heard Williams, walking towards the door, call back to him as he went.

Kling did not smoke the cigarette, or pick it up even; but after a time rose, and with those stiff motions which seemed to be rehearsing some exercise not well remembered, washed, dressed himself in shirt and blue trousers, combed his thick hair, and went along corridors to the door upon which was fastened the doctor's name.

There was a bench outside the door, and he sat down on it, waiting. The passage was dark because the windows had been coated with black paint for the blackout. Nothing moved in the long, dark, silent passage at the end of which Kling sat alone on the bench. He sat there bending forward, his hands clasped between his knees, his red tie

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dangling, his eyes fixed on the ground. He did not wonder what would happen behind the door. He waited, without speculation or awareness of waiting. It was all the same to him, outside or here or in the ward, he did not notice, it made no difference to his waiting.

A nurse opened the door and called him and he got up and stepped forward, and looking past her along the wall of the corridor thought, How many stones there are in this place; so many faces and stones; and lost the thought before it meant anything and went into the room.

'I want you to lie on the couch,' Dr. Pope told him. 'We're going to give you a shot of something that will make you feel a bit sleepy. Quite a pleasant feeling. It won't hurt at all.'

Obedient, null, with that unnatural stiffness, Kling laid himself down.

Lying on the high couch, he looked at the exuberant ceiling without surprise. The flowers and the crowding cherubic faces did not seem any more strange to him than anything else. The ceiling did not concern him any more than the doctor concerned him. Nothing concerned him except the heaviness in his breast. He waited, looking at the doctor as if he had never seen him before, the nurse busy with swab and spirit and tourniquet, and he felt far off on his arm the tourniquet tightening, the bursting pressure of flesh against tightening fabric, and then the small sharp sting as the needle entered the vein.

'Just try to relax,' the doctor said, watching, while the

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fluid in the hypodermic went down, the blank waiting face with wide-open extremely dilated eyes.

He smiled his professional smile of encouragement, and looked from the face to the chest and the massive shoulders bulked rigid under the white shirt that they stretched tight, at the clenched strong hands, the rough blue cloth strained on the tensed thighs, the stiffly upthrust boots not neatly laced, and back to the blank face again. He noticed on the face how the deep tan of the outdoor years was starting to turn yellowish as it slowly faded inside hospital walls.

'Well, how do you feel now?' he asked, smiling, the man who stared up at him without answering.

'I want you to talk, Kling,' he said. 'I want you to tell me what's worrying you.'

Kling, his patient, looked away from him and up at the ceiling.

'What is it you've got on your mind?' asked the doctor.

Kling stared upwards without speaking and now his limbs started twitching a little.

'You'll feel better after you've talked,' Dr. Pope said.

The nurse finished the long injection and withdrew the syringe adroitly. A single drop of blood oozed from the pierced vein and she dabbed a shred of cotton wool on to it and silently carried her paraphernalia into the back-ground and stood watching.

'You've got to tell me what's making you miserable,' the doctor said, speaking loud. He bent down and put his

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hand on Kling's shoulder and said loudly and very distinctly, close to his ear, 'You are very miserable, aren't you?'

Kling looked at him with his wide, black, lost animal's eyes and felt the hand on his shoulder. His shoulder twitched and something inside him seemed to be loosening, he felt sick in his stomach, and a sleepy strangeness was coming up at him out of nowhere, turning him tired, or sick.

'Why are you miserable?' he heard the question. 'Something happened to you, didn't it? Something you can't forget. What was that thing?'

Kling saw the doctor standing far too close, bending down almost on top of him. The hand that had hold of his shoulder gripped hard like a trap, the distorted face looked monstrous, foreshortened and suspended beneath painted faces, the eyes glaring, the threat of the mouth opening and shutting. Kling groaned, turning his head from one side to the other to escape from the eyes, but the eyes would not let him go. He felt the strangeness of sleep or sickness or death moving up on him, and then something gave way in his chest, the stone shifted, and sleep came forward to the foot of the couch, and he groaned again, louder, clutching his chest, crumpling the shirt and the red tie over his breastbone.

'Was it something bad that was done to you?' he heard the doctor's voice shout in his ear.

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He felt himself turning and twisting on the hard bed, twisting away from the eyes and the voice and the gripping hand that was shaking him now. He shut his eyes to escape, but a salt prick of tears or sweat forced them open; he did not know where he was or what was happening to him, and he was afraid. He was very frightened with the strange sleep so near him, he wanted to call for help, it was hard for him to keep silent. But somewhere in the midst of fear existed the thought, They've taken everything; let them not take my silence. And the queer thing was that Williams was somehow a part of this, his smile, the cigarette, and what he had spoken.

'Was it something bad that *you* did?' Kling heard.

He did not feel the hand that was shaking his shoulder. He only felt his face wet, and on the other side of sleep a voice kept on moaning while another voice shouted. But he could not listen because, just then, the stone moved quite away from his breast and sleep came up and laid its languid head on his breast in place of the stone.

He tried to look at the strange sleep, to know it, but it had no form, it simply rested sluggishly on him, like gas, and all he could see above was a cloud of faces; the entire earth was no graveyard great enough for so many, nor was there room to remember a smile or a cigarette or a voice any more.

The old man was there and had been for some time, not sprawled in leaves now but standing, bent forward, listen-

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ing; and Kling knew that this time something must pass between them, there was something which must be said by him, in extenuation, or in entreaty, to which the old man must reply; though what it was that had to be said, or what words would be found to express it, did not appear yet.

The old man bent over him and blood dripped on to his face and he could not move because of what lay on his breast, and when the old man saw he could not move he bent lower still and Kling could see the tufts of bristly hairs in his father's nostrils. He knew he would have to speak soon, and, staring wildly, with the old man's face almost on his, he could see the side of the face that was only a bloodied hole, and he heard a sudden frantic gasp and gush of words in his own language, and that was all he heard because at that moment sleep reached up and covered over his face.

Dr. Pope and the nurse had both seen that Kling was going to start talking. The doctor had seen it coming for about half a minute and waited intently. The nurse looked expectant. When the first sounds came both of them had moved forward at once and the doctor had bent lower over his patient but now they stepped back from the couch.

'I was afraid that might happen,' Dr. Pope said in his impatient voice. 'Damned annoying. I suppose there's no one in the place who could translate?'

'I'm afraid not,' the nurse said.

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'Exasperating,' the doctor said. 'So we shan't get anything out of him after all.'

'I'm afraid not,' the nurse said again.

'Most frustrating and disappointing,' said Dr. Pope.
'Oh, well, it's no good trying to work on him now.'

The Heavenly Adversary

. . . 'in a culture which is completely disordered, prince and servant are enemies, old age and youth kill each other, father and son bear cold hearts, brothers accuse each other, the most intimate friends work against each other, man and wife deceive each other, . . . day after day the danger increases . . . the bonds of society are loosened . . . the spirit becomes bestial . . . the greed for gain grows . . . duty and common sense are forgotten. . .

'Clouds appear in the shape of dogs, horses, white swans and columns of carriages . . . Or they have the shape of a man in a blue garment and red head who does not move. His name is: the Heavenly Adversary . . . or they have the shape of a host of horses fighting: those are called the Slaying Horses . . . snakes crawl through the town from West to East . . . horses and cattle begin to talk, dogs and pigs mate, wolves come into the city. Men fall from

The Heavenly Adversary

the sky . . . When such signs appear in the land and its master does not better his ways in his fear, God shall send misfortune, sorrow and plague . . . all kinds of death, annihilation, earthquake, destruction and grief shall arrive . . . all this is caused by disorder in the state. . . .'

LIE BU WE—about 300 B.C.

WHY did he leave me, I wonder? It seems almost incredible that less than a week has passed—only a few days, in fact—since I was preparing an evening meal for us both in this very room. How happy we were that evening. Or perhaps I ought to say, How happy I was, for events have turned out so differently from my expectations that I feel more than ever astray in the world, as though all my life I had been working along lines that had no relation at all to reality. When appearances prove so deceptive, one's own sensations are all that one really has to rely on; and I can say, at least, without any doubt, that I was extremely happy that evening.

It was, perhaps, the second or third meal we had eaten together in the little house: the house to which I had moved on purpose to be in the same district of the city as this auburn stranger who had dropped into my life as if from the clouds, bringing with him a happiness I had not expected to feel again.

It seemed such a gay little house then, with its yellow shutters, its steep ladder-like flight of stairs, and its small,

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oddly-shaped rooms, each one painted a different colour. There was the living-room all pale green like the spring-time trees beneath which we walked every day after my work was finished; the bedroom coloured like almond blossom; the kitchen blue and white like one of those plates on which one traced as a child endless magic journeys.

I see that I have written in the past tense as if these rooms I'm describing no longer existed; and yet here I am, in that same blue and white kitchen where I was so happily preparing our meal that evening only the other day, when he said to me casually: 'Some time you will write about this because all that is beautiful must triumph for all.'

And I answered (I remember that I was taking an earthenware dish out of the oven at the moment and thinking more about that than about what I was saying), I answered: 'Yes, when it is all over between us, then I suppose I shall write down what I remember because nothing else of you will be left to me.'

The outward aspect of the house is still precisely the same as it was when those words were spoken. The paint is still fresh on the walls, the yellow shutters still present a frivolous brightness to the passers-by. It is only the character of the place which in this short time has become altogether different. Its personality has changed. It is not gay any longer. Oh, no, certainly gaiety has no connection whatever with these coloured walls which surround me

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with their implacable reminder of lost joy. Outer appearances remain unaltered, but the spirit which inspired every form with meaning has vanished, leaving only a shell behind.

When I look round at my few possessions, each one of which carries inextricably in its essence some amusing or tender association, I feel as though I were confronting a dear relative, perhaps a brother, whose brain a sudden tragedy had unhinged. Everything is the same: the features, the figure, the hair; only the one vital element is missing without which the human being has no significance, no entity, no individual soul.

I have never heard of anybody who loved a mad person. I should think it would be impossible to do so. Pity or aversion one would feel, but not love. And the feelings I have for this house are a blend of aversion and pity, exactly as they would be for someone very close to me whose personality had deteriorated until there finally remained no more possibility whatever of contact between us.

Sometimes it is almost horror that comes over me at the sight of these rooms, these objects, for which the whole *raison d'être*, as it were, has been taken away. Why do these walls still stand? When every day and night, all over the city, buildings are being struck down, why does this house remain intact? How can it so obstinately fail to disintegrate, seeing that it no longer has any chance of fulfilling the purpose for which I first decided to occupy it?

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Yes, it's just as if one were forced to live with someone out of his mind, or, worse still, with the actual physical corpse of a loved person which a diabolical chemistry had rendered immune from the process of dissolution.

The words with which I began writing, the words, 'Why did he leave me?' keep recurring to me although I try to drive them away. What's the use of tormenting myself with speculations about this man, dressed always in blue, whose arrival I did not witness and who departed in silence and unobserved? It is only necessary for me to know that he has gone, that he is far away, and that he will not return. Suddenly he left me, without warning or explanation, without saying good-bye. If I had known his intention that evening, could I have said or done anything to influence his decision? That is a question I often vainly consider, alone in these rooms which now have no meaning for me.

And why indeed should one expect to find a meaning in walls, in windows, or in a book that is not to be found on the shelf? In a city where everything is chaotic and inexplicable and where one is constantly beset by all kinds of death, annihilation, destruction and grief it is something, at all events, to be able to say: 'On that evening,' or 'On such and such a day, I was happy.'

I've tried hard to solve the bitter riddle which brought me across the world to this place of misfortune when all I wished was freedom to live in peace, in sunshine, in a country where birds had not learnt to fly in terror from

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the sound of a falling bomb. Lately I've been thinking that possibly all these happenings are bound up together. That perhaps the man in the blue suit with whom I was happy, the man who left me so abruptly and, as it superficially appears, so unkindly, perhaps he was, in some obscure way, connected with my sentence; or even came with the express purpose of putting into my hands a clue which, if properly followed, would finally lead to the truth and make clear the justice of all these catastrophes which have fallen upon me.

How otherwise than as an unfulfilled obligation, and therefore as an indictment, can I translate that phrase of his, which at the time passed almost unnoticed, but which now seems to me to be the crux of the whole matter: 'All that is beautiful must triumph for all'?

The Brother

Now that those days are as dead as the grave and I have so much time on my hands I feel a great and persistent need to record something of the relationship between myself and my brother. And the fact that I'm allowed to do so (indeed, I'm even encouraged to write by the provision of pencils and, in spite of the paper shortage, of plenty of cheap foolscap paper) makes me believe that perhaps those better able to judge than I have discerned in the long, submerged struggle between the two of us an example which may prove valuable to other people in the same sort of unfortunate circumstances.

There's plenty of time now to think back. Plenty of time to remember, to contemplate, to reflect on the disconnected, small, distant pictures which go to compose the whole gloomy canvas.

The Brother

Sitting here in this lonely little room, without friends, without a future, without even a dream; sitting here hour after hour, listening to the sea's curious muffled bass which incorporates at irregular intervals a voice-like contralto pleading, I've arrived at certain decisions. I've decided to make a kind of précis, not a detailed analysis because that's beyond my powers, but a brief sketch of the pattern which my brother and I traced out in our mutual reactions. I'm not doing this in the hope of any amelioration of my own position (that I fully realize is out of the question and I don't even desire it); nor because I am inspired by an altruistic wish for others to profit by my misfortune; but simply because I want to get things clear in my own mind, and the best way to get things clear is to get them all written down.

To begin at the very beginning: I am the elder brother by two years. My birthday is in the spring, under the sign of Mars, and on that day, while I was at home, I was always accustomed to see my mother fill the vases with tulips like stiff fairy lights.

My brother was born in the dead of winter. I remember my mother telling us about the exceptional severity of that winter and how the fountain in the square opposite our home spouted glittering sprays of ice instead of water, and the sparrows were found in dozens frozen to death. I remember particularly how she told us that somebody (I think it was one of the doctors at the hospital where she was confined), suddenly opening a door into the

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street, felt something crunch under his boot and discovered a little pile of dead birds which must have fluttered into the doorway for shelter before they became numbed.

The thought of those small, crushed, rigid bodies, which I picture as finches, is associated with early memories of my brother.

My brother. Ah, now I really grasp the difficulty of what I have undertaken. When it comes to the point of describing him my thoughts falter and turn aside. It's not that I don't remember him clearly, so much too clearly. But the act of concentration is like something unlawful. It's as if I were profanely trying to exhume his actual buried corpse. It's as if my brain cells themselves rejected a forbidden task. I begin to hesitate; I find myself listening attentively to the sea as if those never quite audible voices out there might be about to give me a message. But however closely I pay attention to the sea noise I can't distinguish anything definite: only the subdued, interminable clamour which now sounds to me like a high wind in the trees near the house where we used to live.

My brother. Slowly, slowly, his likeness comes in front of my eyes. Yet it isn't a distinct image of him even now. It isn't one picture so much as a series of pictures, taken at different ages and in different places, dissolving into one another and correspondingly vague. A white skin, red cheeks, chestnut hair. His skin was so white that you might have thought it a gift from the ice flowers on the window that witnessed his birth. People used to tease him

The Brother

by saying that such a beautiful white skin was wasted on a boy and should have belonged to a girl. He was big and strong though, not in the least girlish, and that was the reason, I suppose, that he didn't mind the teasing; that, and the gay, good-natured way that he had. It's his hair that I can remember most clearly: a wonderful head of rich red-brown curls with a lovely golden sheen, as glossy and fine as silk. If I'd been a girl I think I would have loved to run my fingers through his hair and unwind the curls which would, I'm sure, have briskly sprung back as soon as I let them go. I never did touch my brother's hair; and somehow this seems a sad thing to me. I think I could bear remembrance more easily if, even if only once, I had put my hand on his head.

My mother sometimes used to caress him in this way; but not frequently; not, at any rate, when I was present. Sometimes when we were all together in the evening I would notice her eyes turning fondly to his head bowed over a book. And I had the impression that she would have reached out to stroke his hair which shone so handsomely under the lamp if she had not been afraid of making me jealous or of hurting my feelings.

Poor Mother. How she must have regretted the difference between her two sons. Even in the circumstances of our births we were totally different, and all her suffering and anxiety were on my account.

My brother came into the world easily in the glow of a frosty sunrise. From babyhood he was healthy and lov-

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able and never caused a moment's alarm. Whereas I, dragged bloodily through a long and difficult birth, for years swung between life and death, the victim of an endless sequence of illnesses and accidents. All through my unlucky childhood my hold on life was precarious, and it was not until I was fully grown that my body appeared to reconcile itself more or less to the earth.

I have read the psychologists' theory that children born in springtime are liable to a lack of robustness because of the tension accumulating in the natural world during their term of embryonic development. But at the time when I was growing up children born in spring and summer were generally supposed to possess the pleasant characteristics of those seasons. Friends used to express surprise that I, with my auspicious birthday, was continually ailing, while my brother, who should have been handicapped by his freezing introduction to life, was a perfect model of mental and physical health.

Naturally, I could not fail to be aware of the comparisons which were made between the two of us, of course always in my disfavour. My brother was tall, well-developed and fine to look at with his vivid colouring; kind, friendly, intelligent. I was puny, weak, incapable of tying my own shoelace without gasping for breath, my complexion was sallow, my hair stringy and dull, my manner lifeless or boorish and petulant.

When my brother brought friends to the house I would hide unsociably in my room. Or, worse, I would sit among

The Brother

them like a malicious goblin, damping their high spirits with my sneers and silences and bitter remarks.

In this way, as time went on, a gradual alienation took place for which I was entirely to blame. Up to the very end my brother was always considerate, gentle, eager to make friends with me. My heart sinks with shame and remorse now when I remember how often when he came back from his work in the business part of the town he would sit at home, trying to coax me into a good mood with his amusing talk, instead of spending the evening with his companions. How patient he was, and how little response he got from me. As likely as not I would try to pick a quarrel with him for his pains. But he would never be goaded into hostility, and if he saw that I was determined to stick to my bad temper, he would simply sigh and go out of the room; not reproachfully, but with such a sad, disappointed look that my heart almost breaks when I recall it.

And my mother. I see that I have hardly written anything about her as yet, although she was so much the centre of both our lives. Our father died when I was only a few years old and I have no recollection of him at all. My first memories are all of my mother, bending over me, stroking me with cool hands, holding a cup to my lips, soothing me through the mazy fevers of interminable nights, taking me for precious outings during my rare spells of comparative health. She was gay and pretty in those early days, smiling often, and singing, and with a

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quaint humour distinctively hers. That is the way I like to remember her. As a girl she must have been charming, with my brother's bright hair and complexion. I used to hear people say when we were children how much he resembled her.

It hurts me to think that it was the strain of looking after me which dimmed her brightness prematurely. Her devotion to me was extraordinary. At the time I took it for granted, never having known what it was to be left without her care for a single day. But now I realize that there was something fanatical, almost abnormal, in her determination to keep me alive and to shield me from every blow. There was even—how can I convey what I mean?—a touch of perversity in her protectiveness. I hardly know how to express it except by saying that her will for my welfare exceeded the natural bounds of maternal love and assumed a masochistic quality.

For my sake, although she was still a young and attractive woman, she sacrificed all social amusements. Because I was an invalid and could seldom go out, and then only for short periods, we lived a life of almost complete seclusion. When my brother started to earn his living and to bring his friends to the house I noticed a brief revival of her vitality. She looked younger, and began to speak again in the old humorous way that she had abandoned. Even her hair seemed to become more alive although its colour had faded.

But the pleasure of seeing these young people she also

The Brother

renounced on the grounds that their presence disturbed me. It would be best, she decided, that my brother should not invite his friends to our home since I was always upset by them and thrown into a state of quarrelsome agitation by their talk.

Not long after this the one-sided conflict between us intensified and it became apparent that I could not or would not agree with my brother even on the few occasions that we were together. A sort of frenzy of malice entered into me at this time. I was jealous of his looks, of his popularity, of the fact that he played his part in the world as an effective member of society while I was forced to drag out a wretched existence lying on sofas in darkened rooms. To my jealousy was added a devastating sense of inferiority. And these two emotions working together like deadly germs in the blood generated an uncontrollable aggression against my brother which broke out in constant violent and utterly unjustified accusations.

He, acting no doubt on my mother's suggestion, spent less and less time with us. He still slept at home, but most of his days were passed elsewhere and often he did not come home until long after I had gone to bed.

My mother did not speak of him or of his lengthened absences. I, encased in my own egotism, was happy in her even more undivided attention and pleased myself with the thought that her pleasure equalled mine.

We now lived a life restricted to tiny domestic details. I rested on the sofa and read and on good days pottered

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about out of doors. My mother attended to the house and cooked the special foods which she never allowed anyone else to prepare for me. This time she seemed definitely and finally to have turned away from her youth. Her hair began to go grey. She became very silent; not melancholy, but certainly not gay; and though her manner towards me was quietly cheerful her smile seldom appeared. Sometimes I would catch her sitting listlessly like a quite old woman, and I would wonder at the change that had taken place in one who used to be lively and whimsical. I do not say that I was perturbed by the change. In a way it even caused me a feeling of complacency as though she had become more wholly mine by giving up everything else.

All that concerned me was that we were alone and always together and that nothing interfered with the cloud of protection in which she enveloped me.

Now comes the part that is hardest of all to set down. I feel my brain starting to spin, and I must hurry on before confusion engulfs me completely.

It was bitterly cold weather and I was recovering from an attack of influenza. My brother had caught the infection from me, but mildly, and had been at home in bed for two or three days.

On his first day downstairs the two of us were in the study where most of my existence was passed, I on my usual sofa, he in an armchair by the fire. It was a long while since we had been in the same room together for

The Brother

more than a few minutes at a time. As we rested there, both with our books, I was conscious of him glancing at me now and again as if there were something he wanted to say. Contrarily, I refused to take any notice for several minutes, but when I finally looked up I met his eyes gazing eagerly and wistfully into mine.

As soon as he saw that I was looking at him he got up, put his book aside, and came over to me. Standing beside the sofa, looking down with that candid smile that was so hard to resist, he began to speak to me in a gentle, appealing voice, saying how sorry he was that we had drifted so far apart, begging my pardon if he had hurt me in some way, and asking if we could not make an effort to get on better together, if only for Mother's sake.

He spoke so earnestly and with such simple friendliness and good-will that I felt a sudden softening towards him. O God, how much I really wanted to yield myself up to him then, to tear out my black heart and throw it down at his feet. I wanted to love him and to be loved in return. What would I not have given for the power to respond when his hand came down affectionately on my shoulder.

But at that very moment an awful seizure gripped hold of me, my head felt as though it must burst open, and, as if to relieve the intolerable congestion of the brain, a tremendous paroxysm of coughing came on, shaking me so viciously that the walls of my chest seemed to be torn apart.

Asylum Piece

My brother tried to support me in my convulsions. I can still see his face, a little pale after illness, abruptly turning whiter with shock and dismay. My mother came running with medicine in a glass, but I was too far gone to drink. Accustomed to these crises, she at once knew what to do. There was a certain ampoule that, when crushed, exhaled a vapour which gave me relief; but by an unusual oversight there were none of these in the house. At once she prepared to run to the druggist who lived not far away. I, however, as soon as I realized her intention, held her back, clutching her hand, and indicating as well as I could in the midst of my spasms that she was not to leave me.

I'll go, my brother offered immediately, already on his way to the door.

But you shouldn't go out in this cold, my mother said. You're not well yourself yet.

Even in my extremity I saw the agonized look that she gave him with those words, and felt her hand jerk in mine.

Let him go, I tried to say. It won't hurt him. He's so strong. I don't know if I actually spoke aloud. At any rate, he was gone.

My mother made no further protest. In silence she did what she could for me, easing my acute distress until the ampoule was brought. Later on I was helped to bed, none the worse for the dreadful fit.

Next day my brother was seriously ill with pneumonia. By the evening he was delirious; unconscious the follow-

The Brother

ing day. Just before the end he came to himself. My mother fetched me from the place where I was lying prostrated with sorrow and a kind of dread impossible to describe in words.

You must come, she said. He is asking for you.

I did not want to go to the bedside. I was afraid.

Come, my mother said in a stern voice I had never heard. He is dying.

Trembling, I followed her to the room.

I believe some relatives were there as well as the doctor, but I did not see them. I saw only my brother, propped up with pillows, and changed. His short fatal illness had changed him exceedingly. His face had turned sunken and sallow, his hair had lost its gloss and stuck to his forehead in dank strands. Violent tremors shook me as I stood at the side of the bed. Was it my own or my brother's dying face that confronted me there, distorted by anguished breaths?

I saw that he wished to say something to me and stooped over him. The fearful sound of his breathing was so loud that it seemed to be inside my head. I had the sensation of participating in the agony of a man being tortured to death, and my shudders became so uncontrollable that I was afraid of falling upon him. At last words came; clear, and yet not like human speech at all, they came from so far away.

It's a pity.

It was like listening to a voice speaking across oceans

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and continents. And after a long delay, very softly, so that none of the others heard, followed two more words.

For you.

I don't know what happened then. I only remember the terrible pang that pierced through my whole being, the consciousness of some priceless thing irrevocably lost, as if a vital organ had been ripped out of my body.

I have a dim impression of confused commotion, of a lamentable cry, of the doctor hurrying forward. Was it I or my mother who cried out and fell on the bed? I'm not certain. All I know is that my brother was dead and that someone supported me from the room.

Later on, perhaps many hours later, I was lying again on my sofa. It was night time. A light burned on the table under a heavy shade. I think I must have been given a sedative, for I seemed to climb laboriously up a million steps from the depths of uneasy sleep. For a long time I lay absolutely still, staring at the circle of light on the tablecloth. The cloth was one of those thick old-fashioned affairs, coloured a deep blue, and I looked at it with the disinterested attention one might give to a rare object one had not seen before. By doing this I managed partially to insulate myself from reality. I was aware and yet unaware of the tragedy that had happened.

At last my mother came into the room. I did not look at her. Always before when she had opened the door I had turned towards her with confident and eager expectation of comfort. But now I did not want to see her. I did not

The Brother

want to raise my eyes from the tablecloth. I felt myself starting again to tremble as I had done at my brother's deathbed; long, deep inward shudders ran over my secret nerves.

My mother said nothing. I was aware that she had come into the middle of the room and was standing beside the table. I had the idea that she was waiting for me to speak some particular word, but what it might be I could not imagine. Very slowly and with the greatest possible reluctance I lifted my eyes.

She was standing looking down at me, resting one hand on the table. It seemed to me that something about her was different: not the black dress, because for a long time now she had habitually worn black; nor her pallor, although I noticed that her face was unusually white. It was rather that something indefinable seemed to have been taken from her.

The silence between us became intolerable and I stammered something intended for consolation, saying that at least we still had each other.

Yes, you are all that is left now, she said in a low, grave tone, while her eyes appeared to be studying me with the same unnatural and dispassionate consideration that I had bestowed on the tablecloth.

And suddenly, as she stood there looking at me so quietly and steadfastly in the quiet room, at night, with the lamp burning, the terrible revelation sprang out like writing upon the wall, and I realized everything, my own

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blindness, the horror. It was not I but my brother whom my mother had loved all along. He was the treasure of which I had robbed her for all these years and of which I had now deprived her for ever.

As if she knew what was in my mind she remarked:

You were always stronger than he was, and now you have managed to get rid of him for good.

A blue thread from the tablecloth had caught on her sleeve, and as she was speaking she carefully picked it off and threw it away. I don't know why, but this little action of hers was more than I could endure, and I groaned and hid my face in my hands.

I suppose she must have gone out of the room then although I did not hear her go. But after a minute the most awful thing of all happened: I heard her voice crying from the staircase in that dreadful, inhuman tone of a person screaming out of a nightmare, O, what will become of us now?

Whatever happens to me, I shall never forget that terrible cry. No walls, however high and thick, can exclude it. Nothing that I could possibly be called upon to bear could drown that sound which is always in my ears now like an accompaniment to the waves breaking outside.

What will become of us now? For her you might say the question is finally answered. And yet, was the answer really contained in that narrow box that so soon after my brother's coffin took the same steep journey down the dark stairs of our home? When the barber comes round and sets

The Brother

up his glass I look at my reflection and wonder whether the whole drama is not still going on here, in this little room, inside these high walls. Perhaps there will never be an end to it at all. Or perhaps the end will only come when no mirror reflects me any more. Perhaps when I die, perhaps death alone will bring peace, the armistice an end to this sad internecine strife.

The Gannets

IT WAS springtime, a windy day. I had walked a long way on the cliffs by a path that I did not know. Gannets were diving like snow falling into the sea, pursuing a shoal of fish that kept parallel with the shore. I'm not certain now whether I walked so far in order to watch the gannets or to explore the coast, or simply because it was a bright afternoon.

After winding for a long time between low bushes and rocks, the path suddenly began to climb steeply over a headland. Seeing the difficult track ahead made me realize that I was tired, and that I had already come much further than I had intended. From the position of the sun I knew that it must be getting late. The sensible thing would have been to turn back then; especially as the gannets, which I had perhaps been following unconsciously, were vanishing round the rocky point shaped like the snout

The Gannets

of a huge saurian. But instead of starting the long walk home I kept on, telling myself that I might as well see what lay beyond the head since I had come so far. It was quite a stiff climb, the path was slippery with pine needles and loose stones, and I was breathless by the time I got to the top. There was nothing about the view from the crest, either, to justify the effort of getting there. However far I looked I could see only a vista of the same yellowish rocky cliffs topped with pine trees and scrub which had been in front of my eyes the whole afternoon.

A few yards away, in a hollow of the downward slope, was a dilapidated wooden shack. At first I thought it must be some old boat-shed or deserted fisherman's hut. The half-ruined place, apparently only held together by roughly nailed boards and wire and patched with beaten-out tins, seemed much too ramshackle to be inhabited. But then I saw signs of occupancy: a heap of fresh potato peelings thrown outside the door, a few indescribably sordid rags hanging from the crazy posts of what had once been a fence.

I stood there in the wind for a minute, resting and getting my breath after the climb. And as I was wondering how any human being could be so unfortunate or so degraded as to live in such squalor, five or six children appeared and clustered together staring out to sea; they were, like the hovel, indescribably squalid, almost naked, hideous with neglect. They pointed towards the sea where the gannets on this side of the point were diving much

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closer in, with folded wings hurtling like bolts through the air, to strike the water one after the other in jets of spray. I could not hear much of what the children were saying, but it seemed from certain words and from their gestures that they expected the birds to come near. I waited to see what would happen. We all gazed at the gannets which were now no longer diving or searching the waves but planing portentously towards us with infrequent wing strokes. And sure enough I was presently half-deafened by a storm of harsh cries immediately overhead. Long, black-tipped wings hid the sun, shadowing everything; only the cold round eyes and the fierce beaks glittered. And hardly had the flock sighted the children than they seemed to be menacing them, screaming headlong towards them in horrid haste. I shouted some sort of warning, urging the children to run into the house. They took no notice. I saw their looks full of excitement and anticipation, but without any amazement. They seemed to be taking part in a procedure well known to them. Already the gannets were swooping upon one of them, the smallest of the group, whom two of the others dragged along by her stick-like arms. And it was beyond all possibility of doubt that this miserable little creature was the victim among them, already dedicated to the birds. Not terror alone gave such a shocking blankness to her lifted face, darkened by two great holes, bloodied pits from which the eyes had already been torn. I shouted again and began running with an idea of beating the gannets off with

The Gannets

my hands; but then I must have stumbled and fallen heavily. I must have been stunned by the fall on the jagged rock, for when I got up the cliff was silent and lonely, the wind had died down, and the sun was sinking behind sullen bars of cloud edged with fire.

How did all this atrocious cruelty ever get into the world, that's what I often wonder. No one created it, no one invoked it, and no saint, no genius, no dictator, no millionaire, no, not God's son himself, is able to drive it out.

The Picture

THE sun was shining the afternoon I went for the picture. Of course there wasn't anything very remarkable about that because the sun does shine more here in the winter than it does at home. But that afternoon it shone as if the winter had almost come to an end; as if the very next day, perhaps, might be the first day of spring.

How hard winter is to bear in a foreign country, even when there is sunshine. The cold mornings open their eyes to glare at you one after another, like hostile strangers. Everything will be easier when the spring comes, I used to say to myself whenever I was confronted with one of those difficult situations or problems which are certain to arise so often in a strange environment.

Walking along the street on this day that I'm talking about I was happy to feel the spring close at hand. The

The Picture

town, which generally has rather a drab appearance, for once looked quite gay. Flags were blowing over some of the buildings, there was a breezy seaside liveliness in the air, flocks of gulls with bright scarlet legs and beaks followed some laughing girls who threw them the remains of the lunch they had been eating in the public gardens.

The pleasure which I got from seeing these things added itself to the pleasure I felt about the picture I was going to fetch from the shop. It was a week since I had taken it there to be framed, and all through the week I had been thinking how happy I should be when the time came to hang it up on the wall, an ally in the alien territory of my room.

The old man to whom the shop belonged had promised to have the picture framed ready for me today. As I went along I remembered with gratitude his aspect of a benevolent gnome and the kindly way he had interested himself in the picture and advised me about the most suitable style of frame. Since I've travelled so far afield I've learned to be cautious: I know that it doesn't do to attach one's hopes to anybody or to indulge in what's called wishful thinking, but in this case I felt safe enough; I felt sure the old man would not disappoint me.

The shop was on the shady side of the street, and when I crossed over from the other pavement where I'd been walking I was surprised at the difference in temperature between the shade and the sun. The inside of the shop felt really chilly, and it was dark as well, so that for the

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first few moments after I'd come through the door I thought the place was quite empty. Tradesmen in this part of the world have a habit of leaving their shops unattended if business is slack, and there's usually a hand-bell on the counter which a customer rings as he comes in to attract attention. It wasn't until after I'd rung the bell, which in this case was an uncommon one made of glass, that I saw there was somebody already in the shop. A man of medium height, rather thin, wearing a long coat like an ulster and a nondescript hat, was standing with his back towards me, apparently studying some prints fastened to a tall screen near the door. I can't attempt to explain the impression I got then, an impression that was absolutely illogical and contradicted by the man's very attitude as he stood, turned away from me and bending forward slightly as if straining his eyes in the dim light to examine the pictures before him: the impression that he was, if not actually watching me, at any rate acutely conscious of my arrival.

It's not exactly agreeable to feel that a stranger has got you under observation, particularly if you happen to be a long way from home in a place where things frequently turn out quite different from what they appear. My optimistic mood began to evaporate. I was disappointed, too, because the person who answered the bell was not the old man whom I'd been expecting and upon whom, for some reason, I seemed to have pinned my faith, but a dark-haired girl in a red dress whom I'd never seen be-

The Picture

fore. As she came in I looked at the man near the door, supposing that he would be attended to first since he had arrived before me. But he did not turn or change his position in any way, nor did the girl even glance at him. There seemed to be some understanding between them; obviously the man was not in the shop as an ordinary customer, and this was somehow disturbing to me although anticipation of seeing the picture was uppermost in my mind.

The girl asked what I wanted, and, as soon as I had told her, she began to look at the labels on a number of brown paper packages that were leaning against the wall. Again I'm unable to explain the feeling which came over me while she was searching, the conviction that she was not looking seriously, that she did not really expect to find my picture among all those brown paper parcels. If only the old man would come I'm sure he would be able to find it at once, I thought. But he did not appear and I felt myself helpless. The situation already seemed to have developed beyond my control. I was oppressed by an intuition, hard to put into words, that the true meaning of what was happening was in some way hidden from me; and yet I dreaded the moment when it would become clear.

The girl, after going through the wrapped pictures in an aimless way, picked one out, as it seemed to me, quite at random, and laid it on the counter. This will be yours, she said, apparently expecting me to accept it without further inquiry.

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But it's got someone else's name written on it, I said, pointing at a word pencilled on the brown paper so indistinctly that I couldn't make out what it was but which contained far more letters than there are in my two names put together.

For the first time she gave me a faint smile. That's easily put right, she said. She took a piece of india-rubber out of her pocket and quickly erased the writing on the parcel. There you are, she said, pushing it towards me and moving away as if the whole business had been satisfactorily cleared up.

Wait a minute, I called after her. I must make sure that I've got the right one. I hurriedly started to undo the parcel, but the string was so securely tied that it took me some seconds to get it open. Just as I expected, it was not my picture inside, but an inane nursery print of a frog in a top hat. I pulled the paper back over the wretched thing. The mere sight of it was exasperating, and I remember feeling surprised at the sad tone in which I exclaimed, Of course this isn't mine. Why didn't my voice sound indignant?

The girl, who had just opened the door between the shop and a room at the back, looked at me with a blank face. The old man knows all about my picture, I said. Won't you please ask him to come here and speak to me? She didn't answer. I was afraid she was going to refuse. But then, still without speaking, she went out and shut the door between us.

The Picture

Now I remembered uneasily the man behind me whose presence I had forgotten during the last few seconds. I glanced round casually, not wishing to give the impression that I felt any interest in him. At first I thought he must have gone away; but then I saw that he had merely moved to a darker corner where he was standing in exactly the same pose as before although, in such deep shadow, he could not possibly have distinguished a single detail of the pictures at which he seemed to be peering. So he really is watching me, passed through my head. And suddenly it occurred to me that it would be wise for me to leave the shop, immediately, without troubling any further about the picture.

I had actually taken a step towards the street door when the old man appeared from the inner room. At once I turned to him with relief, confident that he would be able to put everything right. I've come for my picture, I said to him. You remember. The picture you advised me about. It was to be ready today.

Picture? Picture? he repeated in an unexpectedly querulous voice, at the same time glancing impatiently from side to side as he came up to me. What picture? There are hundreds of pictures here.

I was so disconcerted that for a minute I simply stared at him. Then it began to dawn on me that the thing which has so often happened to me in this country had happened again, that I had made a mistake, that I had fallen into the trap of accepting as real an appearance that was merely

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a sham, a booby trap, a malicious trick. The old man was very near me and I could see his teeth yellow and broken and bad like rat's teeth under his ragged moustache, and his vindictive red-rimmed eyes gummy with rheum. How could I ever have thought he had a benevolent face? What a fool I was to be so easily taken in.

But you must remember my picture, I pleaded, not yet quite able, in spite of everything, to despair. Speaking with a contemptible note of propitiation I began to describe our previous interview, recalling what had been said on that occasion. The old man waited unwillingly. I could not tell whether he was even listening to me as he stood, glancing about, and thrusting a long black pencil in and out of a tuft of straggly hair just above his ear.

Yes, yes, he interrupted irritably in the end, and going once more to the door of the other room where I could now see an apprentice in a white apron at work at a table.

Perhaps it's in there, my precious picture, I thought. I no longer had the least trace of confidence in the old shop-keeper. I felt convinced, just as I had with the girl, that he had no intention of finding the picture, would not so much as look for it, even if he were not, as seemed only too probable, actually hiding it from me. If only I could go in and look round for myself perhaps I should see it somewhere, I was thinking, when he rudely shut the door in my face.

So strong was my desire for the picture that I think I might have tried to force my way into the room to hunt

The Picture

for it. And that in spite of the fact that I knew I ought to leave the shop at once, at that very moment, that I had stayed too long already. I think I would have chanced everything if the old man had not opened the door a crack just then and whispered, Perhaps you would be able to describe the picture to me? His face was close, much too close to mine, and I saw his mouth with its disgusting rat's teeth twisting into an indescribably sly and venomous sneer, while at the very same instant the man in the shop behind me, whose face I had not seen, uttered a sound that could only have been a suppressed laugh. Yes, they were both laughing. And I had no doubt about who was the victim of their cruel joke. The girl and the apprentice in the white apron were certainly having a good laugh, too, at my expense although I couldn't see or hear either of them from where I was standing.

I stumbled out of the place somehow. I was so humiliated, so disappointed, that I hardly knew what I was doing and turned in the wrong direction when I got into the street. The sun had stopped shining now; a dismal wind blew the dust in eddies presaging rain.

How terribly long and hard the winters seem when one is far from home.

All Kinds of Grief Shall Arrive

THINGS turn out so strangely and unexpectedly in one's life. If anybody had told me a few years back that people would be coming to me for information about the authorities I shouldn't have been able to help laughing. When one's a free agent nothing seems more fantastically improbable than the idea of being entangled with officialdom. Stories about those who get involved with the authorities don't seem to have a personal application at all; if anything, they strengthen one's sense of immunity. Those sort of things may happen to other people, I used to think; but not to me. I was inclined then to adopt a superior, slightly pitying, slightly contemptuous attitude towards unluckier individuals as if they had only themselves to blame for their troubles. In those days I hadn't yet learnt that the authorities are really not concerned with a person's motives or his private character or

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even with his public behaviour, and that somebody quite blameless (as we think) may easily become deeply implicated simply through a slight oversight or perhaps a technical error only due to a lack of information which is certainly not his fault.

The fact of the matter, of course, is that no one can be sure of avoiding trouble; the completely innocent person perhaps least of all; because he, unsuspecting, and lulled into a false sense of security by his clear conscience, is liable to overlook some little formality that may bring him under official notice. Just such a slip is all that's needed to set the ball rolling. Official procedure is always incalculable, but the one thing we can count on is that once a name has come before the authorities, in no matter how harmless a context, it will never be expunged from the records. A name appears, let us say, on some absolutely trivial pretext; perhaps even because of a civic action that would be accounted creditable by ordinary standards. Immediately the whole ponderous mechanism is engaged, countless wheels start to revolve, new ledgers are opened, documents are drawn up, in who knows how many different departments whole staffs of clerks set to work searching and correlating and noting and filing, until, in a surprisingly short time, a huge dossier is prepared. And from this dossier, which is constantly being revised and brought up to date, the subject can never hope to escape until his death. Some people go further still, and say that the dossier is extended to include the direct descendants

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of the original subject, so that anyone who has had a relative under observation is himself automatically suspect. Personally, however, I disagree with such an extreme view which, if correct, would implicate someone in practically every family.

It's the lack of reliable information about these matters and the crop of legends and superstitions that has grown out of ignorance which make a person who is, or who thinks he is likely to be, in trouble, turn to anybody who seems to have the least understanding of official affairs. That's why people have started coming to me; though heaven knows I can do little to help them. Certainly, during the last few years, I've had a great deal of experience in dealing with the authorities; and because, on the whole, things haven't gone entirely against me, a rumour has got round that I've evolved some specially successful technique of my own. In reality I'm convinced that any approach systematic enough to be called a technique would be far too rigid to stand a chance of success in dealing with the authorities whose reactions are essentially capricious, unpredictable and inconsistent. But this view is not readily acceptable to outsiders, obsessed as they are by the fantasy of official logic, and confused as well by the conflicting theories of their advisors.

But look here, they say to me: Surely there must be some hidden laws governing these obscure processes. Admittedly a lot of official business seems quite senseless and contradictory to us. But isn't it probable that behind

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it all there is an understandable formula which, once we have grasped it, will make order out of what previously looked like confusion? Shouldn't we really devote all our energies to a diligent search for such a key?

It's hard to give a satisfactory answer to this; and I sometimes think that an account of an actual case points a clearer moral than any amount of talk; as, for instance, A's Case.

I've known A nearly all my life. Latterly, since I've had so many dealings in official quarters, I've come to recognize certain distinguishing marks in people who are doomed to trouble with the authorities. I don't mean to say that everyone who is going to get into difficulties will bear these characteristics; but any person who does possess them is sure to go through a bad time sooner or later. A always had these distinguishing signs very strongly marked; but in earlier, happier days I was not aware of their significance.

I still remember the morning A came to tell me that for some unimaginable reason she had received an official notification to appear before the authorities. It was a beautiful, still sunny day and quail were calling out from the heath up above my cottage. Seeing her standing beside the door, with her hair blowing about and her bewildered face anxious in sunshine, I thought what a sad thing it was when young people got caught up in our strange official system. Elderly and middle-aged people at least have their memories to sustain them in dark times; but someone like

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A, a quiet young woman fond of birds, has no such inner support.

Well, in due course the case came on, and it had the distinction of being terminated quite quickly instead of dragging along in the usual inconclusive, heartbreaking way. The details, of course, were never made public. All that became known was that a verdict had been obtained against A and that she had actually started to serve her sentence. The next thing we heard, and it certainly came as a surprise, was that she had left the country. I don't mean to imply that she had escaped. We all know such a thing is impossible. But it seemed odd, to say the least of it, that, right at the beginning of her sentence, the authorities should suddenly allow her to go abroad. When I first heard about it I concluded that she was, inexplicably, being handed over to the foreign authorities. Afterwards, when I heard A's own story of what happened, I found out that no apparent restriction of any kind was placed on her movements.

She told me that she herself (rather naïvely) thought she was being given a reprieve. Pardons are issued by our authorities so rarely, perhaps only once in a century, that most advisors will hardly bother to apply for one; but A in her youthful optimism persuaded herself that hers was the unique case chosen to receive leniency. It seems that an official of unknown rank simply walked in one afternoon and without any explanation whatever released her and returned her belongings. Later on, when she had time

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to go through her baggage, she found everything intact, even down to some scribbled notes she had slipped into her coat pocket on the day of the final hearing. At the bank, where she went uncertainly to see if she could cash a cheque, her account was still open; in fact, a quite considerable sum had been credited to her anonymously.

You may wonder why A didn't just go home and take up her life where she had left it, since no obstacle was placed in the way of her doing so. Put yourself in her position, though, for a minute. Imagine the stares, the whispers, the veiled tentative questions, the startled or morbidly inquisitive faces which she would certainly have to encounter day after day, at her work, in the street, at a restaurant—wherever she happened to go. Imagine her relations with her superiors who, though they would hardly take the responsibility of discharging her in such anomalous circumstances, would surely regard her with a good deal of disfavour, if not with downright suspicion. What chances would she have of ultimate promotion, of success in her chosen career? And then, setting aside purely material considerations, imagine how she would stand with her friends, some of whom would doubtless cold-shoulder her, while in the company of the others she would never feel really at ease because she would never know that their association with her might not be telling against them in official quarters, or that they themselves were not, out of pity or politeness or loyalty, concealing their true feelings towards her. When all these

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things are taken into account her decision to go abroad isn't very surprising.

Besides, A was young and without ties and she had money to spend. Here, she thought, was a good opportunity of seeing the world and at the same time escaping from unpleasant associations. She accepted the popular fallacy that the past can be cut off like a diseased limb by the simple method of travelling a great many miles away from its locale.

It seems that she considered the move a success. No one in the distant country could know anything about her, she was starting with a clean sheet, and for a whole year she lived there very contentedly. That is what she told me. But there is some doubt in my mind. This part of her story always seems thin and unreal, like a dream imperfectly recollected. Whenever I have questioned A about this period her replies have been strangely vague. Yes, yes, of course I was happy, she would say to me: I had got away from it all. But when I pressed her for details her thoughts seemed to wander, she would glance about restlessly, making aimless movements with her hands, and at the same time repeating, Yes, I was very happy; but in such a queer vague way that I felt still more dubious.

And how did you live? What did you do? What sort of friends did you have there? I used to go on, determined, if I could, to get something more definite out of her. But she never really answered these questions, just saying evasively that she hadn't done anything much, that she had

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lived out in the country, in an isolated place, and so had not had many chances of making friends. And then she would look awkward and become silent. And if I badgered her still further she would insist on changing the subject.

Not that I got the impression that A was concealing anything or misleading me purposely. It was rather that I felt as if she herself were uncertain; as if she couldn't remember properly what had happened; as if, perhaps, she half suspected that none of this really had happened. What was it that made her repeat over and over again in such a peculiar way the words, I was very happy then? Was it simply that what came afterwards was so much worse? Or was it a subconscious attempt to bolster up the belief that she had once, during that brief dreamlike period, actually escaped the supervision of the authorities?

For a year then, according to A's own words, she was happy in her new environment. It was a year after her arrival to the day that she received the official communication recalling her. A year to the day. How significant that is. If anything were needed to convince one that the case had never been shelved for a moment, it's just that typical instance of mechanical official routine. One can almost see some close, dismal office that is always gloomy because the windows are made either of frosted glass or glass that's so covered with dirt and cobwebs that it's no longer transparent; the walls dark with hundreds of files and ledgers; the clerks working at their desks, or, more likely, lounging and gossiping near the stove at the end

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of the room, totally indifferent to all the suspense and suffering and despair centred around them.

It must have been a dreadful shock to A to receive this message after a whole year of apparent security. And yet I wonder whether it really was such a surprise to her? Whether she had not been half expecting something of the sort all the time, and whether she was not, in some part of herself, almost glad when the blow actually fell?

The first thing she did was to hurry to the main seaport, which was not far away, to make arrangements for her return. People to whom she spoke on the journey were pessimistic about her chances of getting a passage. In fact, they seem to have done their best to discourage her by talking about the difficulty of obtaining a passport, the infrequent sailings, and the inadequate passenger accommodation, most of which was automatically reserved for the great numbers of officials who were always travelling about. It was a thoroughly bad start to a bad business, and A was most apprehensive when she arrived at her destination. But here everything turned out unexpectedly simple. Just as often happens when one anticipates insuperable difficulties, all obstacles mysteriously melted away. She entered the department where she had to make her first application feeling diffident and depressed and wondering what sort of treatment she would receive from the officials who doubtless knew all about her case. To her astonishment the whole affair went through with perfect smoothness and speed. The clerks in the outer office spoke

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politely to her and, instead of following their usual practice of whispering and tittering together while the visitor cools his heels helplessly on the other side of the barrier, they announced her at once.

The official before whom A was taken was a rather fat man of about forty with fair hair and a small moustache. His round, plump face gave him a genial look quite in keeping with his affable manner. He shook hands with A, offered her a chair and a cigarette, and assumed an attentive attitude while she was speaking. A noticed, however, that he didn't seem to be listening very carefully as his eyes were constantly straying back and forth between the papers spread out on his desk and his neat fingernails. Finally, before A's statement was half finished, the man cut her short, saying, So the fact of the matter is that you want to leave, eh? And as soon as possible, I presume. Well, you couldn't have chosen a luckier moment.

He got up then, clapped A on the back in the friendliest manner, and, still keeping his hand on her shoulder, led her to the window and pulled up the holland blind, revealing a fine view of the docks. The department was on the third floor of a big waterfront building and the various ships lying alongside the wharves could all be clearly distinguished. A must have been as interested as she was surprised by this sudden revelation of things which are generally kept so secret. The official pointed out a ship docked almost directly below. She's sailing tonight, he said; and as it happens there's just one berth still available.

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One can imagine A's utter amazement, her stammered questions about the passport, the permits, the hundred-and-one different formalities she had been told. The official airily waved everything aside, remarking that it was a rush, certainly, but that there were occasions on which these things could be managed. He gave A a bundle of forms to fill up and the addresses of certain offices she would have to visit before leaving, shook hands with her again and walked with her to the door, smiling the whole while.

A passed the rest of the day in a turmoil of activity. The places at which she had to report were scattered all over the town, and though she did not meet with obstruction at any of them there was the inevitable waiting about and repetition and delay, so that she barely got everything done before closing time. It was quite dark, starting to rain, and the offices were all deserted when she finally reached the docks with her papers in order. Armed policemen at the gates examined her pass with their flashlights before admitting her, and a specially tall policeman at the head of the gangway took the pass from her as she came aboard.

A has told me that she was too tired and excited and bewildered to have a very clear recollection of what followed. And this isn't surprising in view of the fact that she was at once shown into a fairly large cabin, the captain's presumably, where a party was in full swing. There were eight or ten men packed into the cabin, which was so full

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of smoke that A could hardly distinguish their faces as she was introduced by one of the ship's officers who had somehow got hold of her name. She got a confused impression of people, all talking in loud tones and with glasses in their hands, some sitting, some standing, some in official or naval uniforms, some still wearing their mufflers and unfastened civilian greatcoats just as they had come in from outside; of a medley of charts, printed warnings, instructions and prohibitions, incongruously plastered over the walls among pictures of actresses and naked women. A, too, soon had a glass in her hand, and found herself jammed into a corner beside a large elderly man in a bright yellow golf jacket. Some minutes passed before she realized that this oddly dressed man, already a little drunk, was the ship's captain.

The party went on gaily. Everybody was friendly towards A; the captain in particular never stopped joking with her and saying how glad he would be of her company on the voyage. A had no idea of the time, though it seemed to her it must be getting late. As soon as she emptied her glass it was at once filled up again. Perhaps this was why she hardly noticed the others drifting away one by one until she suddenly realized that she was alone with the captain whose mouth was just opening in a gigantic yawn. Ashamed of having stayed for so long, A jumped to her feet. Presumably it was the liquor that made her feel all at once stupid and dazed so that she hardly knew what she was doing there with the yawning, alcoholic captain

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in the stuffy cabin full of smoke and cigarette ends and dirty glasses. She did not know the time; she did not know whether the boat had started to move; she did not even know the way to her own berth. Standing there stupidly like that she must have wondered what in the world had come over her to make her forget her precarious position and behave in such an imprudent way; at the very start of the voyage, too, when heaven knows what serious consequences might follow.

This was the moment at which the door started to open and someone came into the cabin. In her stupefied state A could not at first remember where she had seen that round face and light moustache. All at once it dawned on her that they belonged to the official whom she had first interviewed, the one who had been so helpful and friendly. But how could it be he? What could he be doing here when all the officials had left the different departments long ago and were at home with their families? It seemed to be the same man and yet A was not absolutely certain. The official—if it really was the official—had altered his appearance by putting on a heavy, shapeless sort of raincoat that almost reached to the ground, and he was wearing besides a hat with a soft brim pulled well over his face. He did not take off his hat although it was sodden with rain, but looked silently, and as A thought, critically, from A herself to the captain who seemed to be falling asleep on a narrow settee fixed against the wall. For her part, A was too flabbergasted to do anything but gape foolishly until

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the newcomer abruptly stepped over to her and said, I'm afraid you won't be able to sail after all. There has been a hitch.

What sort of a hitch? Can't anything be done to put it right? A wanted to know. But the other, instead of answering, merely told her that she would have to collect her luggage and get off the ship at once. At once. Do you understand? was the last thing he said, looking keenly at A from the shadow of the dark hat brim, just before he went out of the door.

If one is to analyze the affair it is extremely important to get an exact picture of the official's behaviour, to know the precise tone in which he spoke, and so on. But unfortunately A's impressions are inadequate. All she repeats in response to questioning is that the man did not seem angry or hostile and that he didn't take up a condemnatory attitude. His voice, apparently, was rather cold and emphatic; quite different from his cordial way of talking earlier in the day. But this might be expected from anyone called out late at night, in the rain, on a disagreeable errand. The question arises in one's mind, naturally, as to why the official—if indeed that was who it was—should take this task on himself instead of delegating it to one of his subordinates. At once, and with the added support of A's own uncertainty, one begins to doubt the identity of the messenger. On the other hand, we know that the authorities do often act in astonishing and incomprehensible ways, attaching the highest importance to

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matters which we think trivial, and vice versa. It appears to me injudicious to draw any conclusion from the data available.

The official's departure seems to have roused the captain, for as soon as the other man was out of the cabin he started up from his doze and asked what had been going on. A began to explain, but before she'd spoken more than a few words the captain impatiently interrupted her, just as if he'd really heard everything for himself, and in a boasting, blustering sort of way told her to pay no attention to what happened but to stay where she was. Even in the midst of her dismay and confusion A thought this conduct very odd, and it made an unfavourable impression on her so that she wondered if the old man could have been shamming drowsiness for his own ends. With this suspicion added to everything else she was in a great hurry to get away. It seemed to her that after her original ill-advised behaviour every minute she spent on the ship now must be jeopardizing her position with the authorities still further. Without really listening to the other's noisy arguments she unceremoniously wished him good-bye and hurried out into a passage which was quite dark except for the tiny gleam of a blue bulb further along. A hadn't the faintest idea which way to go so it was lucky for her that the cabin door behind her opened again, lighting up the companion-way and her suitcase lying at the bottom of it just as she had left it when she first came on board. Her one idea now was to get ashore as quickly as possible. She

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did not even glance at the captain who, blocking up most of the doorway with his bulk, was bombastically advising her to do as he said, and repeating, with a queer mixture of aggressiveness and persuasion, that A had better sail while she had the chance. A did not answer him, but simply snatched up her suitcase and ran for the steps. The old man's voice followed her for a few seconds; it sounded either threatening or derisive, she wasn't sure which. As she reached the deck she heard a door bang and then everything became silent.

There were no lights showing anywhere on the ship, but a faint luminosity came from the sky so that it was just possible for A to see where she was going. A few lonely looking lamps were spaced at long intervals down the quay and near them various dark surfaces could be seen glistening with the fine rain that was persistently falling. The tall policeman had gone although the gangway was still in position; the whole place was deserted. Standing on the quay, A looked back at the black silent hulk she had just left. She was struck by the complete absence of movement or light; a ship on the point of sailing ought surely to be a scene of bustle, but here there was no sign of life. It seems that a notion came to her then that perhaps the ship had never been really intended to sail that night; perhaps it would not sail at all; perhaps it was not even a real ship, but one of those dummy ships which one sometimes sees used as waterside restaurants at holiday resorts. When the official had pointed it out from his win-

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dow it had looked real enough. But how could A be sure that it was not some other ship she had seen from the window?

Preoccupied with these thoughts she walked the whole length of the quay without meeting a single soul. High solid gates barred the exit, and, as she approached, a policeman came out of a sort of guardroom on the left, flashing a torch which lighted up the falling raindrops like sparks. A recognized him as one of the men who had admitted her earlier on, and for an instant this seemed a good omen; but then she thought it might be unfortunate.

A had been through a wearing time and she has described the sense of deep exhaustion that came over her as she began to tell the policeman what had occurred. Now it seemed to her that whole days must have passed since she had been to bed; she felt as if she were almost falling asleep on her feet; and her voice, too, sounded, she thought, like someone talking in his sleep. She didn't look in the man's face as she was speaking, but past him, at the door of the guardroom which was ajar and beyond which firelight flickered and several people seemed to be moving about.

So you must open the gate and let me go out again into the town, she finished up; but she wasn't at all surprised when the other refused to do anything of the kind. Indeed, she would have been more surprised if the man had agreed, her own voice sounded so sleepy and unconvincing.

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You can't go out, the policeman said in rather a truculent way. Your papers have been stamped and officially you've left the country.

But you see, that's really absurd, A replied mildly.

Without any impatience she repeated everything she had said before. This time her words seemed to make more impression because the policeman, instead of giving a flat refusal, muttered something about consulting some officer and stumped back into the guardroom again.

A did not in the least resent being left standing there in the rain. She felt quite apathetic, resigned to everything, even to her own weariness. With rain dripping off her hat she stood staring at the guardroom door which was now so nearly shut that only a thin golden streak outlined three sides of it. It must be nice and snug inside there, she thought (just as if some peaceful domestic haven were behind the door), just as a child thinks, without taking the thought any further.

Voices rose and fell indistinguishably inside the guardroom. A began to imagine that time must have stopped and that she was fated to stand forever, with her suitcase beside her on the wet paving stones, exactly as she stood now. Then the door was pushed wide open. This time it was not the policeman who came out but a man wearing a soft hat pulled well over his face. A started out of her lethargy for a second. But after all, she thought, anybody would pull his hat down on such a wet night—she had

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done so herself—and besides this man was of much slighter build than the other.

She stepped forward, prepared to recite her piece for the third time, but the stranger lifted his hand in a silencing gesture. She could not see his face at all but she felt herself being scrutinized closely. Apparently the man was satisfied with what he saw, for he presently turned round and re-entered the guardroom without having said a word; and in a minute or two the policeman came out, scowling into the rain, and hastily unfastened the gate. Too tired to speak, A picked up her suitcase and stumbled outside. Just as the gate was closing she took one last look along the quay towards the ship she had left. Perhaps even now at the last minute she expected to see the vessel ablaze with light, with sailors shouting to one another and running about; but it was all dark and still as the grave. Tomorrow everything will be straightened out, was her final thought as she fell like a log on to the bed in a cheap travellers' hotel which luckily was still open near by. But probably she didn't believe this even then.

If A had ever seriously imagined that her affairs would be quickly arranged, her hopes must have vanished next day as soon as she entered the department on the third floor. The clerks who yesterday had received her so courteously, this morning seemed to have been waiting with quite different feelings for her to appear, and her arrival was the signal for a general outburst of suppressed giggling and choking and grimacing and leg-slapping. No

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sooner had she shut the door after her than the chief clerk got up from his desk and came up with a half-mincing, half-strutting gait that was intentionally provocative. He was a dark, frizzy-haired, fancily dressed young man who looked as though he had native blood in him.

So you didn't get away after all, he said, leaning on the wooden barrier and staring at A insolently out of his prominent brown eyes. The two of them were so close together that A had an excellent view of his white shantung tie printed with a palm-leaf design. The opening phrase had evidently been prearranged, for the other clerks stopped their antics and sat silently goggling.

I want to see the head of the department as soon as possible, A said. She knew that to show any sign of irritation would simply delay matters so she forced herself to speak peaceably. Please let him know that I'm here. It's urgent.

You're in a great hurry all at once, aren't you? the chief clerk remarked. He pulled a pencil out of the bush of black hair over his ear and tapped it against his front teeth in a specially annoying way, never taking his eyes off A's face. Now that you've condescended to turn up, he added.

The fact was that A had overslept after her exhausting experiences on the previous day; nobody had called her, and it was now getting on towards noon. However, she didn't see any need to explain this to the chief clerk, so she merely replied that she had come as soon as she could.

What made you change your mind at the last moment

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about sailing^p asked the young man. He made no attempt to move, but, as A didn't answer, suddenly adopted an openly sneering attitude. I suppose you lost your nerve and couldn't take it when it came to the point.

Luckily A had enough restraint to control herself. She knew that to start bandying words with the clerks was the worst mistake she could make, and that if she once allowed herself to be drawn into an altercation she might never get beyond the outer office at all. As she came in she had happened to notice an old newspaper lying on the bench provided for people waiting for interviews. Turning away now in disgust, she sat down, unfolded the crumpled paper, and held it wide open in front of her. The paper screened her from the clerks' impudent faces even though it couldn't shut out the noises they made. The whole office had begun to indulge in puerile jeering and joking at her expense. Seeing that A didn't show fight but remained inscrutable behind her newspaper, the taunts grew louder and ruder. She's yellow; Got cold feet; Hasn't got what it takes; Quitter; Rat, were some of the gibes she was forced to listen to, accompanied by subdued catcalls, boos, hisses and other offensive sounds.

This was just the sort of situation that the clerks in our official departments always delight in, and of course they were determined to make the most of it. Like the rest of their kind, they derived the keenest amusement from mocking a poor victim who happened to be at their mercy. They're all the same, the clerks in these offices, an irre-

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sponsible, spiteful, childish, scatterbrained crew. One wonders why on earth the authorities put up with them. But not only is their mischievous conduct countenanced by their superiors, but it's as if they were actually encouraged in it; in fact, it almost seems to be one of the official requirements. I've often noticed how, when a well-behaved lad enters such a department, his whole character changes immediately: he loses his good manners, neglects his family, becomes flighty, quarrelsome and malicious, and spends all his spare time swaggering about with his fellows. Perhaps the clerks aren't really bad at heart but simply spoilt, thoughtless and conceited. No doubt they do work very hard at times—the enormous mass of official documentation witnesses to that—and the sedentary indoor life impairs their health to a certain extent. But when one has made allowance for these facts it's still difficult to see why they should be privileged to abuse their position as they do and to torment unfortunate people who have quite enough troubles to bear already.

A sensibly sat absolutely still, realizing that, just like children, the clerks would tire of their tricks before long if they didn't succeed in getting a rise out of her. Sure enough, after a few minutes the baiting died down to disappointed mumbles, she heard someone go into the inner office, and presently the head clerk sulkily announced that the official would see her. Her last glimpse as she went into the other room was of a craning head and a pair of sharp eyes peering after her from behind every desk.

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The inner office looked exactly the same as on the previous day with the holland blinds over the windows admitting a diffused light. The official was writing, he did not look up at once, and A studied him carefully as she came into the room. Yes, it was the same man who had come aboard the ship, there couldn't be any doubt about it, although he certainly looked different now in his smart office suit, and without his hat his face seemed younger and fuller. No, there couldn't be two people so alike, A was thinking, when the official suddenly pushed aside his papers and snapped out, Well, what do you want now?

Although she had expected to be met with coolness and possibly with censure, A was not prepared for such an uncompromising tone. She hardly knew how to reply. The other did not help her out at all, but confronted her with a cold, piercing gaze that was anything but encouraging. I've come to find out what I'm to do now, she said hesitantly.

It appears that you've taken matters into your own hands, the official said in the same barking voice.

I don't understand, faltered A.

The man let this pass in silence and glanced at his watch. A realized with horror that she had created a bad impression by not showing up earlier. Worse still, it must be the time when the official went out to lunch so that the interview was likely to end before anything had been settled.

But you must be able to give me some advice, she began

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hurriedly. Surely you can tell me what I'm to do to put things right so that I can sail on another ship.

There won't be another ship for a very long time, the official said in the detached, final tone in which a person refers to a matter already disposed of. He seemed to be on the point of dismissing A who stood in front of him with a dismayed face; but he changed his mind and went on: You can hardly expect another golden opportunity of that sort. I've never known anyone offered a better chance.

Do you mean that I ought to have stayed on the ship, then? she exclaimed, completely taken aback.

You had a chance in a million.

A stared at him dumbfounded, trying to read in his round, expressionless face the correct interpretation of the last remark which, so it seemed to her, could be taken in two quite different ways.

But it was you yourself who told me to go ashore at once, she said slowly, after a pause.

The official turned his head and gave her a sharp look. For a second she thought he was going to deny ever having been on the ship, and the treacherous doubt plagued her again: What if I was mistaken? But the other, instead of settling the question once and for all, left her as much in the dark as ever by saying, Didn't the captain tell you to stop on board?

A admitted that this was true. She was about to continue that she had obeyed what she naturally took for the higher authority, when the official looked at his watch again and

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got up, remarking in an indifferent voice, Haven't you ever been told that a captain is always master aboard his ship?

For heaven's sake don't send me away already, A implored him. You must give me some help. Or if you won't help me yourself at least tell me who I'm to go to.

In her desperation she began following the official about the room while he, hardly seeming to have heard her, was putting some papers into a brief-case and getting his hat and overcoat out of a cupboard. What am I to say to the home authorities? A asked despairingly.

That's up to you, the official said, struggling into his coat which seemed to be rather tight in the sleeves. He spoke in a casual, abstracted way as if he had lost interest in the whole affair and was already thinking about something else. We have no contact here with any other authorities, he added in the same bored tone. His attitude towards A had changed altogether and was now merely impersonal and offhand as though he were seeing her for the first time. Of course, you could try the other departments, he went on, rapidly slipping one button after another into the buttonholes down the front of his overcoat. But, frankly, I don't think it would be much good. In any case, there's nothing more I can do. But you're quite free to take whatever steps you like on your own account.

A says that if she had fully realized what lay behind those words she would have thrown up the sponge there and then. Yes, she once told me mournfully, I would have

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done better to have thrown myself into the sea then. And when I think what people in her position have to go through I'm almost inclined to agree with her. What sort of a life is it when all one's time is spent in running from one department to another, forced to entrust one's fate to callous, feather-brained underlings who know perfectly well that they are dealing with an under-privileged person and probably never even trouble to put one's carefully prepared statements before their superiors? What sort of a life is it to live month after month in a hired room, with one's luggage packed, in case one should be summoned away at a moment's notice? What sort of a life is it to be alternately buoyed up or cast down by contradictory rumours, all equally unreliable and ephemeral, or by an imaginary glance of encouragement or disapproval from some passing official? What sort of a life is it to ponder for hours over the construction of a single sentence in still another appeal, which, if wrongly worded, might prejudice the whole case against one? What sort of a life is it when one is continually impelled to write letter after letter, doomed either to remain unanswered, or to elicit a new bunch of complicated forms or an incomprehensible official rigmarole which one studies feverishly and vainly in search of enlightenment?

Just imagine what it's like to be always risking humiliation by trying to ingratiate oneself with this or that petty clerk or hanger-on who might let fall a crumb of information. Just imagine the loneliness (for of course it's impos-

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sible to make friends in these circumstances even if there were opportunities of doing so); the monotony (for one can't concentrate either on work or amusement); the strain (for one never dares to relax for a minute for fear of missing some vital pointer).

Yes, it's a hard and mysterious system under which we live, and we can't hope to understand it. Whether or not there really exist laws governing official procedure is immaterial since it is impossible to investigate these secret matters. Perhaps the most incomprehensible thing of all is that a well-meaning person like A is as liable to heavy penalties as the worst criminal. Although we don't know what originally brought A under official notice I can say from my own knowledge of her that it couldn't have been anything you or I would consider a serious offence. And her second offence, if that lay in leaving the ship, was surely not much more than an error committed with the best intentions. I'm not defending the fact that she joined in the drinking party; obviously, to keep a clear head should have been the first care of a person in her predicament; and most likely all her subsequent misfortunes stemmed from that lack of restraint. Yet even here one sees extenuating circumstances. To begin with, she was already excited and over-tired when she arrived on the boat; and she was in a totally strange environment besides, in circumstances that were very difficult and disturbing. It would not have been easy for her to avoid taking part in the captain's celebrations or to have refused the drinks

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that were offered to her without seeming unsociable or straitlaced. Yet for these actions she is condemned to do penance for many years; perhaps even for the whole of the rest of her life. For who knows whether, although she achieved her return long ago, the authorities will ever see fit to terminate her protracted sentence?

Benjo

IT'S TRUE that I've never talked much about the things that happened to me in the other country. When my friend used to ask me questions about my life over there I found it hard, impossible almost, to answer; and now I find it equally hard to explain why this was so. It wasn't, as he assumed, simply that I'd forgotten about it. I don't deny that my memory is bad. My recollection of that far-off time as a whole is incomplete and blurred, there are a great many gaps and inconsistencies in it, and the chronology is inexplicably confused. On the other hand, I can remember a number of disconnected episodes quite clearly; I could certainly have related them to him if I hadn't felt so reluctant to break the shell of privacy in which they were encased. For a long time it was as if a sort of tabu were laid on the whole subject of my experiences abroad. It was the greatest ef-

Benjo

fort to me to focus my attention on that period at all because, as soon as I started to concentrate, I used to be overcome by something I can only describe as a mental blackout. And this wasn't because the memory was unpleasant to dwell upon. Quite the reverse: the impression that always remained with me of those days was of a wonderfully tranquil and happy time. No, I can't really account at all for the inhibition that persistently kept me silent so long, nor for its gradual weakening. Now that no one questions me any more about these affairs I am able to contemplate them without interference. The curious thing is that now that no question-induced blackout obscures them, the memories themselves seem to be evaporating. The curtain which used to cover the picture has been removed; but now the colours of the paints are starting to fade. Every day the canvas becomes more indistinct, a ghostly landscape, with a few figures, such as Benjo's, appearing here and there, still touched with the bizarre gleam of their original brightness.

I hadn't been long in the country when I first made Benjo's acquaintance. By the way, I never discovered whether Benjo was his surname, or an abbreviation, or just a nickname: he was always referred to simply as Benjo. It was early in the morning when I first saw him. I know I hadn't been long in the old house I had bought, because the men who had been at work on the renovations had left only a few days before. The place was intended for a farmstead, but for some reason the land had been sold off

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separately while the building remained empty for several years. You couldn't have called it a good buy from the practical standpoint: the house was dilapidated and old-fashioned and inconvenient, and very isolated and inaccessible too; but the price was low and I wasn't deterred by the drawbacks, numerous as they were. The thing that really appealed to me about the property was its situation high up on a lonely hillside with a wonderful sweeping vista of chestnut forest and a distant view of the sea. There was a rough little hamlet of grey, primitive cottages about half a mile away, but it was hidden by a fold of the hills. All you could see from my windows was the wild garden where anemones and red tulips grew in between the stones, and then the great cascading fall of woods to the sea.

The early mornings there were often specially beautiful, and this particular morning I'm thinking of was one of the best. It was very still—the wind didn't usually rise till about ten o'clock—and the islands seemed to be floating light as cloud-castles just above the horizon. After all the dreadful anxiety I'd been through I felt that I could never absorb enough of the peace, the beauty, the solitude; and so I wasn't altogether pleased to see someone coming along the track that led to the garden gate. At first I thought it might be one of the workmen who had mislaid something, a screwdriver perhaps, or a scarf, and was coming back to see if he'd left it lying about anywhere. However, I soon saw that it wasn't a workman who was strolling

Benjo

towards me, but somebody I'd never set eyes on, a surprising figure in that out-of-the-way place, a big, tall, heavy man, smartly and rather eccentrically dressed in light trousers and a canary-coloured pullover and a white linen cap like a yachting cap with a long peak. I stood at the window wondering who could be visiting me at this early hour. It was really rather annoying; I hadn't even had breakfast yet and the kettle was just on the boil.

I had a vague idea that if the stranger saw no one about he might go away, and instead of showing myself I just stood where I was, watching him. His behaviour was as eccentric as his appearance, for instead of coming up to knock at the door as anyone else would have done, he began wandering about the garden with his hands in his pockets, looking at the house and surveying it from all sides with his head tilted and his eyes screwed up like an artist criticizing a sketch. After several minutes of this, having thoroughly scrutinized the house from every angle, he approached the door with the same rambling, indolent gait. By this time my curiosity was aroused and I at once let him in. He greeted me by name (but without introducing himself), took off his cap, dropped it on to a chair, shook my hand, and began to congratulate me warmly on the improvements I had made to the property. All this seemed very odd. I was certain I'd never met the man before and yet he spoke as if we were old friends. In my bewilderment I stared hard at him, trying to place his full, florid face which had a curious softness and shapelessness

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about it like a baby's face, or like an unfinished model in plasticine.

Benjo. How can I give the clearest picture of him? I think the word which best describes his whole personality is one which I've used already about his fashion of walking, the word 'indolent.' Yes, everything about him seemed heavy and lazy, like a great, sleepy, good-natured tame bear. Just like a bear, too, in spite of his friendliness, there was something a little bit sly and suspicious about him, although you couldn't say what it was. His face was so soft and plump, like a happy baby's; and yet the little eyes, the pink, incomplete-looking mouth, were not quite reliable. These impressions I received at the start although they didn't become crystallized until later on. At that first meeting I was impressed most by his friendly attitude which was really very engaging. And when the kettle boiled over in the kitchen and he urged me not to delay my breakfast, I invited him to share it with me.

While I was making the tea and putting the breakfast things on a tray my visitor remained in the living-room. Through the open door I could see him lounging about the room and looking at everything with his screwed-up eyes just as he had done outside the house. It rather irritated me to see him do this; but then, as soon as I came in with the tray, he began complimenting me on my good taste, admiring my books and the arrangement of the furniture, in such a simple, jolly way that I was placated at once.

The idea occurred to me while we were eating that he

Benjo

might have lived in the house himself at one time, or had some connection with the previous owners which would account for his interest, and I asked him if this were the case. Oh no, he replied, I've thought about living here often enough, but I didn't want to take on the job of doing up the place.

I wondered just what he meant by this. He didn't look as if he were short of money. His clothes, though far too ostentatious for my taste, were well made and of fine quality, the brilliant pullover was of softest wool embroidered on the pocket with an unknown coat-of-arms. No, I decided, it probably wasn't lack of funds but sheer slackness that made him fight shy of embarking on renovations.

The mysterious embroidery ornamenting his pocket stimulated my curiosity about him. Several times I was on the point of asking his name, but I was restrained by shyness and by my ignorance of the country's social conventions. In view of the friendly way he was treating me I felt it would appear a discourtesy on my part to inquire who he was. We sat there over our teacups for quite a while. My companion had a lazily humorous way of talking about local matters that was entertaining if not without a streak of malice. He seemed to have an intimate knowledge of everything that went on, and I asked him if he had lived in the district a long time. I come and go, you know, was his drawling answer to this; come and go. And then he ponderously heaved himself up from his chair and prepared to depart. Come and see me whenever you feel inclined,

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he said as he was leaving. Just ask for Benjo—anyone will show you the way. As he went off smiling to himself I realized that I still hadn't any idea why he had visited me: unless perhaps he had just looked in to inspect the place and see what I had done to it.

Outside the gate he passed the old woman who came from the village each day to clean up for me, and paused to say something to her which brought a wry grin to her rather sour old face. So Benjo has been to see you already, she remarked as she came in and began taking off the big black straw hat, shaped like a basket, that she wore tied under her chin with two shabby ribbons. At the time I thought she was referring to the early hour, but afterwards I wondered whether another significance lay at the back of her words. I would have liked to question her about the remarkable Benjo who was evidently well known to her (how could such a conspicuous figure fail to be well known in an isolated village?), but I don't approve of gossiping with servants and she herself had nothing more to say although several times during the morning I caught her glancing at me with rather a queer expression. I always found the inhabitants of that remote district very insular and reserved—a fact which emphasized by contrast Benjo's geniality.

One afternoon a few days later I decided to pay my return call on him, and stopped to ask my way at the combined post office and inn in the centre of the village. It was a depressing place, dark as a cave and full of some rank,

Benjo

unclassifiable smell, but in spite of its unprepossessingness there were always three or four yokels hanging about there; I suppose because they had nowhere else to meet. These idlers seemed to find something amusing in my request to be directed to Benjo's house. One fellow who had such a hairy face that he might have changed heads with an Ainu burst into loud laughter, exclaiming, *She asks us for Benjo's house! She asks!* But the proprietor came up and silenced him with what I thought unnecessary roughness, pushing him angrily to one side, and, accompanying me for a few steps, pointed out with his pipe the road I would have to follow. You can't miss it, he said. Just make for those black trees you can see there against the sky. I thanked him, and he nodded his head once or twice in the dour way they have in those parts, before he went back to the others who were watching from the dark mouth of the door.

It only took me a few minutes to walk to the group of firs which showed up conspicuously against the predominant bright green of the chestnut woods. There was no sign of any sort of a dwelling; only a narrow, crazy track that might have been made by rabbits, looping and faltering between the crowded tree-trunks. This trail soon led me to a small clearing in the middle of the plantation. But here there was nothing to be seen either, except what looked like an old weatherbeaten gipsy caravan derelict under the trees. I was just going to turn back to the road when, to my amazement, the upper part of Benjo himself

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suddenly emerged through the window of the caravan, like a very large snail protruding from a very small shell.

So you found your way here, he called out cheerfully. And how do you like my country residence? He waited for me to approach, laughing as if the whole thing were an excellent joke, and leaning out of the narrow window in which he had the appearance of being tightly wedged. Come up; you'll find it very snug, he went on. But as I put my foot on the lowest of the four steps that led to the door at the back of the caravan, he seemed to alter his mind, saying, Perhaps it's really a bit cramped for the two of us inside, and on such a fine afternoon we'd do better out of doors.

Next moment he opened the door and brought out two folding chairs which he passed to me down the steps. If you'll just take these I'll see if I can find some refreshments, he said. Through the little door I could only get a glimpse of the interior of the caravan littered with books and papers amongst which Benjo's enormous figure was rummaging. Then he came out with some glasses and bottles of beer and the door was banged shut.

I seem to have given you a surprise, he said while the chairs were set up on the slippery brown floor of pine needles. He kept laughing as he poured out the beer, and I could see he was very much tickled by my astonishment.

But is this where you really live? I asked in the stupid way that one falls into when one's thoroughly taken aback. I don't know what sort of a house I'd expected Benjo to

Benjo

have; probably some showy villa in keeping with his style of dress. I noticed that he was just as spick-and-span in his gaudy way as at our previous meeting, and I wondered how he managed to look so dandified when he lived like a gipsy. There didn't seem any room for his clothes or anywhere to keep them in the caravan. And what was the meaning of all those books and papers? Benjo was the last person I should have suspected of studious habits. Could he be conducting some kind of private business out here in the woods? I began to realize then what a dark horse the fellow was.

I come and go, he said, just as he'd said it before. Here today and gone tomorrow, you know. Then, as if he guessed my doubts and wanted to banish them, he became serious and went on in a very reasonable tone, Of course, it has its drawbacks, it's not luxurious, it's by no means all that I could wish. But on the other hand there are definite advantages in this style of living. It's cheap and healthy, and convenient for getting about, and I'm able to get through a lot more work than I would if I were living somewhere where people were continually dropping in on me and distracting my attention.

I didn't know what to think. There was certainly something queer and inexplicable about Benjo; and at the same time he was so naïve and so anxious to be friendly that it seemed unworthy and even absurd to distrust him. After all, he was more like a big, clumsy, harmless, friendly animal than a man, lolling back there in his seat with a

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drowsy, good-natured grin. Most likely there was some quite simple explanation of his odd idiosyncrasies.

I stopped with him until we had finished the beer, but without getting a second chance of looking inside the caravan. Feeling that I'd already been guilty of rudeness in displaying so openly my surprise at his living arrangements, I didn't like to ask any questions. Benjo himself did not refer again to his mysterious 'work'; nor did he again mention his domicile until, just as I was leaving, he remarked, Now you can see why I envy you your cosy quarters up there on the hill.

I've described this interview with Benjo in some detail because, in its way, it was typical of my whole association with him. I suppose 'association' is the right word to use about a relationship which always continued superficially cordial without ever remotely approaching intimacy and without ever losing (on my side) a faint element of uneasiness. In spite of my longing for solitude there were days when loneliness overcame me in the strange country and I was glad to see Benjo's massive form loafing along in some garish costume. At other times I would be irritated by him almost unbearably, or filled with a vague, amorphous suspicion that even bordered upon alarm. Living alone in a lonely place one's few human contacts assume disproportionate importance, and so Benjo occupied a larger place in my mind than was warranted by the actual time that we spent together. How often did we see one another? I have the impression that at some periods we

Benjo

met frequently, almost daily. At other times weeks would go by between our encounters. Quite often Benjo would leave the village, and for days on end his caravan would be missing from the clearing among the pines. When this happened, I believe that I experienced a lightening, a sense of relief, of which, however, I myself was hardly aware. Yet I was not displeased when, after a solitary spell, I heard that he had returned. It was almost invariably the old cleaning woman who first gave me the news. Benjo came back last night, she would announce while she was fetching a broom from the corner or starting to wash up the breakfast dishes. Or, Benjo will be with us again before sundown. I didn't ask her, though I often wanted to, how she obtained this information about his movements which she never failed to pass on in a portentous voice as if it had some special personal significance for me.

Looking back now, it seems to have been Benjo who visited me far more often than I visited him. In fact, I can't really be certain that I went again more than once or twice to the caravan or that I ever got another glimpse of its interior. Probably one of the reasons for this was that in order to get to the fir plantation one had to walk through the village, and I always avoided the place as much as I could. There was something indefinably depressing to me about the grey little houses and their uncompromising inhabitants. Benjo, on the contrary, was quite at home in the village where he spent a good deal of time drinking and gossiping at the inn, apparently on excellent terms

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with the habitués. From there it was an easy walk for him to my house, and he acquired the habit of strolling up the hill with a bottle of beer which we would divide between us. His behaviour towards me was always precisely the same. The same lazy, jolly, bantering manner; the same flippant, slightly malicious talk about this trifle or that; the same indolent way of slouching round, hands in pockets and head tilted to one side, staring at everything in sight. As time went on this trick of his got on my nerves more and more acutely. My irritation reached such a pitch that I could hardly restrain myself from bursting out in protest at his inquisitive attitude. Yet all the time I was bothered by the feeling that my annoyance was unjustifiable. Why should I resent a person taking a friendly interest in my activities? Everything I did seemed to interest Benjo, whether I was gardening or working indoors, painting a cupboard or putting up shelves or some such odd job in the way of making the place more comfortable. He would lounge near me for hours, not helping actively, but encouraging me with appreciation and sometimes with suggestions of his own, and all the while smiling with the sort of complacent expression that might be worn by a landlord who watches a good tenant improving his property.

When winter came on I expected to see less of him. The winters aren't very severe in that district, but the high winds and heavy rainstorms are quite enough to make a camper's life unattractive. Benjo, however, continued to come and go as usual, although he grumbled about his

Benjo

hardships whenever we met. I simply couldn't understand the man's conduct. His clothes were as expensive and ostentatious as ever, he seemed to have money to burn, for I heard stories of how he would turn up at the inn with his pockets stuffed full of notes and coins and stand treat to the whole village. Why on earth didn't he take himself off to some reasonable dwelling?

But he merely came to my house more frequently on the pretext that his own quarters were so miserable. He made himself very much at home, dropping in at all hours, and almost behaving as if he had some right to be there. I can't explain how it was exactly, but he began to adopt a sort of proprietorial attitude that was inexpressibly aggravating and also somehow disquieting. Once or twice when I came back from a walk I found that he had climbed in through a window and was sitting in front of the fire, and I'm certain that he'd been snooping about the place in my absence. Nothing seemed to have been moved, there was no proof that he'd touched anything; and yet I had the feeling that everything in the house had been closely examined. On another occasion, coming in quietly from the kitchen, I actually caught him peeping through my bedroom door which he had surreptitiously opened. Over and over again I'd tell myself I was a fool to suspect him of anything worse than childish curiosity; wasn't he just as simple and mannerless as a great boobyish boy? Or I would try to think of him as some foolish, unwieldy, well-meaning animal that had attached itself to me and hadn't the sense

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to realize that it wasn't unreservedly welcome. But all the same I was often uneasy now in his presence. I would feel a nervous antipathy towards him whenever I heard his heavy, dawdling steps that advanced so inexorably to my door.

One day I actually asked him point blank why he didn't buy or rent a decent home of his own. You can be sure I would have done that by now, he answered, if this place of yours hadn't spoilt me for anywhere else. It's a mistake moving into a house in a hurry. Much the best plan is to wait until you find somewhere that really suits you.

You'll have to wait a long time if you're wanting this house, I said, because I've got no intention of leaving.

That was the moment, when we both laughed as if at a joke, that my buried intuition of what was coming took its first step towards consciousness.

In all this time I've never really been able to make up my mind about Benjo. Did he really know that I should be summoned away so soon, so finally, and in such lamentable circumstances? Sometimes I still incline to the idea that he was just a simpleton who played his part accidentally, or, at the worst, was merely an unconscious tool. At other times the weight of evidence seems to cast him for a far more sinister role. His plentiful supply of ready cash, his sudden arrivals and equally abrupt disappearances, the inexplicable presence in his caravan of all those papers and books, even the detail of the embroidered crest he so frequently wore—all these things can be taken as pointers

Benjo

towards some official connection. But against this one is obliged to consider his characteristic laziness, which surely was not assumed and which was quite incompatible with authority; and his doglike quality of friendliness, which, though it could be tiresome enough, was genuinely disarming. I find it hard to believe that he was aware all the time of what was going to happen; but looking at the other side, I find it hard *not* to believe. However, it's unprofitable to puzzle one's head over these old questions, which now, in any case, no longer seem very important. What I feel now is nothing sharper than a perplexed and melancholy regret when I think that all the time it was for Benjo that I worked away at the house where I was not permitted to reside, and that perhaps today Benjo's unappreciative eyes are watching the islands I never visited float like castles on the remote horizon.

Now I Know Where My Place Is

VERY soon after I arrived in the southland I began hearing about the hotel. I don't mean that it was notorious in any way, it was never mentioned in the sensational press like some of the gambling places and so-called country clubs, but somehow or other its name always seemed to be cropping up. Like everybody else the friends with whom I was staying spent a good deal of time swimming and playing tennis, and while I was with them on the beach or perhaps walking off the courts after a game, I would hear someone near by casually mention that they had lunched at the hotel the previous day or that they were going to dance there that evening.

Curiously enough, it was never one of my own friends who made a remark about the hotel. In fact, in some obscure way which I don't attempt to explain, I got the im-

Now I Know Where My Place Is

pression that they deliberately refrained from referring to it in my presence, that they would actually have preferred me to remain unaware of the proximity of the place.

Of course, when I first heard it mentioned it meant nothing more to me than a name; it might just have been any southern hotel that was being discussed. But is that the exact truth? Looking back now from this distance of time it seems to me that even then, on that very first occasion when a girl in a green swimming suit, strolling along the beach and swinging a straw hat in her hand, spoke about the hotel to her companion as they passed; even then, in the level and unequivocal shore light, something stirred in me; the little hyacinth that blooms inside my heart quietly unfurled a new petal.

Was it really the same place that they were talking about? The place that for so many years lingered like a half-memory on the horizons of my consciousness? How often through the slow school terms, and afterwards when life conducted me into quite different situations, did the tenuous picture appear before me in that vague twilight between sleep and waking! How well my imagination was acquainted with the peculiar tower, rounded like the keep of an innocuous fairy-tale stronghold. How intimately I seemed to have experienced those balconies, those light-crowns in the great hall, those tropical gardens with their palms and flowering shrubs and tall beds of succulent cannas. All these things I had been accustomed to accept as part of the queer dream-plasma which flows along like

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a sub-life, contemporaneous with but completely independent of the main current of one's existence.

Did I ever really visit the hotel when I was a child? You may think it strange that I am in doubt about such a simple question. But life is so uncertain these days, everything that happens makes me more and more unsure of myself or of anything else, so that I really can't speak positively about events that took place so long ago. Practically each day one is confronted by some manifestation of precariousness, some proof of the unreliability of one's judgment and senses, so that it becomes impossible to make a definite statement about anything that one sees or hears. And if this is true of contemporary happenings how much truer it is of things belonging to the remote past which are in any case subject to distortion through the mere accumulation of hours. Why, I could cite endless examples of deceptive appearances, of perplexing, dubious and enigmatic events, inexplicable and disturbing discrepancies by which one is continuously surrounded and with which one is expected to cope, heaven knows how.

One seems to be living in a perpetual fog; and it's because of all this obscurity that I feel in doubt about the hotel. Perhaps I did sit, a small, serious and rather lonely figure with straight fair hair, under the electric brilliance of those enormous crowns illuminating the dining-hall. Perhaps I did occupy myself with mysterious and solitary pursuits, too grave to come into the category of games, among the speary cannas that towered over my head like

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a fabulous jungle growth bursting aloft into an orange and vermillion fire.

Or perhaps it was really only a picture of the hotel that I saw in an album of photographs at my old home. I remember so well the album bound in some very soft leather and embroidered in coloured beads with an Indian symbol. Is it really the soft roughness of the leather, not unlike velvet, that comes back to me along with the slim elegance of satinwood furniture and the stippled scentless rain of hydrangeas? Or is this, too, just an illusion and the blue-tinted photograph, round which constellations seem to be wheeling, no more than a shadow in an old dream?

I'm no nearer to knowing the answers to these questions than I was when I first saw in one of the southern shops a postcard with a picture of the hotel. The sight on the prosaic card of that curious rounded tower had a violent effect on me. I immediately made up my mind to visit the place and at the first opportunity I asked my friends to drive me there in their car. At first they hesitated, disconcerted, I could see, by my direct request, and displaying the same unaccountable resistance that I had previously noticed in regard to their attitude towards the hotel.

At last I persuaded them to do as I asked. It would have been difficult for them to refuse without actual rudeness for I was not to be shaken in any way from my determination.

An afternoon was decided upon for the expedition and we set out. I was excited and gay. My companions, as if

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making the best of a bad job, now that they were irrevocably committed to the undertaking, started off cheerfully enough. But as the drive continued their mood changed: long pauses punctuated the talk and it seemed to me that I could detect in their manner and in the looks which they exchanged traces of reluctance and even of anxiety. When I tried to discover the reason for their disquietude, asking them if they disliked the hotel, if it were too expensive, if the road to it were bad and so on, they returned evasive replies, forced themselves to talk carelessly for a while, but soon lapsed into silence.

Gradually I myself became infected by their uneasiness. The look of the landscape, too, through which we were travelling was not reassuring. For some time after leaving the town we had been driving across a flat, parched, yellowish plain, uninhabited apparently, and useless as pasturage, for the short lion-coloured grass was brittle and dry and no trees gave their shade. A range of low mountains sullenly barred the earth from the sky which was now invaded by strange upright clouds as by a battalion of ominous ghosts.

The way must have been longer than we anticipated as the day was fading into a thundery half-light when we reached the narrow peninsula at the end of which the hotel was situated. Here there was nothing on either side of the road but a few sand dunes patterned with coarse grass and beyond that the two vast expanses of calm and uncoloured water. We drove for what seemed a long time along this

Now I Know Where My Place Is

road before we reached the hotel. The monotonous lava-grey continuity of sky and sea exercised a hypnotic effect on the eye. All existence seemed to have dwindled to that one narrow, monotone and trance-like progression between languidly droning seas.

How can I describe the dramatic way in which the appearance of our destination broke into this tedious entrancement? Suddenly the evening mists cleared away, a pure, cool light, not sunshine, but the aftermath of the sunset glow, filled the western sky and touched the long backs of the waves with an ethereal radiance. A million luminous scales shimmered on the breast of the little harbour where yachts were moored. The hotel stood on higher ground overlooking the harbour. Many of its windows were already lighted, and as I gazed at the strange rounded bulk of the tower a flock of large birds in wedge formation flew very high above it towards the west.

I got out of the car and hurried up the steep incline in front of the building. My friends tried to detain me, calling out that they wanted to look at the harbour while some daylight still remained, but I paid no attention.

Perhaps it would have been better if I had waited for them and we had gone all together up to the hotel, the ramifications of which, not lofty, but rambling and spacious and decked out with creepers and balconies, reminded me of one of Genji's summer palaces.

But would it have made any difference after all? Would the presence of other people have deterred the small figure

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with straight fair hair who gravely approached me between beds of cannas that twilight had already deprived of their colours? And after all, why should I deny her? In this world of false friends and dangerous ambiguities where nothing is what it seems, isn't it best to accept whatever comes without resistance or inquiry, relying only upon the unassailable knowledge that in one's heart a hyacinth is secretly and inviolably blooming?

A Certain Experience

ONCE, a very long time ago, an extraordinary thing happened to me. A very long time ago, I've written; but mere words can't describe the enormous stretches of time which have intervened between that incident and the present day. When I look back on it it's like contemplating something in a former existence of which one has miraculously retained memory. If I were a believer in the transmigration of souls, I should really be inclined to think that it did take place in an earlier incarnation. It has that remote quality; and at the same time it continues to exercise an obscure and profound influence over me, even now.

There are times when I hardly remember the occurrence at all. For quite long periods the memory seems to withdraw itself, to go into retreat, as it were. When this hap-

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pens I become restless, and the great bird which always hovers above me swoops lower and fills my head with the stridence of his black wing-beats. At first, because the memory has really gone a little away, the cause of my uneasiness is not clear; I'll put it down to the oppressive weather, or perhaps to something I've eaten. But sooner or later a glimpse comes to me, as if, in the secret room where it had hidden itself, the memory lifted a corner of the curtain and peeped out of the window. Then at once I hurry off in pursuit. From that instant of realization my whole life becomes oriented towards the one objective of recapture. I feel like the owner of some beloved and valuable animal that has been stolen; or the parent of a kidnapped child. I can't rest until the precious memory is safely housed again in my consciousness.

What was this wonderful event? someone may ask sceptically. It certainly must have been something unique that happened all that time ago and is still so important that you can't bear to forget about it. Anybody can say that they've had a mystical experience without fear of contradiction because there's no way of proving the matter. But surely this is something more definite. Describe it to us. Tell us about it.

Well, the experience did have its objective aspect which can be described in quite simple language that anyone can understand. For instance, it can be stated plainly that I was condemned, that I was imprisoned, that I had given

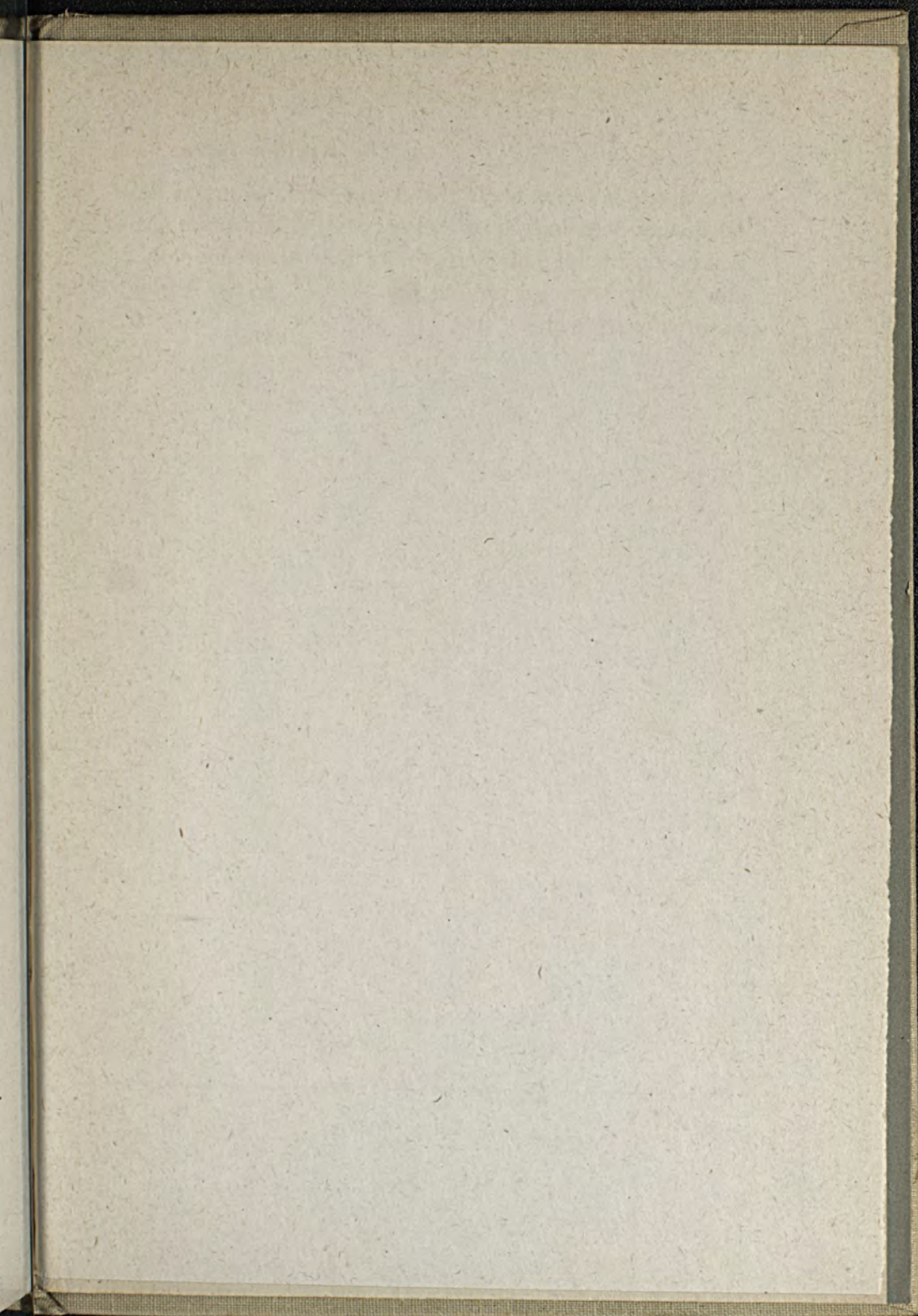
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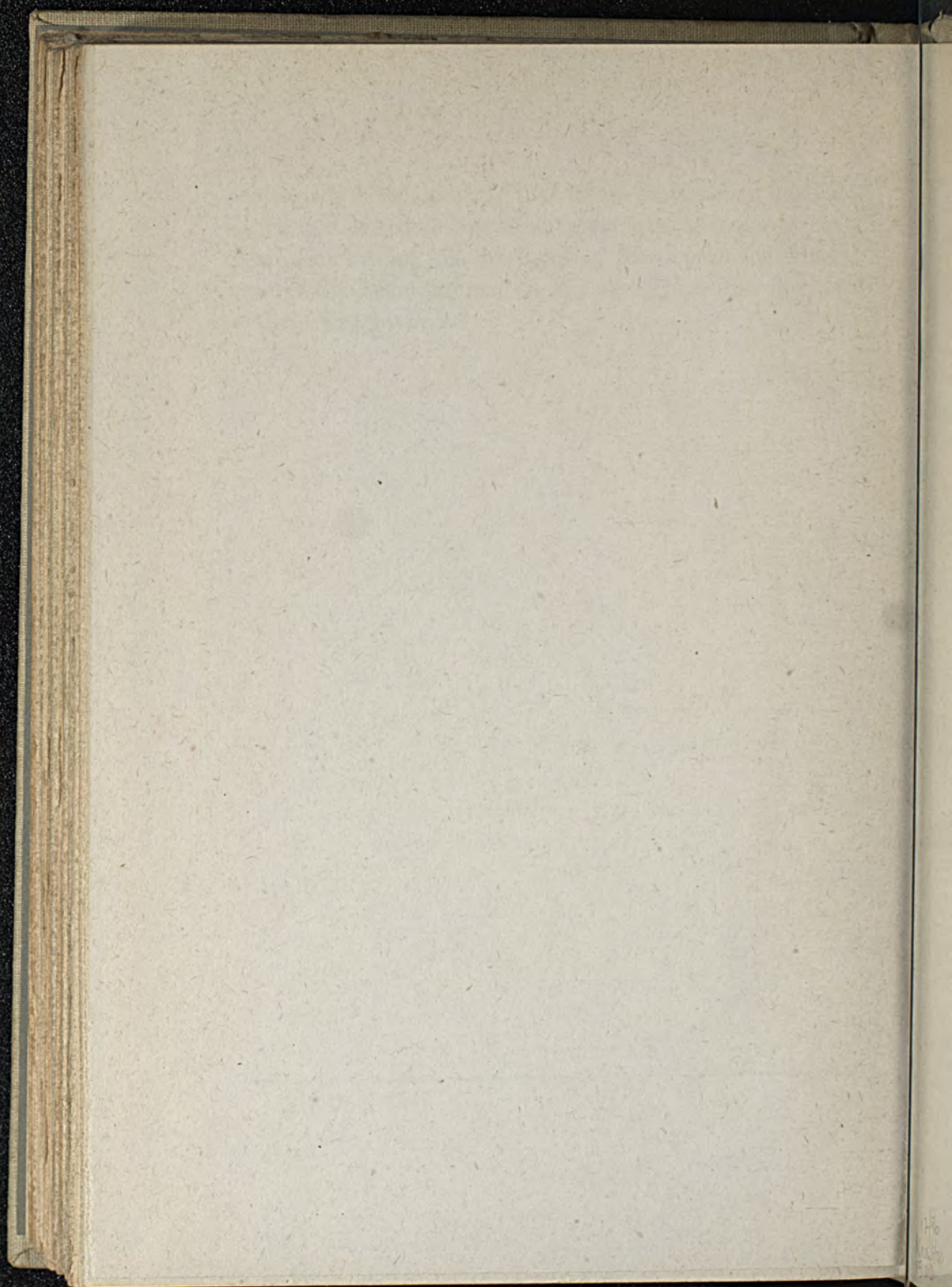
up hope, and that I was then delivered and set free without stipulations. I can describe the courtyard with its high spiked walls, where shuffling, indistinguishable gangs swept the leaves which the guards always re-scattered to be swept again. I can describe the peep-hole in the hookless door, the hard, unsleeping eye-bulb in its cage. I can describe the smells in corridors, the sounds ambiguously interpreted, the sights from which eyes were averted hastily. I can describe the hands under which I suffered; I can describe the visitor with the rolled umbrella who announced my release.

But all these descriptions, no matter how detailed, give only the bare shell of the experience, the true significance of which beats within them like a heart that can never die. The objective side of the matter does in fact die; or at least it can be said to grow old and desiccated and frail as a beetle's discarded carapace. But the mysterious and private heart never ceases to beat. Indestructible and immortal, the heart beats on, independent, and beating for me alone. It's the personal nature of the experience which is incommunicable and which gives it its supreme value. What does it matter if the outward manifestation withers and shrivels and ultimately even crumbles to dust as long as the priceless heart still survives? Perhaps I was mistaken in the gentleman who spoke with such smooth reassurance. Perhaps I was taken in by the umbrella encased slim as a wand in its black silk tube. To judge from what happened

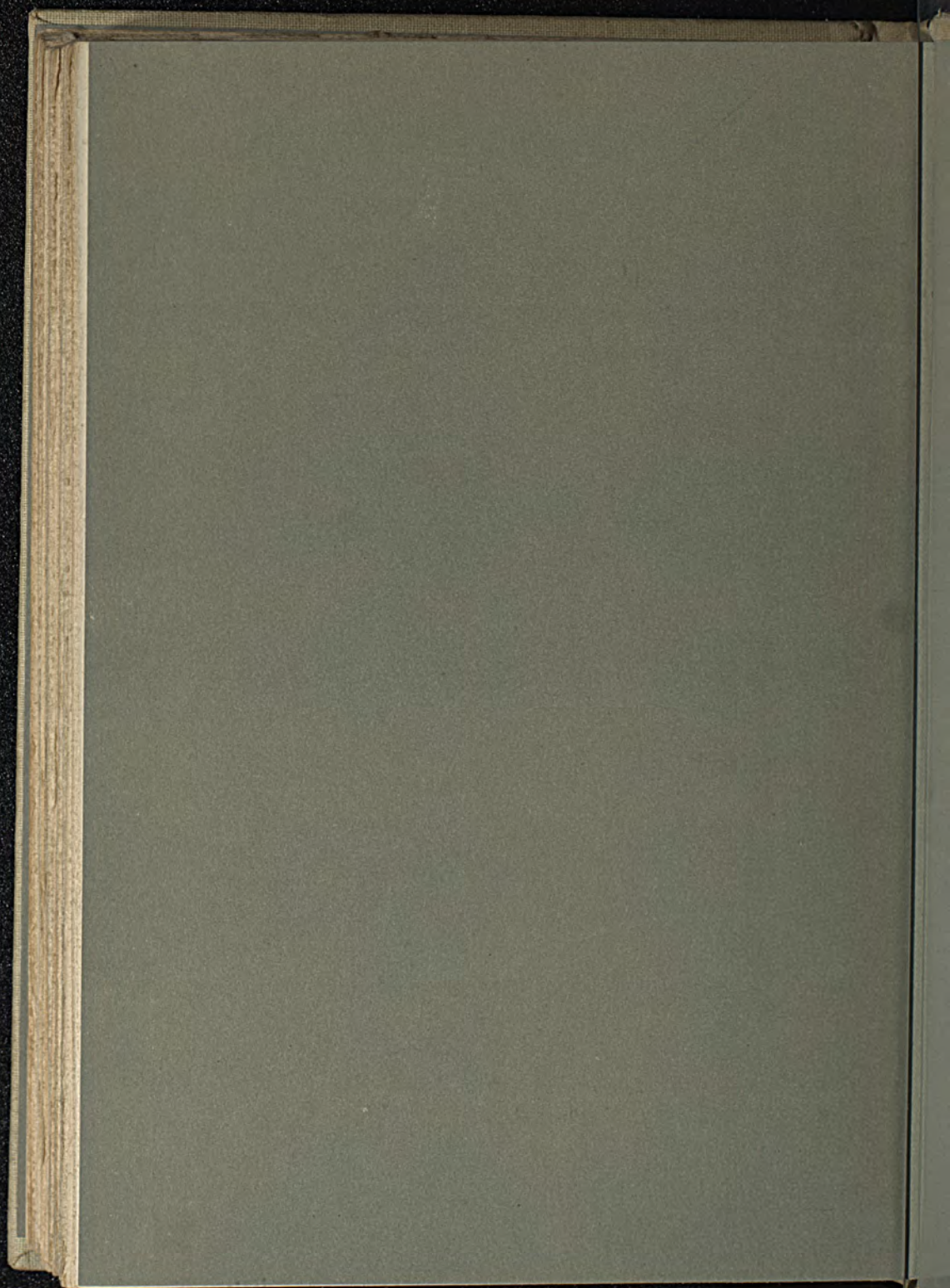
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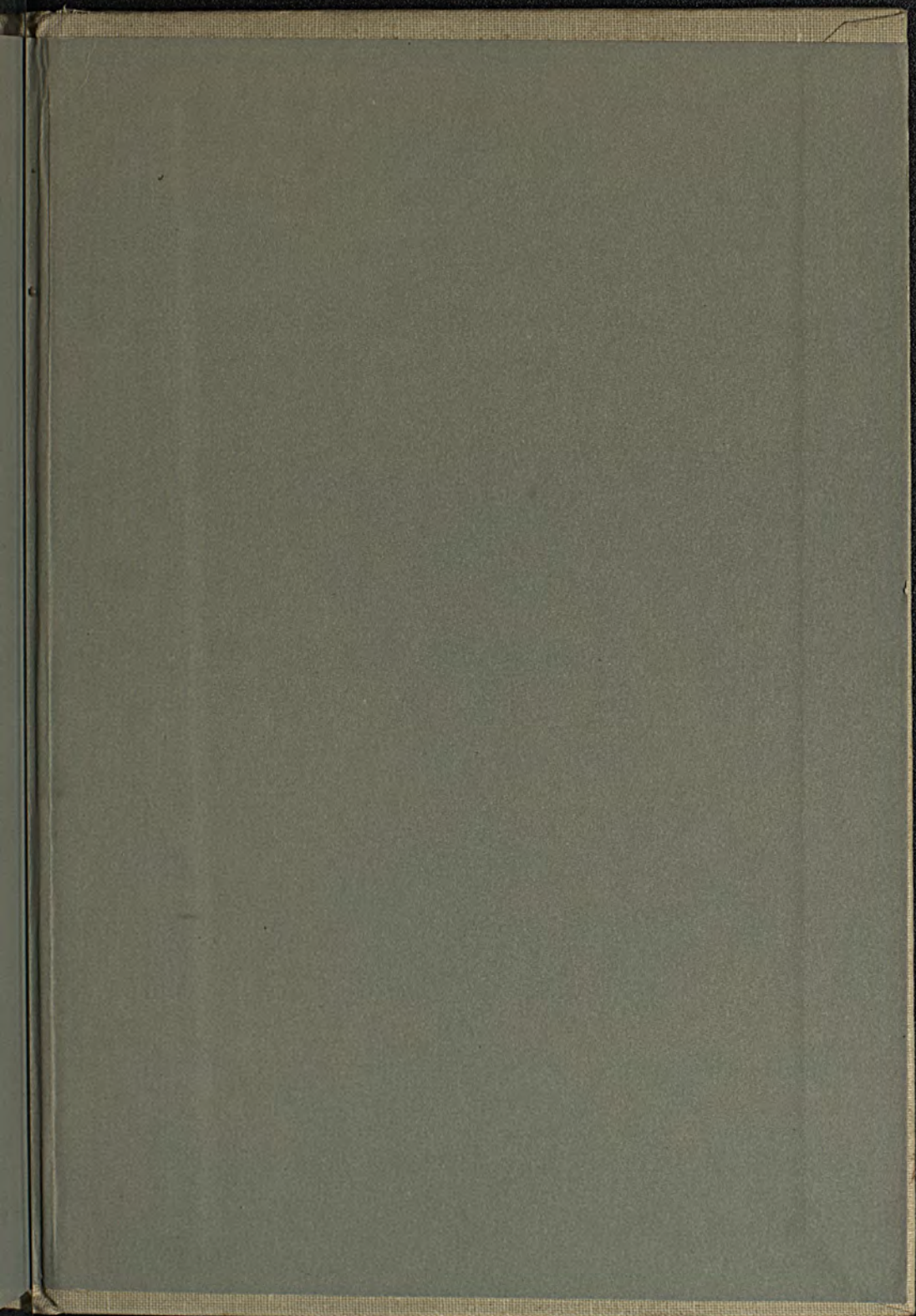
afterwards it seems likely that I was too trusting on that far-distant occasion. Nevertheless, painful and ruinous appearances cannot kill the heart of the experience which continually beats for me; no less strongly in the shadow of threatening wings.





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Anna Kavan