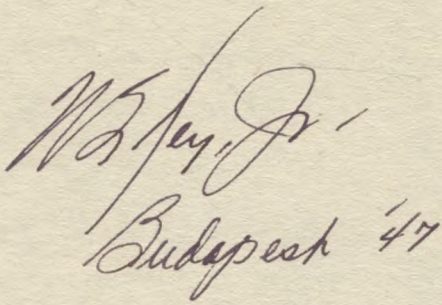

Rehearsal Under the Moon

Books by

ADAM DE HEGEDUS

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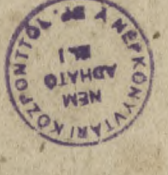
Don't Keep the Vanman Waiting

The State of the World

Rehearsal Under the Moon

Rehearsal under the Moon

Adam de Hegedus



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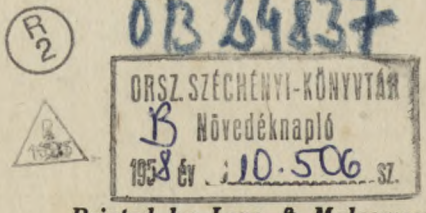

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"I've got the words, I've got the tune,
I've been rehearsing under the moon,
But I've got nobody to hear my song
So I'm humming to myself . . . "

Words by Magidson and Siegel; music by Fain.

FOR RONALD AND IDA

All characters in this Novel are entirely imaginary and have no connection with persons in real life.

REHEARSAL UNDER THE MOON

BOOK THE FIRST

CHAPTER THE FIRST

At nine-thirty the women rustled from the room. There was a shuffling of chairs: most of them moved from their original places towards the top of the table. It was then that one of the party came up to him with a smile.

"Paul Noley, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said. The stranger had a pale face and immediately gave the impression that he was younger than his looks.

"I thought it was you," the stranger said. "The moment I arrived. . . . Wanted to ask Caroline, but we came down to dinner at once. I can see you don't remember me." He took the chair and tipped his cigarette on the fruit plate.

"Something very familiar . . . Vienna?" He smiled.

"Cold," the stranger blinked. "Try again."

"Then it must have been London."

"Hot."

"When?" The game became exciting.

"Oh . . . twelve or thirteen years ago." The stranger laughed.

He looked into the stranger's eyes: they were small and grey and sharp and intense.

". . . You mean . . . At Spenser's?" Paul said suddenly

in a loud voice, his glance became searching, he dropped his lower lip slightly. "Hoover."

"Yes," the stranger said. He looked happy.

"What a memory you must have for faces," Paul said. "It's quite thirteen years ago . . . I'm twenty-six. I left when I was twelve and a half. He shook his head. "I wouldn't have recognised you. . . ."

"You haven't changed much," Hoover said, "except that you must be over six foot. But not your face. Not even the colour of your hair. . . . But when did you come back to London? You went to Austria, didn't you?"

"What a memory you have."

Hoover felt elated. He often noticed, at times with embarrassment, pain, confusion, that people never remembered him so clearly, so accurately, so tormentingly as he remembered them.

"I came back four years ago," Paul said; Hoover was listening now. "You may remember father died while I was at Spenser's and my mother took me back to Vienna. I was brought up out there. . . . Then I came back."

"Just like that?"

"Well, almost . . . it's a long story. . . ."

"And what are you doing now?"

"I'm working for a Vienna paper and for the *Examiner*."

Hoover fixed his eyes on a point above the mantelpiece, but his eyes saw neither the Regency dandy nor the negro page who was hanging the collar of the Garter around his master's neck. "Last Sunday, wasn't it?" His glance, less sharp now, was already on the candlestick in front of them, then it halted on the reflection of a silver dish on shining mahogany. "A review on French novels. . . ."

"Yes, that was me."

"But you have another name . . . Paul something Noley?" Again his glance was on Paul's hair. He was looking at it.

"Haller-Noley. . . . My stepfather adopted me, you see."

"Funny." He smiled now. "I was thinking of you while I was reading it. No reason, because I hadn't realised you were back, but that Haller, that put me off . . . I often

wondered what had become of you . . . You remember Steve . . . ? "

" Vaguely. He had gold wire over his front teeth. . . ."

" Yes. . . . He's on the stage now, you know. . . . And Miller is in the Navy."

" Scruffy Miller," Paul said. " And what are *you* doing ? "

" I'm supposed to be a barrister. . . . Have you known the Conduits long ? "

" I met Lady Conduit at the Austrian Legation."

" And she collared you for Caroline's dinner-party. I don't blame her. You are very decorative. But . . ." he whispered, " look at these *eligible* young men. . . . Just look at them."

" Well, they are twenty . . . they might improve."

" I doubt it. You began life good-looking and you've kept it up."

It was out, it was out ; Hoover was feeling relieved. Fast as lightning he assumed a didactic expression as if all he had said was : " Water freezes at zero."

His neighbour handed Paul a decanter. A little silver wineleaf trembled on its chain.

" Port ? " Paul asked.

" The dance tonight," Hoover said, as he turned round after passing the port, " is s'posed to be very amusing."

" Whose is it ? "

" Worcester's. He gives one every April for one of his nieces . . . and he asks all his bookies, trainers, jockeys and some quite amusing tarts. Look, I'll give you my telephone number. We must get together as soon as possible." He picked up a place card from the table. It said " Lady Deirdre McDonald." He wrote his telephone number on the back. " Ring me any day after six."

" Sure you don't want any more port ? " Conduit asked. A second later he rose.

" I wonder who all these people are," said the girl who had been sitting on Paul's left at dinner. She had a piping voice.

" They look gay," Paul said. He didn't like talking while he danced.

" The sort of people one would see at the Palais, in Hammersmith. We made up a party once and went there. It was fun. They dance far better than we do, these people, really . . . I s'pose they take dancing lessons. Make a business of it . . . I say, look at that man. . . . That teeny weeny one with the girl in green sequins. . . ."

" Isn't that Connoly, the jockey ? "

" Oh, yes . . . he rides Dick's horses. . . . Of course."

" D'you mind if we look at the pictures in the gallery ? " Paul's voice struggled against the applause. The bandleader tried to say something to the crowd, he smiled, they went on clapping, the bandleader raised a paper board above his head. It showed the number of the next dance.

" Are they very good ? " she said.

" S'posed to be."

Dancing was impossible ; there was hardly any room and none of the girls he had to ask could dance. But it was an excursion, this party, a landscape with figures, no longer new and exciting, but it brought back the time when such things were new and exciting and magical. Yes, let's face it, magical. He didn't mind her stupidity. She was an outsider, she didn't really belong ; possibly a poor relation. The music, the smell of flowers from the mirror frames, from the vases, from the fireplaces and the ease and the grace of the spring night entered his mind.

" Only one woman," she said. " Henrietta, first Duchess," she read the legend. " By Allan Ramsay."

They were all male Callenders, chronologically arranged and lit by striplights, as in a museum. The room had a museum smell too. A Kneller, two Romneys, Benjamin West, an unknown painter, Opie, Hayter, Beechey, Tennyson-Cole, another unknown painter, Sargent, the inevitable de Laszlo. . . .

" That's Dick Worcester by Simon Elwes," the girl said. " Awfully good."

" Mm," Paul said. Strange how Sargent didn't date. The band started playing again.

By the time they got back to the ballroom he saw that the girl he had booked was already dancing with a performing

seal dressed in tails. He went to the bar.

There was an empty seat in the corner under a pink lampshade. He put his drink on the table beside the chair. As he lit his cigarette he looked at the book matches. The cover was blue and white stripes, with a coronet. " Five strawberry leaves," he thought; and the initial " W." He smiled. He would no longer make mental notes of this and that and bits of conversation. He would no longer scribble furtively on the back of a dance programme that Nuneaton looked like " *George IV towards the end* " or that Lady Stockport had a " *workmanlike handsomeness*," or just words like this—" *Elephant hunter out India reminded by smell of mint. Inflammation of the middle ear, rubber boots. Wife, back in Hampshire, doesn't know.*"

It was no use fighting against the inevitable, that aristocracy; not only aristocracy: the rich, the smart, the elegant, the prominent was taboo in intelligent literature. It was a forbidden subject, that was all. Nothing was as forbidden as that. The wildest sexual aberrations got away with it, the most depressing sordidness: " inartistic sordidness," was quite fashionable; the " Great World " was taboo. It was " unreal." A duke was unreal, automatically unreal, no matter what else he was beside being a duke. A duke with cancer in his liver was " unreal," the emotional life of a peeress was " unreal," no matter how exciting that emotional life was, no matter how racy, how revealing her vocabulary. They were the literary untouchables. The roots of the matter were in the social system, of course. The social system is brutal, quite pathological and quite morbid but why all this hypocrisy, these stupid taboos? Why mustn't one talk about class differentiation, why must a writer pretend that one person is as well born as the other, if the poison is that he isn't. And why not say that the aristocracy had outlived its usefulness, that it ought to be liquidated, if that was the case? Why pretend that it didn't exist or why say it was " dull " and " unreal," when in actual fact it was neither. Why say that an upper class do was *always* a dull affair, that they *always* looked bored? Just look round at these people and at the others one saw and knew. Were they dull? Did they look bored? They were as cheerful, as noisy, as vulgar

as a bank holiday crowd by the seaside on a sunny day. They were having the time of their lives. That they were having the time of their lives at other people's expense, was another question altogether. Why not say that and why say that they were solemn and ritualistic and pompous and reserved when in actual fact it was the habitués of the half-a-crown hop who were solemn and ritualistic and pompous and reserved. At first blush, of course. Deeper down, if you got to know them better, you found that in spite of fears, humiliations, overcrowding and deficiencies of this and that, they were neither really solemn, nor pompous, nor reserved.

But there was something else. The life of the really poor, the sordidly poor was new in literature, and because it was new, and therefore interesting, the public put up with the " documentary approach," for the time being at least. With the dry catalogue of squalor, drunkenness, ignorance, unnecessary suffering, disease, dirt; the flat, two-dimensional description of the flooded lavatory in the Sheffield slum, the phonographic record of the conversation in the dole queue in Birmingham, the stereotyped swear words. *Of course* it was vital and important that the writer should talk about these, *of course* it was important that he should bring it home not only to the intellect, but to the whole mind. But did he? His approach was insufficient. He was faithful and honest certainly, but photography is not enough and the approach left his material almost completely without significance.

Paul finished his champagne. What the whole thing boiled down to, of course, was that his knowledge about the " Great World " was his literary vested interest, and, as likely as not, he would have to throw away his vested interest, all the material he had collected in the past four years. It was bloody. He knew his " Great World " well, he knew how rotten they were and how public spirited, how mean and how generous, and they interested him as human beings, interested him apart from the fact that he was using them as a means of escape ; as a drug and apart from the fact that he might have been sponging on them. It was bloody because he saw them, he watched them, with pencil in hand, at probably one of the

most critical periods of their existence : in the middle of a social revolution. And how exciting it was to watch them, because even if they didn't *know*, they felt intuitively that something was coming : revolution, counter-revolution, a new order. What will it be ? Communism ? Fascism ? Technocracy ? And one saw them, at least some of them, how skilfully they tried to play themselves into the new system as some of their feudal ancestors had smuggled themselves into the new capitalist order. But all this, of course, was " unreal " and dukes were " dull." . . .

He turned to the bar. The younger of the two barmen came up to him, with an astonishing eagerness. He was fair, very fair with the tragic and beautiful face of a tragic and beautiful woman. As Paul got his drink and turned away he suddenly saw a familiar face smiling at him by the wall. He smiled back. The other came over. He wore a red carnation in the buttonhole of his dinner jacket, the size of an orange. He gave Paul's hand a mighty grip.

" How are you, Mr. Jerviss ? " Paul said.

" I saw you dancing," Jerviss smiled. " But you couldn't see me. Packed isn't it ? How is the old paper ? "

" Doing its best. Are you fighting soon again ? "

" No fear. Next week I start training. You was dancing with a very pretty young lady. Tall, blonde, in black lace. Who's she ? "

" Oh, that's my dinner hostess. Lady Caroline Lamb."

" Fancy. I just saw a book with the same name. Lady Caroline Lamb. Is there a book about her ? "

" No, no. The girl you saw me with is the great-grand-niece of the one the book is about."

" Is it a good book . . .? "

" It's an interesting subject . . . if you like historical biographies. . . ."

" Positively. Historical biographies . . ." he repeated the words. The other day I bought a book on Rich . . . oh, what the devil . . .? Rich . . ." he began to search the Flaxman mouldings on the ceiling, " You know, he was a French cardinal, who was. . . . What the devil. It's a big, red book . . . with pictures . . . Rich. . . ."

" Richelieu."

" That's it." He snapped his fingers. " You *would* know it . . . 'Course. Rich Lioo. Cost me fifteen bob, but it was worth it. . . . Then I bought another. On Cromwell. That wasn't much good though."

" I didn't realise you were such a great reader. . . ."

" Well, it takes all sorts to make a world," Jerviss said.

" I mean," Paul added quickly, " because I very rarely meet people who read. Most people I meet write, or at least try to write and don't read. A poor outlook for pen-pushers like myself. . . ."

" Well. There's some comfort for you," he laughed. He added : " You see the boxer is the laziest individual going. In training we work like hell, but when we aren't in training we just laze round. Did you say you wrote books too ? I mean besides the paper ? "

" Well. I'm trying to write," Paul said.

" Fiction ? " Jerviss brought out the word with pride.

" Well, yes. Short stories mostly."

" I'd like to see some. Could you put down the names. . . ."

He produced a large gold pencil. They sat down at an empty table.

" Kind of you. Only about four have been published and they came out in rather out-of-the-way magazines. I don't think you could get them now. . . ."

" Could you lend me some . . . I'd send them back to you, I would."

" All right. I'll send some to you. . . . But don't blame me too much if you don't like them."

" Why, you are a clever chap. . . . It must be difficult writing though. . . . You know," he put both of his hands into his pockets, " I always wanted to write. Ever since I left school. . . ."

" And did you try ? "

" No fear. It wouldn't be any good."

" How do you know ? "

" Hope I'm not butting in." Paul looked up. He smiled. " No. Mr. Jerviss, this is Mr. Hoover."

" Pleased to meet you." Jerviss got up with speed.

" Enjoying yourself? " Jerviss asked Hoover.

" Yes. It's fun. This party contains, among others, the only six women who never failed Worcester and the only six men who never borrowed money from him. . . ."

" That's a good one," Jerviss said.

Later on Paul got up. The bar was emptying. He remembered that he had booked a dance with a girl called McDonald. He said good-bye to Jerviss. Hoover also rose.

" Don't forget to send me the stories. Here, I'd better give you my address," Jerviss said.

Jerviss' card was a large square of parchment with crimson, gothic letters. It read : *Les. Jerviss, England's light-heavy weight champ.*, and had his address and telephone number on it.

" Where did you meet him ? " Hoover asked, they were walking up the stairs.

" He gave me an interview, after his fight with Schulze."

They reached the top of the staircase. Paul saw his partner. He went up to her.

Hoover lingered about for a little, then he decided to cut his partner. He went to the bar. It was now completely empty, save for the young barman.

" I'll have a Scotch," Hoover said. He lowered his voice, ". . . What are you doing now ? "

" Working for Sprinters," the barman said. " Just come back."

" Liverpool ? "

" Yes. I had pneumonia. I was very ill. . . ."

" You're looking very well."

" D'you really think so ? " The barman turned back to see himself in the mirror.

" I do. . . . And you've got nothing on. . . ."

" Except my hair. . . ."

" Yes, but that's very good. It always was."

" Will you have another one ? " the barman asked.

" Not yet . . . Harry."

The barman pulled out a cigarette case and offered it. Hoover smiled as he recognised the case. The barman didn't smile. He gave Hoover a light.

" Who is he ? " the barman asked. His voice was quiet.

" His name is Noley. We were at school together."

" Never seen anybody so lovely," the barman said.

" I have," Hoover said. He tipped his cigarette, " But not often."

" Does he understand you, Reggie ? " the barman said.

" Does one ever really understand people ? Does one ever . . . I'll have another Scotch."

Paul took his partner back to the landing where her next victim was already waiting for her with fatigue and impatience. It was twenty past one, and he thought he would go home. He gave a parting glance to the crowded ballroom floating on the wings of jazz like an irregular merry-go-round, and to the groups of girls who were blocking the way to the main entrance with a sense of despair, shyness, and shame, waiting for partners who were late, or had forgotten about them, or had deliberately cut them. As he was trying to wade his way down the stairs, he felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned.

" Why, how are you Veronica ? " he said. " I keep meeting people tonight . . . I haven't seen for ages. . . . Are you dancing this ? "

" I don't think so. Matter of fact I was just thinking of going home."

Against the background of young debutantes, she looked very mature and a little striking. Paul thought that she was a little too dashing in her dark red velvet frock with its very low cut, her naked toes, and too much make-up. " I haven't seen you for a year," she said. " What have you been doing?"

" Not much. Just being busy most of the time. And you ? "

" I've had quite an exciting time," she said with little enthusiasm. " I'm working at Marjorie Fife's in Grosvenor Street. I am just leaving though. . . ."

" And how is the ' Ferrers Household ? ' " Paul said.

" Still going strong . . . in the backwaters of Brompton Road . . . do you remember ? "

Paul smiled. He remembered. He had met Veronica at a dinner party in Kensington some two years before, and for a time after that he enjoyed going to the Ferrers'. He was going through a troubled time then and he found the strange inertia of the "Ferrers Household" soothing. He absorbed the atmosphere of carefully polished Edwardian mahogany and of the various Empire souvenirs which seemed a little shabby in Brompton Road divorced from the native sunshine of their Mother India. He was amused by the contrast of Veronica, full-blooded, passionate, emotional, shy, and progressive, against the background of solidity, respectability and imperial glory, faded by the dim lights of Kensington, by a little anæmia and a limited income.

"You have quite neglected us," she said.

It was true. After a time the contrast and the "background" with its uniformly insipid conversations and the drawl of Mrs. Ferrers ("like a teacher of elocution") began to bore him. Like so many writers and journalists, his nervous system was conditioned to absorb and extract all the subject matter, all the essence from an atmosphere; then when the process was finished, he turned his eyes in search of yet another and fresher sensation.

"And what are you going to do now?" Paul said.

"I don't quite know. Sylvia is trying to get me a job in the Mercury Book Club. You know Sylvia. . . . She is bringing out a new book in the autumn . . . I say, did you ever finish that novel you were talking about a year ago?"

"I had no time. . . . Whose dinner party are you with?"

"Basil Tilstock's. . . . It wasn't a dinner party really. Just two of us. He knows the duke and he brought me here. . . . Matter of fact I have quite lost sight of him. . . ."

After the dance they sat on the stairs.

"Awful pity you didn't finish your novel," she said.

Paul noticed how large her mouth was, and how lovely her teeth. She looked just a tiny little bit common—he thought—too much vitality. It was attractive. Suddenly he remembered how thrilled he had felt, when he first met her, at the contrast of Veronica against her background. He was thrilled again.

" It's impossible to dance," he said when the band began to play again.

" Too crowded. D'you know *The Upper Ten?* "

" I've been there. More crowded than this. And very, very expensive. . . ."

" It's too early to go yet. What do you think? "

" I think it wouldn't be a bad idea to drop in on me. . . ." He added very quickly, " I've got some brandy at home. . . ."

" You live quite near me, don't you? "

" Any more stairs to climb? " she whispered.

" No. Here we are." He opened the door of a tiny room on the fourth floor. He switched the light on.

" Terrific amount of books," she said. She stood by the bookshelves. " You've got one by Isabel. . . ."

" A review copy. Have some brandy." He took the bottle from the bottom drawer of the writing bureau. " I've just had this given to me. Hold on a second, I'll get you a glass. . . ."

" No thank you, really. I've drunk enough tonight."

" Won't you have any? It's s'posed to be good brandy."

" No, thank you. But I'd like to have a cigarette."

" Here you are, do sit down. I'm sorry it's an awful wicker chair. It isn't mine."

" But the bureau is yours, isn't it? "

" Yes. . . . How d'you know? "

" I just guessed. One doesn't generally find them in . . . residential chambers." She put the last two words between inverted commas. He laughed. She pulled her finger along the side of the bureau. " It's good," she said.

" And the clock is yours too," she said. " Where does it come from? "

" It is Viennese. Belonged to somebody in my mother's family. It used to play when I was young. I must have it seen to."

" Very pretty." She got up to look at it.

" It's *Empire*," he said.

" So that's where you work? " she said and swept the room with her glance.

" You didn't believe I was a penpusher. . . ."

" I still don't. You don't look like a writer."

" What do I look like ? "

" Anything *but* a writer."

" Yes, but what ? "

" Something more active, out-of-doors. . . ."

" The man who sells vacuum cleaners . . .? "

" No ; wide, open spaces . . . The Shropshire Lad. . . ."

" Oh yes, the grass is green and on the grass lies Maurice and my knife is in his side. Rural and wholesome."

" Daddy likes Housman," she laughed. She finished her cigarette and opened her bag.

" You haven't got a mirror. Where d'you shave ? "

" In the . . . other room." He thought his voice sounded matter of fact. He felt he was trembling.

" Oh, yes. Let's see the rest of your place."

" What a soldierly-looking room," she said, looking round Paul's bedroom.

" You sound as if you had a great experience of soldier's bedrooms."

" Naughty."

" Yes," he said, " I can be." He went up to her and kissed her in the neck, under her hair. He put his hands on her shoulders. She put her hand on his. Her mouth tasted of smoke, alcohol and lipstick. It was also cold and soft, very soft and large. He drank in the scent of her hair. It was a strong scent and sweet with an old-fashioned sweetness. Slowly she opened her mouth. He felt her teeth, cold, strong, white teeth against his tongue and the velvet softness of the roof of her mouth.

He felt her body against his. The hard beauty of her shoulders, the strength of her waist. " God . . . almost as strong as I am." She withdrew her lips for a moment. Urgently he reached for them again.

" Darling," he whispered, " let's sit down."

" I have to go. It's very late. What time is it ? "

He bent to lift her up to lay her gently on the bed. Gently, very gently.

" No," she said.

" Yes," he said.

" No," she said.

He tried a little force. She pushed him away. He felt she was angry. She got up and turned away from him.

" Darling."

She said nothing.

" Darling," he put his hand round her waist. She pushed it away with force.

Excited, ashamed, alarmed he left the room, crossed the landing and went into " The Sentry Box." He lit a cigarette. His hands shook. What would she think ? More important : what would she say ? What a fool he was to get mixed up with her, and how bloody clumsy. The most shameful, humiliating thing a man could do. Had it been successful, it would have justified the means. Now it was all finished. . . .

How many times he had promised himself, oh, how many times, not to have anything to do with women. It was positively dangerous in his position, it involved responsibilities, time, money. It only made him feel silly, interfered with his work, his plans. . . .

But then, surely, all that monastic idea is mad. A healthy young man at twenty-six could not possibly live without it. It was against nature, and certainly against his temperament. One can't generalise. He would be more normal if his emotional life were better arranged. One should control one's emotions, but should never suppress them. The most natural thing. Only he did it clumsily and stupidly.

And besides. . . . The justification came swift as lightning —she was to be blamed too. Why did she go out of her way to look like that ? Why was she dressed up like a girl in Sackville Street ? No. There could be no question of " advantage " being taken by him. She wasn't so innocent as not to know what it meant if a young man asked her to his place at half-past two in the morning. Well, that was the end of it in any case. . . .

He heard the bedroom door open and her footsteps to cross the landing. It was she alone who was to be blamed, really. But he was stupid, stupid to a degree.

And when he saw the sulky expression on her face (he saw

it was more deliberate than genuine) he spoke suddenly, before she could say anything.

" I am very sorry, Veronica. I must apologise for my behaviour. . . ." He felt he had suddenly become very formal ; almost regarding her as an inferior.

" I forgive you this time," her voice sounded very quiet, " but next time . . ."

In the unfinished clumsiness of the phrase he felt something annoyingly feminine.

" I'm afraid there won't be a next time . . ." Paul said.

" What d'you mean. . . . Are you angry with me ? "

" Of course I'm not. Why should I be angry with a perfectly charming and lovely person ? " To hide his defeat and to shelter his hurt pride, he was carried away, as so often, by a sudden impulse to become theatrical. He spoke very quietly and slowly. " You see, we mustn't meet any more. I am clearly not your type. . . . And I am no good at resisting temptation . . . and still less when a person is quite so lovely as you. . . ."

" So you *are* angry with me ? "

" No, why should I be ? " He continued in the same slow, even theatrical style which like a thick smoke screen hid his genuine emotions. Now it became so thick that he himself could not see through it. " Why should I be angry ? It would be ridiculous. . . ."

" If you knew how ridiculous you are now. . . ."

" Thank you."

" Because I am sure you could be nice if you tried. . . ."

" Will you forgive me ? "

" I have already told you I forgive you. . . ."

" Thank you."

" I must get you a taxi . . ." he said.

But as he lay awake in his bed he felt miserable. It was all very well and heroic to stiffen into the attitude of a man fighting a " lonely battle " ; to have no friends, because he was " born " to live without friends. To laugh alone and to cry alone and to share his mind with nobody but his diary, with his diary which was more of a Book of Complaints than

a record of the development of his mind. To shield a childish and ridiculous sensitiveness with cynicism, various poses and permanent acting, to maintain a conventional lie that he was all right and doing well, to develop a harsh, utilitarian attitude, to guard himself against the silliness love might bring him into. To remain "cool" and "hard," to rely on "nobody but himself." And, at the same time, while he was trying to be uncompromising and aloof and cold, he was trying desperately to search for The Woman. The woman who would understand, who would become The Friend, who would share his problems. Only to find women who never understood and who merely shared his bed. And sometimes, like tonight, a shameful, bloody failure.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

BETWEEN two cups of tea Paul tore the wrapper off the *Morgenpost*, then with a routine movement, he opened the newspaper at pages six and seven. There it was, "*Ramsay Macdonald censures Germany*," *From Our London Correspondent, London, April 26.* It came out well, under a "banner" heading. A column and a half. He read it quickly and excitedly as always when he saw himself in print. There were three crosstitles. They looked well in print, but were quite irrelevant to the text.

On page seven, almost lost under an advertisement for Meinl's groceries, he saw the other story: *Stanley Spencer walks out of Royal Academy.* Oh, they had cut the end bit about Spencer's murals in Burghclere Church. He was already reading the Agency report on the preparations for the Silver Jubilee and the Mayor of Bermondsey's refusal to meet the King. Morgenthau says U.S. Treasury would buy silver . . . Admiral Standley says Britain has no naval air force. He turned back to the main foreign page. Secret German War Fund. . . . In Holland and U.S. to purchase war materials. . . . Schacht denies Paris allegation. . . . He had seen that two days ago. No new comment. He

would have to ask the Foreign Office about this. . . . Tailor's apprentice in Salzburg attempts suicide by swallowing two dozen pins. . . . Cardinal Innitzer indisposed. An empty paper.

It was only as he lay in his bath that he thought of the epilogue of the dance last night. It was the unpleasant bit that came first and stood out clearest, then Veronica asking, " You live near me, don't you ? " in the most casual, matter of fact fashion. That was brazen and lovely.

He would never see Veronica again. The whole thing was satisfactorily settled. She wasn't angry with him and wasn't likely to tell anybody about it. But that was the end, no matter how attractive she was. He knew the type.

True, if he had gone " carefully " about it, he might have brought it off. It was a pity he made a mess of it. It was a pity because she was really attractive and it was clear she would never insist on marrying him. She knew exactly how much he earned and what his prospects were. But there were other considerations. . . . He would have perhaps been willing to have an affair, but she would have wanted a lot of attention. She would have wanted to go to places which he could not afford. And even if she didn't, she would have wanted him to be with her all the time. She sould drag him to all sorts of uninteresting parties, neither smart, nor sordid, nor intellectual, neither copy, nor amusement. Just nothing. Not only that ; she wouldn't leave him time to write and she wouldn't let him do the job on which he depended for his livelihood.

And all this didn't matter—the water touched his hair at the back ; he raised his head a little—all this wouldn't matter if she'd really understand him. Now what was he talking about . . .? In that case he would at once be madly in love with her. Madly. But she wasn't even interested in literature. Not even that. That afternoon . . . a year ago, eighteen months ago, when he went to have tea with her and read her a chapter of *Outlook : unsettled*, the chapter in the middle, the really good bit when the woman spy is having a miscarriage while trying to find out details of German rearmaments . . . she just couldn't see that it was

a serious novel based on the material of the orthodox, commodity spy story. That the characters were absolutely life-like. She just couldn't see that. It may not have been a good novel, but it was the first time in literature that somebody had tried to write a serious, realistic novel about a woman spy ; about a woman who was alive, who turned to spying because her own life was dull and because her uncle was a naval commander and got her the job. For that matter it was an ill-paid job. This was very important. An ill-paid job. And she wasn't an attractive woman ; young, that was all. She had bad bone construction, round shoulders, overlapping front teeth. Her skin was her only asset. Then the " reality " of the world of spies, the rivalry between them for the better job, for more money. The colonel of the intelligence service. Nothing whatever romantic about him and nothing mysterious : an efficient bureaucrat, quite intelligent, quite young, but an inhuman specialist in armaments, just like an inhuman surgeon who sees his patients in terms of duodenal ulcers. Veronica couldn't get all this ; just couldn't grasp it. He stole a glance at her as he was reading the dialogue in the hospital, a really good bit (he had got the Hemingway trick right this time), but her face remained blank. " Very good English," she said. No, she was attractive, but she would never understand him. She looked intelligent. She *was* intelligent. Could be. And she had feeling too, but she was Stranded Gentry and painfully uneducated. Angrily he pulled the plug and the bathwater began to run out.

He rubbed himself with a tiny towel. He was feeling cold. He put on his pyjamas and dressing gown and left the bathroom.

He shaved and dressed quickly. He lighted a cigarette and picked up the pile of newspapers from the floor and took them into the " Sentry Box." He went through the headlines, the *Express* first, quickly turning page after page. Then he dropped the paper and opened *The Times*. Nothing in the news summary. One special article was on tar-cancer immunity, the other on the reverberations of Stresa. He began to read the first leader :

" As the ' Eastern Question ' in its older form was the problem of filling up the vacuum left by the recession of the Turkish tide, so in its latest developments it is the relation of the heirs of the Habsburgs to each other and to the Great Powers. Through this labyrinth of claims and resentments. . . ."

He put the paper down and reached for the *Manchester Guardian*, but he stopped half-way. He got up. Last night, of course . . . champagne at dinner and gin at the bar and lack of sleep. He belched joylessly. Breakfast this morning was worse than ever. Tepid, inky tea and, of course, *cooking* eggs. Again. It was foul for thirty shillings a week. No use staying in the same boarding house. Three years. " The oldest inhabitant." It was no use. It meant no privileges. He thought his attitude had made it quite clear to Mrs. Darvill when she sent up rotten eggs last month that he wouldn't put up with it in future. A week later it was the same old story again. Of course she saw that habit with him was too strong and that he wouldn't leave. He would have to put it to her one day, very firmly. " Competition is quite strong and thirty shillings a week is quite a sum of money . . . *to lose*, Mrs Darvill." Only one didn't want to be unpleasant.

He got up to drink a glass of water, in the bedroom. It was stale and tepid, but he drank it all. He would have to get the dope on the German story. Even if . . .

The bell on the landing punctured the silence of the room with three piercing shrieks. He hurried down the stairs at breakneck speed.

As to most people who live in comparative loneliness, an unexpected telephone call always gave Paul a thrill and years of experiencing that the call was more often than not of unimportant character, could never break down his excitement, his curiosity, his impulse to bolt down the stairs. It was usually only on reaching the second floor landing, quite near the telephone, that he could control this sudden impulse by a little cold reasoning, telling himself that the call might mean nothing, or could have been quite safely ignored.

" Hullo," said Paul, taking the receiver.

" I hope I didn't wake you up," said a voice ; a pleasant,

but completely unknown voice.

"Who is it?"

"Reggie Hoover."

"Oh. I didn't recognise your voice." His own was suddenly filled with warmth. "No . . . I've been up for quite a long time . . . I'd like to very much . . . No, I am doing nothing tonight . . . Quite sure . . . I'll have to go to the Foreign Office at five, but I don't expect they have anything to say. . . . It's really very kind of you . . . Berkeley Grill at eight . . . You sure it will be all right? . . . I mean, I don't in the least mind putting on a dinner jacket . . . Very well then . . . See you at eight. . . ."

It was only when he reached his own landing that it entered his mind that he had never given Hoover his telephone number. Or had he? He tried to recollect the scene in the dining-room. Hoover gave him his own number and suggested that he should ring Hoover up. Now he was not so certain. He had quite forgotten about Hoover. So many things had happened last night. It was so very good to have bumped into him all of a sudden. He was grown up now, like himself. It was interesting to see an old schoolmate as a finished product. Only he did not remember very well what Hoover was like at school. His present appearance gave no clue at all. He was rather thin, about an inch shorter than himself. His face was what some people call "refined," small, grey eyes with an intent gaze, a very intent gaze. . . . A thin nose. In five years' time he would be completely bald.

His voice was a better indication. Trying to think back he realised that it was the voice that finally made him remember Hoover. It was fairly high pitched . . . yes, yes, yes, practically the same voice as when he was a kid at school. It did not seem to have changed. That's why he remembered the voice, though usually he was better at remembering faces. The tone of the voice was the same, only the intonation was different.

He was very pleasant last night. Quite frankly he would not have recognised Hoover. He had never thought of him in the last thirteen or fourteen years. And as he tried hard to single him out from among the layers of his memory—

Hoover at Spenser's—he could remember nothing beyond that Hoover's people were rich, they had a large car and a big house in London.

It was half-past eleven. He felt revitalised. As he took his thick, red pencil to mark anything that might look promising in the papers, which he was now going through again, he reflected that if he found nothing, he would finish the article on unemployment which he had begun writing the day before yesterday, and post it.

He got out of the antiquated lift of the Foreign Office, and passing through the dark corridors lined with newspaper files, he reached the news department. On the black sofa under the window he saw a man from Reuter's, a Hungarian, and a third man he had never seen before. He learnt that the Foreign Secretary was not leaving for Geneva. A Swiss journalist joined them, read out a line or two from the evening paper and made a comment on American silver buying, merely to hear himself talk. Then the unknown man—in an Australian accent—told a story more obscene than witty about Mussolini which Paul had heard before. The atmosphere was heavy with the scarcity of news.

" Well, gentlemen," a tall young man came up to them and smiled with a cordiality that was somehow not his " size " ; a size larger or smaller would have done. " Who is first ? "

The Reuter's man got up, and left with the young spokesman. They disappeared behind a door at the end of the corridor.

Later when Veacock came, Paul asked him whether he knew a new line about the secret German Fund.

Veacock smiled. " You don't mean to tell me the story strikes you as new ? " Nervously he lighted a cigarette on the stub of another. " Or you are not reading the *Statesman ?* " he added with an indulgent smile. " It's an old story and it's uglier than it looks. I shouldn't be surprised if the sum is much more than a thousand million pounds. And it is deposited in many more countries than Switzerland, Holland, America. . . . We know jolly well that Germany is rearming, we don't need Churchill to tell us. . . . As

for your new line, I could give you a few addresses where you could find out more about it. A lot more. For example . . ." he said, his expression was impish, " A firm in France, it's got a nice period piece name. It's called *Taillefer et Rumpelmeyer*. Then there is . . . but I think I could give you a few addresses nearer home," he chuckled quietly, masochistically, cigarette ash falling on his dark waistcoat. " We are encouraging them. . . ."

" You mean a kind of remorse, in England and France, for Versailles."

" Not remorse . . . no, just free enterprise, *Laisser faire, laisser aller*."

" *Laisser passer*," Paul said.

" You don't believe it ? "

" I do," Paul said, " but what can one do ? "

Yes, what can one do ? he asked himself as he walked down the steep, lead-coated stairs of the Foreign Office. Shall I put it into my next short story ? he reflected with disgust and anger ; then, as people who would tug at a hollow, aching tooth, he went on. Shall I write a short story about international capitalism encouraging German rearmament when it happens . . . this very bloody afternoon . . . he flushed inwardly . . . this very afternoon, that *Forum* has just rejected a story about a widow who sold her husband's tombstone : a much more lyrical subject. Presumably because it did not contain enough opium, enough dope, it did not provide enough escape. It was no use getting like old Veacock ; so morbid and desperate about it. Of course, Veacock was a puritan, and an old man and when all was said and done a Marxist. He liked Veacock ; so very beautifully honest and such a fine journalist. But then Veacock was a politically-minded person. And he wasn't. No use getting upset about something that one couldn't alter, couldn't help. And perhaps he himself, like the readers of *Forum*, needed opium and escape.

He saw the Prime Minister getting into a car in front of Number Ten. The Prime Minister looked old and worn out.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

"AND now, Paul," Hoover said, pretending he didn't notice that Paul was admiring his room, "you must tell me more about yourself. . . ."

"I've been talking about nothing else," Paul put down his glass. It was a lovely, strong *Bisquit Dubocher*. "And it was your fault. You made me talk."

"I did. I want to hear all about you. . . . All about your literary activities."

"Very little to say. . . . Matter of fact you've cheered me up quite a lot tonight. I had a rejection slip this afternoon. . . ."

He suddenly felt he ought not to have said this. At the Berkeley, when the conversation came round to writing, he had decided it would be "dangerous" to tell Hoover about the rejection slip. He might sympathise, but all the same it would make a "bad impression" on him. It was bad policy to talk about his failures, even to people with whom his relations were fairly intimate. True, of course, in the last hour or so he had become more intimate with Hoover in thought, but now he wished he hadn't said it.

"Oh, my dear," Hoover said, and his voice at once was filled with tender and genuine sympathy. "And you are taking it as bravely as all that. Like a schoolboy seriously hurt at cricket. I know exactly how you must feel." He made an impatient movement with his hand. "The fact that every young author has gone through the same hell can't be much comfort for you. I know that." He looked at the carpet for a moment.

"Do you know Green-Radcliff on the *Forum?*"

"No," Paul said.

"I know him very well. He might be helpful."

"But I honestly don't want to bother you. . . ."

"No bother."

"You see, ever since *Harmony* went under, I haven't placed one single thing. I s'pose it's my own fault. I mean, I seem to refuse to write the stuff they want. This may be true, but

I don't think it is. It's something deeper, I'm afraid. . . And, of course . . . I am suffering from a disease."

" You don't look like it," Hoover smiled.

" But it's a disease all the same. I have impersonal and abstract interests, a creative urge and a very clearly specified ambition, or, if you like, a very clearly defined vanity. I have the ambition, the urge, the desire to write. That's the disease ; that is what is ' wrong ' with me. I know it can be suppressed and that I could somehow force myself to take up a profession which is not at all congenial to me. . . . I could do it. I am twenty-six and it may not be perhaps too late. But I feel it would be a very unwise thing. Because I also know that no matter what profession I'd take up, the disease would prove to be a millstone round my neck. It would prevent me from ' getting on,' no matter what I might do."

He helped himself to a cigarette, then went on :

" The trouble, of course is, that there is a very limited public for the things I write. . . . Please don't for a moment think this is because I'm a genius. I am not a genius and I am not a bit sorry for not being one. I s'pose every unsuccessful writer would tell you the same story : he cannot give what the public wants, because of the public. . . ."

" Well, of course," Hoover said. He almost shouted. " The fault definitely is with the public. . . . But," he raised his forefinger, " the public *cannot* be blamed for the fault. The public can't help it. If I may borrow your expression the public is also suffering from a ' disease ' . . . We live in what you call a ' competitive civilisation ' . . . struggle ; under duress, an almost permanent political, biological, economic insecurity. At least most people do. The result is for most people either a worried life or a desperately colourless, dull life. . . . For the ' better classes ' and the poorer classes, you see . . ." he dropped his hands after making a gesture. " Under such conditions the natural cravings of people, the appreciative faculties, are either killed or crippled. The majority of people, therefore, in literature . . . or I should say in all the arts . . . are only looking for one single thing. For a drug. They read in order to forget.

They want to forget, they want to drug themselves, to run away from their surroundings, their lives, their problems. Some read because they want to make up for the deficiency of their actual sexual experiences, but not so many as many people think. Some . . . very few, make an attempt to find in literature a key for the meaning of their lives, but the majority feel that life is too meaningless, and all that they want is to run away from it. . . . I know jolly well what I'm talking about. At least I ought to. I touch life on many points. And I know, and I think I understand, the mentality of the lower classes. I know them quite well. . . ."

"You mean as a barrister?"

"Yes. And in other ways. They are very interesting." He interrupted himself. "We shall talk about that some other time, but let me continue. . . . This craving for a drug, for escape, on the part of tens of thousands of people has created a demand. It has created a market. . . . It has created commercial literature. And you cannot supply that market, because you are too fine . . too good. . . ."

"Not at all," Paul broke in. His voice sounded almost angry. "For goodness' sake don't go away with the idea that I am too good, that I am above commercial literature. I have no illusions there. It isn't a question of pride. Because, I confess to you, that I have tried twice. Once in bitterness and the other time as a cold-blooded experiment. To 'write down.' They were failures. I've still got them. '*For reference.*' I didn't succeed for the very simple reason that it was not in me to write that sort of stuff. But I don't for a moment imagine I am a *better* man than commercial writers are; I am different, that's all. I always think that the popular author is fundamentally of the same mental atmosphere as his public. Fundamentally, mind you. Even if he does not come from exactly the same social class. That is why they succeed. You can't cheat there. You can't really 'write down' to the public. You can make concessions, yes I do too, but you cannot alter the fundamental quality of your mind, your interests, your sympathies, your sentiments, the fundamental rhythm of your style. . . . You can't cheat by trying to 'write down' or trying to 'write

up,' just as you can't make wine synthetically."

Paul shrugged his shoulders lightly. "If one's perfectly unscrupulous . . . and what is more important than lack of scruple . . . if one has the technical skill, one could, I s'pose, 'write down.' Yes. One could even get away with with it. One could even make money. But not much. One would never be entirely popular. One would never really succeed. There, you see. . . ."

"How attractive you are when you are bitter," Hoover thought, but he did not say it. "I can see the problem very clearly," he said, and remained silent for a moment, then he began to smile to himself. "Strange," he said. "It's a strange thing. . . ."

"Popularity?" Paul said.

"No. I was thinking. . . . I was very curious to see how you had developed . . . I've been thinking of you at times. Sometimes other recollections brought you back to me. Sometimes, it just happened. Quite unconsciously. You know what it's like. A kind of unconscious memory, a remembrance that unexpectedly attacks you. Without reason. It is perhaps hidden in the objects, in the visible things . . . I don't know. Proust didn't know, and he knew everything. . . . In any case," he said, his voice suddenly changed, "I often wondered what had become of you. . . ."

"D'you remember me at Spensers?" Paul said.

"Quite well. If I shut my eyes I see you before me. . . ."

"I must have been awful. . . ."

"The opposite. You were a singularly good-looking little boy. Or rather a big boy. You were very tall for your age and quite muscular. . . . And really beautiful. You know when we English make up our minds to be beautiful we succeed. You lived up fully to the picture postcard beauty. Wavy fair hair, regular features and a perfect skin. . . . And how coldly aloof. You never seemed to laugh and you never mixed with anyone. Except your friend Michael. He was very attractive too, but I didn't like him. He seemed to monopolise you."

"D'you remember any of the others . . .?"

"One or two," Hoover noticed for the second time tonight

that Paul was reluctant to talk about his childhood. For a moment he felt hopeful. " But not quite as well as I remember you . . . and you have changed very little. Anybody could recognise you from an old photograph. . . ."

Some time later a church bell sounded in the distance.

Paul pulled out his watch. " Half-past one. I've kept you up." He rose. " I don't quite know what to say, Reggie." He smiled slightly. " If I were a conventional person I would say it was a very great pleasure for me to see you. . . . Well," he tossed his head the way he used to at school, " it was."

Hoover took both of his hands : " I'm also very unconventional." He looked at the carpet. " At least when it comes to things that really matter. One day, I shall tell you exactly what I felt tonight. At least, I shall try. . . ."

" And I must see your stories," he said to Paul's back in the open doorway. " Send me the ones you like best. When could I have them ? "

" I shall send them tomorrow."

Hoover walked in to the sitting-room and lit another cigarette, slowly he walked up and down the room. The room was getting cool. He tipped his cigarette into an ashtray on the mantelpiece, and he looked at the grey ash against the green jade. As he raised his head he met his glance in the mirror. Instinctively, he turned his face into " the angle." Forty seconds later he raised his eyebrows a little, then with his forefingers smoothed the skin under his eyes. He sighed. Tilting his head downwards, he looked at his hair. With fingers outstretched he gently brushed it over his forehead.

" Another five years," he thought. But this time the thought did not make him feel bitter.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

" How did you like Green-Radcliff ? " Hoover asked.

" He's quite a pleasant individual," Paul said after a little

pause and Hoover at once knew that there was something wrong with the interview he had arranged for Paul.

" He had read all the three stories you sent him and he said he liked them. Accent on he. The minute he began to talk about them, I knew that the battle was lost. I had a good mind to say : ' Very good of you and now tell me why you're turning them down ? ' Only I didn't say it. So he went on praising me. I felt I was near vomiting. Then, just when I thought he would, he said he was sorry, very sorry and he dramatised it. He made a face like this. . . . Then he must have noticed that he was making me feel sick. He became quite a sensible person. D'you know what he said ? Now, listen carefully, Reggie, it's important. He said the fault with my stories was that they had all those features with which only a well-established author, a big name, can get away. He said my plots were original and my characters marvellously unpleasant. He said all this wouldn't really matter even for a beginner. There were other things. Well, item two in his charge sheet was my lack of respect for the social structure and my ' *merciless exposure of collective stupidity.*' He said it was done amusingly, because he had a few good laughs, but he ' *feared* ' that a beginner couldn't get away with it. Then, he held my technique against me. Colloquial style, the fact that I use as little comment as possible, that I try to create atmosphere by the things I leave out, instead of including bits of a gardening catalogue or a furniture dealer's price list. Then he said it was difficult for the ordinary reader to follow my dialogues because I omitted most of the ' dramatic instructions.' Then, he said I ought to have said ' a fortnight passed ' or ' it was two years later,' instead of trying to convey the passage of time by indirect means. Anyhow, the end of it was that only a Big Name could get away with these faults and he suggested in as many words that I should try to write less *ambitious* stories. That was all. No, it wasn't. He said *Forum would always be glad to consider anything I'd care to submit.*"

Hoover remained silent for a moment. " I honestly don't know what to say," he said. " You remember, it was late at night when I rang you up to tell you what I felt about

your stories. I thought they were extremely good. . . . I honestly don't know what to say. I'm frightfully sorry. . . ."

"But Reggie," Paul said, "you really don't need to say that. . . . It was very kind of you to do what you did. I'm grateful to you, because without your introduction I couldn't possibly have heard the truth. I would have gone on getting rejection slips, just as in the past . . . I would have never heard the truth. . . ."

"The truth?"

"Yes. Green-Radcliff, apart from routine false pity, was quite right. He isn't responsible. Nor is the editor. I ought to have known that long ago. Radcliff is quite efficient, intelligent, quite well read and possibly well paid. But he's an underling and he has little more to say in literary matters than the office boy. He *is* an office boy, and I don't say this because I'm angry. He's a well paid office boy in a prosperous commercial concern. He selects a certain number of short stories which come up to the *Forum* pattern and rejects the rest. It's big business. The new note. Yes, quite new," Paul repeated as if Hoover needed convincing. "When we were kids . . . ten or fifteen years ago, there were at least fifteen literary periodicals in London. They all belonged to different people. The men who edited them paid little, but they knew about art and talent and when they recognised it, or when they thought they did, they didn't mind giving encouragement. All that has gone now. The magazines these days belong to big combines just like cough-syrups, laxatives and hair-oil. They have a central policy: money making, and money is in the commodity story and in Big Names. The beginner, the nameless, should write commodities or go on starving. . . ."

"Which, of course, is madness even from the financial point of view, killing young talent . . ." Hoover said.

"No, it isn't," Paul shook his head almost angrily. "Don't be sentimental. It isn't madness. The man may be a criminal, but he isn't mad. Because if you try to look at it with a cool head you will see that *all* young talent wouldn't be killed off. Some would, yes. Others would come to their senses and prostitute themselves. If they could, that is.

It isn't as easy as all that to prostitute yourself. Good intention isn't enough. Prostitution needs competence and a detachment of spirit. Then you mustn't forget the young writer who doesn't have to earn his living. Some would starve rather than give it up and a few of these would die, but the fit would survive. The biologically fit, I mean. I didn't know how but they would. Perhaps the spirit would help them to carry on. . . . The ' divine spark,' you know. . . ."

(His hair. The unnecessary luxury of it. Those brave metallic waves of green and gold. Quite like Stanley's hair, but God, how could one think of Stanley. How could one. Hoover looked away.)

". . . If only a statistician could show the impossible, the quantity of art lost to us through unnecessary hardships and suffering imposed on artists . . . and scientists too, because I think some scientists are in the same boat . . ." Paul shrugged a shoulder, " well, this is dinner table speculation for ' spirited ' people." He got up and pulled out the bottom drawer of the writing bureau. " Have some brandy. Nothing quite as good as yours, but still . . ."

(No, it wasn't " perversity " that he found Paul most desirable when he was angry. Certainly not. Strong emotions brought out Paul's masculinity. There were any number of people, who became feminine when they lost their temper, but Paul suddenly became a man, a male. You could suddenly feel his strength was a man's strength.)

" We shall have to try another magazine," Hoover said. He was feeling hopeful. He was feeling strong.

" I don't know whether it's worth while," Paul said. " I'm not getting despondent, but I feel it would be the same thing all over again. There are four magazines that could publish me. I have tried them all."

" Have you ever thought of *Fresh Fields*? It's all young writers and some of them are very good. It pays badly, of course."

" That wouldn't matter. It's quite a good magazine, but they are obsessed with politics. They think I'm a bourgeois writer, mostly because I think documentary writing is important but artless. I saw Gerald Gompertz. He spent

a whole hour and a half lecturing me. He *recognised my talent*, oh yes, but he didn't like my writing. He said perhaps I couldn't help the way I wrote because I was a Romantic Individualist. I asked him whether he wanted me to write party propaganda tracts in the form of short stories. He said no and quoted Lenin, saying that an artist was wasting his time with propaganda. But he said I ought to have more social consciousness. He implied all the time that I was not so much *bourgeois* as frivolous . . ."

" And what did you say ? "

" I waited and waited till I thought he finished. He took a long time over it ; he quoted Marx, Lenin, Bucharin, Sorel, Tolstoy, Engels, Babeuf, Trotzky, and Adam Lindsay Gordon. He thought I must have been beaten down. Well, I was, but I still had enough strength left to say that my belief as a writer might not be quite as frivolous as all that because the stuff I tried to write, might perform a ' useful function ' after all. I said that the serious artist had the same function as the scientist, except that the scientist was bringing things home exclusively to the intellect. I was trying to bring it home to the whole mind, or at least to the emotional mind. In doing this, I could not start out from *a priori* conceptions like Catholicism, Socialism, Nationalism. I had to work in my own way. I told him all that. I felt awful, of course, because it's a miserable thing for a writer to be forced to ' explain ' himself. The same as when you have to explain a joke." Paul stamped his cigarette out. When he looked up he saw Hoover was smiling.

" You look a little tired," Hoover said. " I wanted to say this before, what about going away for the week-end ? Could you come to Paris with me ? Leave on Friday and come back on Monday. *Air France*, or K.L.M."

" But that would cost a lot of money . . ."

" That's all right. It's my party. You know, 'social consciousness.' "

Paul laughed. " Very kind of you, Reggie, but I couldn't do it. They are sure to call me Friday night from Vienna and I'm very behindhand with my cuttings."

" What cuttings ? "

" For my files. That bottom row behind you. Interesting articles that I may want for reference later. I do that every Saturday."

" You are a lovely person, Paul," Hoover said.

Paul smiled. Pity Hoover drank so much.

It was past midnight.

" I must go," Hoover said, " you must get up early."

" Fairly. Shall I see you home ? "

" I'd love you to."

" I must get your coat and hat."

" May I come in ? " Hoover said, following Paul to the bedroom.

" Do."

Hoover entered. Instinctively, searchingly, hopefully he looked round the room for a split second ; he looked at Paul's dressing table : a comb, a cheap hairbrush, a sixpenny nailfile, Nothing, nothing. Not that one expected to find anything hopeful, but still.

" Is that your mother ? " Hoover said.

" Yes."

She was lovely. Just as he thought the week before. He would have a lovely mother.

He took Paul's arm as they walked down Queen's Gate. It was a chilly night.

" Don't you feel the cold. Like this, I mean ? "

" No." The " o " rose as he said it.

" You must have a haircut every week . . ."

" I ought to, but I don't."

" When shall I see you ? "

" Any time you like."

" Let's go to a play tomorrow."

" Yes, but let me take you."

" Oh, no." They arrived at Hoover's house. " Not till you make a lot of money."

" You will have to wait a long time then."

" All right, Mister Obstinate," Hoover forced the words through his lips. " I'll give you a ring tomorrow. Sure you don't want to come in ? Well, good night."

" Good night."

No, it wasn't that he was " too careful," he had every reason to be careful. And it was a good thing he was not feeling hopeful. There was nothing to encourage him. Nothing whatsoever.

For the tenth time, for the twentieth, he went through his tiny inventory of hope. There was something in Paul's eyes, or rather in the way he looked, not always : sometimes. In his being a writer, his sensitiveness, his intelligence, his imagination. The roots of these are always mysterious and sometimes suspect. They must come from somewhere and there are few places they could come from. Paul had good taste. Instinctive good taste. In an English boy that would be encouraging, but Paul was half-Austrian, and Central Europeans, even desperately normal ones, often had good taste. That his father had died of asthma was a different proposition. He was very excited when Paul told him about that. Asthma in the family is always a little suspicious. Something about asthma ! And something about the other allergic diseases : hay-fever, eczema, spring rash.

This was all. And a good deal of wishful thinking probably. He was cool and detached now, really, and yet he had to say he had never come across anything like Paul. Never even dreamed about anything like this. Matter of fact he *had* dreamed about Paul, yes. He used to ; years ago, stubbornly and persistently had Paul's memory come back to him, time after time : Paul at Spenser's. Perhaps because he felt that there was, in retrospect, something very encouraging about Paul, aged thirteen. More encouraging than about Steve ; he used to look quite dull at school. Just look at Steve now, at twenty-seven. The last time he had been thinking about Paul was when he was writing the essay on Justice Holmes for *Jurisprudence* . . . " *The Fourteenth Amendment does not enact Herbert Spencer's social ethics* . . . *Our system of morality is a body of imperfect social generalisations expressed in terms of emotion.*" These lines came into " *Noley versus State of New York.*" That was it. But that Noley was a Wall Street banker. As he had read the name he had suddenly thought that Paul was now twenty-three, like himself, and probably quite dull and uninteresting. That was three

years ago and was the last time he had thought about Paul until he had seen him again, suddenly, dramatically, at Caroline's dinner-party, a fortnight since. Three years ago. He was then already becoming resigned to the fact that all he could ever hope for was temporary satisfaction for which, at times, he would have to pay. Money or something else. Not that this mattered . . . He would be violently attracted for a while by some physical feature ; always that or nearly always : by coarseness or tenderness ; but how little remained afterwards, how little emotional residue, how painfully little.

With Paul it would be different, he felt sure ; entirely different. Paul had the makings of a great writer, there was no doubt about that ; he had the beautiful sensitiveness of intellectuals and none of their physical features and mannerisms. In fact his good looks were quite coarse, he looked like a young stevedore, a soldier, a farm labourer, a naval rating. Completely overplus good looks. Overplus and unnecessary. Unnecessarily large hands for anybody except a riveter. An unnecessarily large quantity of hair : that green and gold metallic luxuriance all over his skull . . .

. . . With Paul it would be different. There could be permanence. Permanence. It was absolute nonsense that he was fickle, (because that was his reputation among the others ; he knew that). That he was forever searching for new faces, fresh adventures, fresh sensations, that he was a hedonist. That he got easily bored. God alone knew he was none of these. All through his past, ever since he was a child, when he had first discovered, bewildered, shameful and proud, that he was not the same as the others, all through the past : for ten years or so, he had been looking, feverishly, desperately for someone, for one person whom he could love passionately and tenderly. For someone, so that the torment could come to an end, the feverish and pitiful search, once, twice, three times a week, the danger, the humiliations, the permanent unrest that allowed him no peace to devote himself to his studies, to his career . . .

He walked up to his bedroom and as he undressed he began to think, as so often before, that conditions must be similar in what he in his thoughts called the " other world."

He knew so little of it, he didn't even pretend he knew it at all. Would it be the same in the " other world " ? There must be sensitive, possibly neurotic young men who were searching, nervously, hopelessly, desperately in exactly the same way as he did, except that in their case it was for a woman. It must be the same torment, the same unhappiness, the same frustration. Yes, but there was a better chance for permanence and there was no shame about it, no ridicule, no social ostracism, no danger and not that dreadful, agonising insufficiency of partners. Two per cent. of the whole population. That is if Hirschfeld and Havelock Ellis had not exaggerated.

But as things looked they must have done.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

He noticed that he had left his light on in " The Sentry Box." Good for Mrs. Darvill, he thought. The room was full of cigarette fumes. As he opened the window a gush of wind swept some papers off the writing bureau. Slowly he collected them together. They were one of the stories Hoover had sent to Green-Radcliff. The thought of the interview in Fleet Street in the afternoon filled him at once with self-pity. That he told Hoover all about it did not absorb any of the shock. But he had heard the truth.

" Nobody but a well-known writer can get away with these . . . I hope I can make myself clear to you . . ." Here Radcliff had looked him straight in the eye ; for a moment he looked almost angry with him. " Please don't think I'm either sarcastic or flattering. I mean everything I say. These are quite good stories. They could be published . . . even by us . . . if they were under a big name. But I'm giving official secrets away," he smiled, " I'm talking too much."

Too much, yes, too bloody much.

He pulled the three copies of *Harmony* from his bookshelf. Two years since these were published. What a grand day it

was when he got the latter saying that *Fine Spring Day* was being accepted. His first story to be printed. How magnificent the autumn rain looked as it revealed the full beauty of South Kensington station. Two years ago. Nearly two and a half. Nothing since then. Nothing. Rejection slips. Enough to paste up and decorate a wastepaper basket with. (He had thought of this before.) Two years wasted. And he was almost twenty-six. Not old, but old enough. Most of the writers he knew had already made their name at twenty-six.

That, of course, would be useless. Useless to approach a well-established author, a Big Name, and try to sell him his stories on a fifty-fifty basis. Under the Big Name. In the theatrical world, yes, that was different. Authors of musical comedies very often bought some of their scenes from outside. Revues were usually written by half a dozen different people. And he had been introduced to a Pole, a big, fat, elderly man, who would sit every evening on the terrace of the Rotonde in Montparnasse and sell short story plots, five hundred francs apiece.

But then, it needn't be a writer. He emptied the ashtray into the wastepaper basket. It needn't be a writer. Any famous person would do : a politician, a peer, a churchman.

He opened the red and black *Harmony* that was under the green one. *Something Wrong by* Paul Foley. " *For a time he liked the noise of the children playing football under his windows. He almost enjoyed it. Perhaps because it was new. But when he got used to it, the racket began to disturb him. He had been expecting something fresh. The children, however, invariably shouted the same words. ' Tackle 'im, go on, tackle 'im . . . Come on, Jim, keep your bloody eyes open . . . Stick it in . . . stick it in . . . go-o-o-al . . .*"

That was a good opening, not as good as *One Night More* or *Limitations of Eternity*, but that was the first time he had begun his story in the middle, as if afraid somebody might shut him up. He looked at the pattern the dialogue made on the following page. He read the dialogue again. He enjoyed it.

It was then that it happened. Paul tried to remember later how it happened. He was reading the dialogue of

Something Wrong, enjoying it, again and again, then he suddenly jumped to his feet as if obeying a loud command, and decided to telephone Jerviss. Well, of course, it didn't happen quite like that. As he finished reading the end of the story for the second time, he closed the magazine and looked at the other one and then yes, he remembered he had promised Jerviss to lend him some of his stories. It was then that he thought of Jerviss.

His first impulse was to telephone Jerviss. Ask him to dinner. Tell him during dinner. He pulled out his watch. It was nearly one o'clock. He would ring him tomorrow. First thing in the morning. Marvellous ! Marvellous ! He lit another cigarette. Well, of course, he wouldn't sleep. Bugger sleep. Marvellous idea. Jerviss was the very man for it.

Not so new, of course, not so new. He had thought about something like this before. He remembered exactly when. It was one Sunday morning when he saw an article by Lady Terenure in the *Sunday Mail*. It was called *Reading for Pleasure*. He had met Lady Terenure. One of those elderly trouts who used to come to Uncle Franz's receptions at the Legation. She used to cut him until she found out that his mother was related to the Minister. He remembered his surprise when he read the article. Lady Terenure had absolutely no claim to fame. She was the middle-aged wife of a former M.P. : not even a well-known M.P. She was about fifty-five and she talked in the very same accent, the same key, the same intonation as Sybil Thorndyke did on the stage.

Even before he read the article Paul realised with bitterness that in England a name which had achieved prominence in the fields of Sport, Politics, Society, Church or Crime, if not exactly identical with literary merit, could prove to be a perfect substitute and was assured of an easy entrance to Fleet Street. The better the celebrity was known the less important were the standards required. Some wrote on subjects allied to their *Cause Célèbre*, but quite frequently on things far removed from them. Paul had read articles on religion by an eminent tennis champion, on tennis in turn by a fashionable

cleric, on modern art by a young politician, and on politics by a purely social hostess.

It was clear that fame or notoriety in twentieth century England had become a fair substitute for intelligence, imagination, power of invention and prose style ; and these "features" by black-leg outsiders embittered Paul ; yet with a curious passion for self torture, he always read them, whenever they came his way.

But as he finished *Reading for Pleasure*, Paul did not swear and did not " enjoy " his anger and frustration as usual. He began to reflect. Frivolously first, then seriously. Why shouldn't it be he who wrote these articles for the untutored celebrities ? And the single thought began to multiply itself, in no time, like bacteria which began to infect his brain. Not only that he should go through the articles and make them printable. No. He would suggest the ideas for the articles and would write them himself under their name. Under a well-known name he could get away with a good deal ; that is to say, within certain obvious limits he would be able to write about anything he liked and say what only the Big Name would be allowed to say.

And, of course, he would make money. He might go fifty-fifty with the celebrity. It wasn't too high a price. How stupid of him not to think of it before. Of course, if one stiffens into a statue of Non-Compromise, if one prefers a beggarly independence, if one prefers experimenting—until one got old and had to compromise. Why not compromise now ?

But who should be the sleeping partner ? It must be an uneducated celebrity. For such a purpose the social world seemed the ideal field.

It would be a desperate thing, of course, but there was ready money in it and it offered an adventure and an escape from his helpless, bitter feelings, the rejection slips, the humiliations, the impotence. And—this was more important—he would be writing English all the time, and he would be able to get that final polish. Perhaps he would be able to chuck writing German, blocking his way with all those subconscious influences of foreign mannerisms. And perhaps he

would be able to chuck the miserable *Morgenpost* with its depressing layout, and dirty greyish paper, the provincial outlook, the worries, the humiliations, the fifteen pounds a month, that always came late.

Then he had dropped the idea. Yes, he did think it was a little frivolous. A society woman's news value would never have proved enough to publish any of the real stuff under her name. Newspaper articles, yes, but not short stories. And not stories like *Today is Wednesday* and *Number Engaged.* Yes, but there were other reasons too. Vereker had suddenly given him some twenty books to review for *The Examiner.* Six columns, five pounds each. Then he suddenly went mad after that. Yes, plain lunacy. He wasted four months translating Petzold's novel into English and six months trying to place it. And what bloody replies he had received. All said the same, practically the same, as if the publishers had made a secret agreement. " While your translation is an unusually skilled and inspired one, our feeling is . . ."

Jerviss was different. He began to brush his teeth with vehemence ; he enjoyed the hard brush on his gums. "Jerviss is simple, but full of the unexpected refinements and sophistication of what the English call ' The Man in the Street ! ' " He remembered his own sentence, he had actually put it down in German but on seconds thoughts crossed it out when he was typing the interview with Jerviss. It was true, but not relevant.

It was a bad week for news, that week in October six months ago. Nothing whatever in the papers. Then one evening Emmerling, the complimentary ticket champion, took him to the Jerviss-Schulze fight. " You can write it up," Emmerling said. " We don't want sports ; Reuter's enough . . ." He thought he would interview Jerviss. With a charming boyish smile Jerviss received him in the dressing room after the fight and the following morning in the Strand Palace. Yes, of course, old man. How much soda . . . so much ? Come on, it won't hurt you. Jerviss tried to force a big cigar on him, a long, square, big-business cigar. And how childishly Jerviss insisted on a copy of the *Morgenpost,* when it was printed, regardless of the fact that he would not be able to

read one single word beyond his name. " You must give me a tinkle on the telephone," he said when they parted. He felt he had made a " good impression " on Jerviss.

And the other night at the Worcester's dance. How enthusiastic Jerviss was in his greeting. And his " literary interest " of course. Paul suddenly felt a pleasant warm feelin his stomach.

The best man for the purpose, no doubt. What a grand surprise it would cause if the attractive " dumb animal "—the public would obviously regard Jerviss as an " attractive dumb animal "—were all of a sudden to speak out and speak out well. It wouldn't matter if the contrast left the masses cold. They would simply swallow him as a " celebrity feature." But it would surely thrill those few—those few, who are thrilled by such contrasts ; that little step-brotherhood, that secret society, that underground conspiracy of the thinking, the imaginative, the cultured.

BOOK THE SECOND

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

As his taxi got entangled in traffic jam after traffic jam, Paul realised for the first time that in the excitement of the morning and during the struggle with his excitement in the afternoon he had not thought out any tactics for unfolding the plan to Jerviss. It was true, experience had taught him, that it was no use planning out carefully every little detail on such occasions, because if the thing did not come off, his disappointment was the more bitter. He realised too that he was at his best when he had to act on the spur of the moment, and that in an emergency he became curiously resourceful and inventive. Yet now when he looked at his watch after his taxi passed the traffic lights at the Ritz, he felt that he had left too much to chance. What would happen, for instance, if Jerviss suddenly became tongue-tied or failed to understand the proposal? But Jerviss was intelligent. Yes, but perhaps too intelligent to agree to such a fantastic proposal. That was more likely. Or perhaps there was a definite reason why he was the only famous English boxer who never "wrote" for the press. Perhaps he thought it cheap, maybe there was a clause in his contract forbidding it. Or—his taxi seemed to become a fixture in Shaftesbury Avenue: it wouldn't move—Jerviss had quarrelled with the press and they wouldn't publish anything by him. The nearer Paul got to Greek Street, the more entangled his thoughts became. His last was that the whole thing was very likely a mistake and that he had fallen victim to his uncontrollable impulsiveness.

It was five minutes past eight and the hall of the Altamira was very crowded. Paul recognised an actress, then he recognised a journalist sipping something out of a sherry glass, their backs reflected in a wall of mirrors. Jerviss was nowhere.

As he handed his raincoat to the cloakroom man, he reflected that he would ask the *maître d'hôtel* first whether Jerviss had sent a message. As he turned he heard a slightly husky voice behind him :

" Mr. Noley."

" Oh," he said ; it was true, after all. " Sorry to have kept you waiting. It's five past eight. The taxi . . ."

" That's all right. I'm mightily glad to see you."

And to prove this he squashed Paul's hand between two large rings on his right hand. It was quite painful. Paul noticed that the boxer wore the same wristwatch with its heavy gold bracelet that he had worn the first time they met. Around his tie of wide blue and gold stripes there was a little gold cravat chain bearing his initials.

" A glass of sherry ? " Paul asked.

" Thank you very much."

They sat down. He had already seen the sports jacket Jerviss wore ; it was the colour of iced coffee. It wasn't the colour, of course, that he had noticed before, but the cut. The absolutely horizontal shoulders, the pinched waist, the pleated back, the accordeon pockets. He had seen it on a framed photograph in the window of a tailor's shop off Oxford Street. Across the waist, slanting upwards, and a little messed up because of the glazed surface of the paper, Jerviss had written : " To Joe Rappaport. Many thanks for the good suits. L. Jerviss, England's Light Heavyweight Champ. London, 1935."

Later as the waiter was serving Jerviss he looked at his guest without looking at him. He gave the impression of being a tall man, though he was a good two inches shorter than Paul. He noticed that Jerviss wore a pair of cuff-links that had little portraits of himself on them, grinning, in miniature. What made him look like a boxer ? Because

there was something, an indication unmistakable even to him who knew so few boxers. On his face the profession left no obvious marks . . . There was something in his tone as he spoke, a slight sniffing, but that was only when he spoke. With his curly, fair hair cut short his face was somehow reminiscent of a soldier in civilian clothes : a regular guardsman, a gunner. He had noticed the first time he saw him the strange quality of the skin of Jerviss' face. His eyelids were darker than his face and the face itself was strangely narrow for a boxer, and taut and pinched ; not unlike a mask. When he smiled the mask was suddenly filled with a boyish charm. There was some whimsicality and no irony in his smile. Jerviss often smiled.

" And what are you doing now ? " asked Jerviss later.

" The same old thing. Hacking for dear life in German and trying to do something worth while in English."

" That's mighty clever of you. Fancy being able to write in two languages. Or three. You can write in French as well, can't you ? I wish I could write."

As the waiter took their order for sweets Paul saw with a great and delighted surprise that it was Jerviss who had brought up the subject of literature.

" I've always wanted to write," Jerviss said. " I was ever such a great reader at school."

" Did you go to school in London ? "

" That's right. Weston Street, in Bermondsey," he explained. " Just a council school, you know. You've never heard of it, I s'pose. Well, Mr. Austin . . . he was the teacher, he used to think a rare lot of my English. And I was ever so keen on books, you see, and he was keen that I should go on, pass exams. and whatnot and win scholarships. That sort of thing. Anyway, I used to read a lot at school. Not rubbish, mind you. No Sexton Blake and penny dreadfuls, but real good books . . . I mean like Rafael Sabatini and Dornford Yates. Did you ever meet any of them, by the way ?

" In those days," Jerviss smiled without any apparent reason, " see, it must be nearly twenty years ago . . . no. More. I wrote a verse or two. Mind you, I was just a kid,

about fourteen, those days . . . and I wrote a story . . . just fancy . . . and it was published . . ."

"Where?"

"Oh, in the *Bermondsey Advertiser*," Jerviss said, not hearing the way Paul's voice suddenly changed. "I don't s'pose you ever heard of it. It was just a local. I haven't seen it since. You see, it was like this, the teacher knew Mr. Pepper, he was the editor, and he published it for me. My mother was ever so proud . . . Mind you, they didn't pay me," he added significantly.

"You know, you could make money writing, and it would appear in better papers than the *Bermondsey Advertiser*."

"You mean poems?"

"No, articles for the press, stories for magazines, novels."

"I don't know . . ." Jerviss shook his chin. "I'm not well up in those things . . . Literature . . . I know some editors and journalists, boxing correspondents, but I never tried. Once a journalist . . . you know him I suppose, Ted Hinchcliff, he's on the *Comet* . . . he wanted to ghost my life story, but I said no . . ."

"Why not? I mean a boxer's life is news value to the public, and you could have had a good deal of money for the serial rights . . . and your life story would have been interesting reading . . ."

"I know. But I didn't want to. You see, it's like this. I may as well tell you I haven't had much education. I hadn't the chance and all that and the long and short of it is I couldn't have written it myself. Fact, the whole thing would have been ghosted by Hinchcliff and I didn't want it that way. I read other boxers' stories, and they were all the same. All the same . . ."

"Factory made style . . ."

"Positively. Factory made style . . . He would have made my story exactly like any other boxer's, he would, and he would have put in stuff that wasn't true and he wouldn't have put in stuff I wanted to put in . . . You know what I mean . . . I wish I could put down what I feel about my life. It would make a good book, you know." Jerviss shook his head and looked at Paul with pride. "Once or twice,

you know, I tried to write bits of it, but it wasn't any good. It wasn't," he added, as if glad to be reminded.

" Oh, come, come," Paul said loudly, fast, reassuring, gay, forceful. " Writing is a difficult job. It took me years of sweat and pain and disgust and despair. It needs immense patience, immense," he repeated persuasively, then as if he had very suddenly developed a brainwave, he said : " D'you know that you and I ought to co-operate . . . quite seriously . . . . I could teach you how to write. If you would like to . . . but what I'd like more is if I could write stuff under your name. But no nonsense stuff, not the usual newspaper stuff, but something really worth while. Good things. I could work with you, your time permitting. And you would naturally only let me publish what you wanted me to. And we would share the proceeds."

Their eyes met for a second. Jerviss fixed his glance on Paul's hands and rested his look on them for quite a long time, then he looked into Paul's face and began to smile triumphantly as if he had just seen the point of a particularly subtle joke.

" I see," Jerviss said, slowly. " I knew it must have been done that way. Pat Henderson and Nipper Browne write for the papers, and of course, Orvieto," he laughed. " *Of course* it wasn't written by them. Now, this is between you and me, mind. I don't fancy Pat's ever written as much as a letter," Jerviss said with the air of passing on a very confidential and frivolous piece of indiscretion. " He's all right, Pat is, except that he likes to booze. You see he was a mill hand up North. Dare say he went to school like most people, but he never kept it up . . . you know what I mean. Then Orvieto. *'Course* he couldn't have written that bit in the *Sunday Banner* about his life. When I last fought him a year ago, he could only say ' bye-bye ' in English . . ."

" And he said that when he greeted you on arrival too."

" That's right. He's a good chap, you know, Orvieto is. He's got eleven brothers and sisters and he's keeping them. He got one of 'em a job in London. A waiter . . . a West End job."

" Well," said Paul, " my idea is entirely different. These

boxers you mentioned were usually interviewed by a journalist like Hinchcliff, who'd make a few notes in his notebook, but I'm sure he could write the stuff just as well if he'd never seen them. The point is, you see, that in the newspaper offices it is understood that Henderson or whatshisname or Orvieto have nothing whatsoever to do with the actual writing of the stuff, even if it's printed under their name. They get paid for it and they get some publicity. That's all. My idea is a better one . . . I hope." He smiled, briefly, nervously. " My idea is that the stuff should go to the editor straight from you, *pretending* it was written by you. That's the main point, you see. This is very vital and very imporant."

" I follow," Jerviss said proudly.

" It will be child's play for you to persuade the editor that you wrote the stuff yourself, unaided, and in this way, not only will you get more money, but you will have a wider range of subjects to write about. Apart from the additional fame as a writer. Once the first articles are published you'd be allowed to write about anything on earth."

" I get it. But what about the editor? Won't he see that it's not my style? "

" Not at all. All you've got to do is to keep it a secret. We shall both be silent about it. Not a word to anybody and I know that I shall be able to write in a way that even your father wouldn't kno that the stuff wasn't written by you . . ."

" But how? I shall give myself away when I talk. I don't talk like a book."

" Now, that's where you are wrong. The average writer does not talk a bit the way he writes. In fact the average writer—it's very funny—is usually very bad at expressing himself when he talks. He is usually a poor talker. It's funny, but it is very natural. He is a writer and not a talker. He gets used to expressing himself fully only when he writes. He concentrates everything on that. That's his real job. And writing is different from talking. For one thing he has plenty of time to thin out what he wants to say. He is quite alone when he writes. He's a different sort of man then.

You follow ? If he makes a mistake, he can correct it on the sheet of paper. He can put in a better sentence, and he can rewrite the stuff no matter how many times. You see ? That's why you need not have the very slightest fears. They won't notice. You'll have to bluff. If they ask you (but I don't think they would) if they ask you how it is that you can write so well,you could say you work very hard, you use a dictionary, and you could also say you never had any education, you have never been taught how to express your thoughts in speech, but you taught yourself to write . . . I shall teach you a few professional lies."

" I don't think I shall need them," Jerviss said.

But the gay expression on Jerviss' face suddenly changed. For a minute or two the boxer seemed to be arguing with himself. He looked at Paul long and steadily.

" But why is it you don't want to write the same things under your own name ? "

" I was just coming to that. In this country, the way of a young writer is very difficult. He is only accepted and published if he writes the stuff which is popular with the public, or rather what the editor or publisher thinks is popular with the public. When he has made a name for himself, of course, he's allowed to write anything about practically everything he likes. *Anything :* even about things which are not popular with the public. *Then* he can give his own self, if any . . . But before that, before he has made his name, it's hell for him, especially if he cannot easily adapt himself to the editor's demands. You will understand that under such conditions it's pretty hopeless for an outsider to make a position for himself except at the price of a terrific struggle. That is why I had the idea of writing things under your name. I am forced to use a trick because I've got to fight an enemy with his own weapons."

" What do you mean ? "

" I mean the enormous value of a name. It has an unbelievable attraction for most people, for practically everybody. It is magic. And the interesting point is that in writing for the papers it is immaterial whether the name was made in writing or in any other field. If they see an article

under a famous name, nine people out of ten would read it without question. If they see a story by, say, Les Jerviss, they don't mind whether the story is good or bad : they read it, and the editor knows they will read it. And he would look on your writing entirely differently to the way he would look at stuff by someone unknown. He does not mind the fact that the stuff may look unpopular, unpopular because not conventional, because it is original and unusual. In the same way he doesn't mind if the stuff falls below his standards . . . the latter is a more frequent consideration," Paul added and they both smiled.

" My plan is to write original and unusual stuff under your name. I hope I shall be able to give my mind completely to it, and I hope to give good stuff. Your co-operation, as I see it at this moment, is everything to me. It would give me a glorious opportunity to say a good deal I'd like to say : to fight my way through. It would be a magnificent opportunity and, I think, in the interests of good literature."

Paul became heated by his own arguments and continued a little louder :

" The public would be forced to read the stuff we are writing, and if I may say so, they would be forced to read good literature. Just imagine what we could get away with . . . I don't know if you can follow me, because you may not know the conditions, but it really is a great thing. I wonder if you can see what I am really up to. You may not, as you live in a different world. I am asking you to help me in a great venture. It is a fight of Spirit over Matter. It is something like a Crusade. And it involves nothing on your part."

The boxer's face grew very serious while Paul talked. He never said a word, because he thought it would have been rude in the circumstances, but he nodded at intervals when their eyes met. To Paul he looked like a young and ardent member of a nonconformist congregation listening to the preacher. There was humility and respect in his look. Paul became uneasy. He had not realised the unexpected effect of his words on Jerviss. He paused for a moment, then switched on to the technical problems of the plan.

" This, of course, means that you must refuse all interviews

when anyone asks your views on things other than boxing. I don't mean the sporting press. To sporting reporters you can tell as much as you like about your weight, your condition, your hopes and prospects and the rest ; but you must not give away the sort of information on which you could publish an article yourself. For example, should a reporter come along to ask your views on religion or politics or literature, or anything not strictly connected with boxing, you would smile at him charmingly, and say you would be simply delighted to write the article yourself on the subject. Would he just say exactly how many words he wants. Then we write it and get paid for it."

" You're a shrewd business man, aren't you ? "

" I don't know. I try. I think it's high time I should. D'you know how much Ashenden makes in a year ? "

" No."

" A good twenty thousand."

" Go on."

" And the rest of the top class don't make much less either. You have a name which has great *news value* in it, whereas mine hasn't. I'm only known to readers of such highbrow papers as *The Examiner*. There are hundreds of people like me, thousands, but there is only one Les Jerviss."

" Oh, go on with you. But . . . I thought it was that way . . . that the average man in the street is . . ."

" Like a flock of sheep. And not *only* the *average* man in the street. Unfortunate, but it creates an opportunity."

Jerviss nodded three times, and smiled.

" I never realised it. As you can guess. Only natural. I've been boxing for nearly twenty years and I don't know much about these things. Like this, I mean. Half the world doesn't know what the other half is doing. Well, to cut it short I like your idea, it's smart, but then you are clever, aren't you ? " He smiled again. " I don't know how it would work out, of course. That's more in your line . . . Tell me . . . how did you think of it ? "

Paul shrugged a shoulder.

" Inspiration."

Jerviss nodded. His face was gradually becoming serious.

He was silent for a moment or two, then his face changed, he looked awkward, he rubbed his thumb against the palm of his other hand.

" What is it ? " Paul asked.

" You see, I was always so keen on books and literature and all that, but I never had a chance, you know."

" Yes," Paul said.

" You see I'm really ashamed I know so little, but you know . . ."

" I know."

" Yes, and it would be very nice of you if you could . . ."

" But certainly. But that is part of the game. You will have to make a study of literature. You must read books. To see what your fellow writers are doing. I shall certainly initiate you. I like lecturing. I'll talk your head off."

" And when would you start ? " Jerviss said.

" As soon as possible. But don't forget this. The most important thing about it is secrecy. Nobody, not even your best friends, your family, must even suspect what we are up to."

" No, no, you can be sure of that. When it comes to bluffing I'm good. You don't know me yet . . ." Suddenly he became electrified. " And what shall we write about ? "

" I shall think about it. You needn't worry. I've got lots of ideas. Well now, d'you know any editors ? "

" I know Hinchcliff, that's the *Post* . . . no good . . . Then I know the sports editor of the *Clarion.* Nichols his name is. And . . . I shall think of others."

" Well, I don't really think you need to know the editor because if it comes to your that your name in itself is enough. In the beginning, of course . . . it's useful . . . I tell you what, I'll do the first one tonight. You're having a fight soon, that would give it publicity. I'll let you have it tomorrow. In the afternoon. Could you come and see me . . . say at five ? "

He gave Jerviss his address.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

He really ought to have given a lift to Mr. Noley. Too late now. He wasn't a stickler but it would have been nicer, all the same. Etiquette. But he was feeling funny, drunk like, when they parted. Same thing one always felt after one saw a picture after one's own heart. He hadn't been to the pictures lately, because there weren't any real good films, what with *Clive of India* and *Java Head* and *The Last Gentleman.* These weren't the stuff. He wanted " realistic " pictures, about real people, like *Arrowsmith* and *Men in White.* He'd seen *Arrowsmith* twice.

When Mr. Noley rang in the morning he didn't know why he wanted to see him or why he asked him to dinner. First he thought it was another interview, but he was glad to go all the same because at the dance the other night when he saw Mr. Noley again, he was thinking Mr. Noley was the type he'd always wanted to meet. He thought that after the first time they met. He often thought of that. At the Strand Palace it was and Mr. Noley telephoned he would come and do a write-up, and didn't look a bit like a journalist. Not that he was expecting an older man, it wasn't that. He looked a gentleman, Mr. Noley did, but also he looked so different from the gentlemen, from the real class people one met. It wasn't looks, because he looked a bit like Lord Nuneaton, the one who asked him to lunch at the St. James's Club in Piccadilly, after the exhibition bout for the Alexandra Hospital, or Sir John Werzens, Baronet, whom he met at the National Sporting Club. There was any amount of others, for looks Mr. Noley was very much like them, he looked refined and class—but he was chummy the same time. Perfect gentleman. Take the way he ordered dinner tonight. The way he talked to the waiter. He was chummy yet he remained a gentleman and wasn't la-di-dah, not for a tick. Easy his way was, and natural. The way he said the words that were in French, not like Reg Goldstein at Frascati's—you could see that Reg was giving himself airs, showing off. It

was a safe bet that Reg couldn't speak French, not when a real Frenchman spoke to him.

Then, on top of it, on top of all this—personality—what an imagination. What an imagination. Don't they call that " imaginary vision " ? Vision was a better word, anyhow. What a brain. And only twenty-six. And how on earth could he make him laugh all the time, without ever cracking a dirty joke. How could he do it all the time ? No matter what he talked about, it was always interesting. And clear. He found it difficult to figure it out, but he remembered, after the Duke's dance, that he felt, " instinctively," that Paul was the type of bloke, the type of man for whose company he always wished. Wouldn't have minded, even if he had been a little more stand-offish. Only natural. As it was, it was a little extra that Paul wasn't stand-offish. Never. Would have put anybody at ease, at once, easily. Just the way he was made.

He always liked people who had brains. When he read about men in the papers, who invented drugs that could cure pneumonia or grafted monkey gland into some chap's John Thomas, or wrote book articles he liked, he always felt he would like to meet them. Take that man Jeans. He was a sir and an astronomist or astrologist, and there was Lord Horder—such a fine " scholarly " face—and Sir Warwick Deeping. Was he mister though ? And, of course, Lord Nuffield, " who rose from humble beginnings to become a captain of industry and a great benefactor to humanity."

But these were the great minds ordinary fellows could never contact. Exceptions. There were other people who were not so famous—" prominent "—who talked well and could say the things one felt but couldn't say them the way one would have liked to. Now take Mr. Noley. Only met him three times, and one felt one had known him all one's life. And Mr. Noley seemed to have known him too. It was ever so funny that, and nice.

But he knew lots of people with brains, any amount of them. People in the trade and outside. They had brains, no doubt about that. And some were rare shrewd, but it was different. Not the brains he really meant. The journalists. He knew

a good many reporters and sporting correspondents. Some young, others old, some successful, others not successful; after a time they all looked alike. One could really spot a journalist at once. That was funny. It was as easy to spot a journalist as it was to spot a boxer. Journalists had no cauliflower ears, and had all the bones in their noses in one piece and did not wear their hair short and their figures . . . it was something else. What it was one couldn't say. But one could spot them right away. There was a time when they seemed class, a cut above the average, but as one got older and wiser one could see that their only touch with " the spirit," with " spiritual values," was that they made no mistakes when they wrote, that is no mistakes in English and all that. They knew how to put it in black and white. That was another thing. No matter what paper they wrote for, no matter they would all write the same way. It was always " the shapely brown colt " that was " one of the possible candidates for classic honours," or " Orvieto now almost sure of the title," or " interviewed by the *Post* last night, Les Jerviss had stated that . . ." And the way some of them talked, even if it wasn't cracking a dirty joke in a West End pub.

They were ordinary. Most of them. There were star-writers, of course, like Mr. Elston, but he was so very stand-offish . . .patronising. Or Mr. Overstreet of *The Times* (or maybe the *Telegraph*, he wasn't sure) who seemed to have known everything about sports ever since England was England, there was nothing he didn't know about boxing for instance, and he was positively a gentleman, very distinguished, but a chap could always feel that Mr. Overstreet was a snob. Anyway he was an old man and grew flowers or whatnot down Surrey way.

The kind of sporting journalist he met usually had nothing to talk about except the trade and racing and the papers and money and drink and women. Yet they kept talking. All the time. They had their heads screwed on the right way, they were plenty shrewd, they learnt that when they were office boys, yes, but when they got on in life they had no " spiritual aspirations," no. They read books but they had

no " spiritual aspirations," none. They crowded on boxers and bookies and promoters and they always " accepted " invitations to the pictures, to suppers, to nightclubs. And then there were those others, mostly free-lancers they were, who had always had " temporary financial embarrassments."

One didn't mind that, some were young and some papers treated them rough like, penny a line or whatnot, and he didn't mind a couple of quid because money came easy. It didn't always use to, not in the beginning it didn't, but still people always said one had to do that and people always said it was a good thing, an investment, to have friendly relations with the press, that sort of thing. But as the years went by he began to feel they were not the goods, journalists, leastways the ones he met weren't. It wasn't that they were spongers, because lots of them asked him to have a drink too and some of them earned good money, but they were empty and they tried to make out that they weren't empty. Americans were different. Didn't put on airs. They didn't mind if one didn't take them serious. And they were really funny. Yankee journalists were absolutely like the ones one sees in the pictures. Absolutely. There was a lot about people in the movies that was not the same in real life, but not American reporters.

Meeting people like Paul always made one sad afterwards. Funny, but one always felt kind of out of touch with people afterwards, when one went home or bumped into people one knew. Ordinary people. " Anti-climax," he nodded mentally, that was the word. And it was so shameful, it made one funny inside. It was when one left them and went back to the old life one knew one was lonely. Well, of course, one could always bluff other people, because it would be ever so funny if people found out that one was a lonely heart when one was thirty-six and British champion, and had a large house and some money put by and " publicity value." But it was a sorry thing, all the same. It was an old story too. It was when he came back from the States—he was twenty—no, twenty-three then—that he felt serious, that he was looking for a man or for a woman, but a man would always make a better companion than a woman, a man who could listen to him, who could follow and understand, to whom one could

really confide ; with whom one could talk it over. Many things one wanted to talk over, not only when one felt down. All very well that he had not much of an education, there were were plenty of people in the same boat. He was different. He was not rich, no, but positively comfortable and he had a position in life. Time on his hands, too much of it sometimes. One couldn't make a clean breast of all this to anyone. People would laugh. They would think he was funny. And as a matter of fact they wouldn't be far wrong. Once he read in a newspaper that there were people who never grew up, mentally that is. People who always remained fourteen or whatever age that was. He often felt that way himself.

One could, of course, always study even though one was no longer a kid at school. Lots of blokes went to evening classes and Mr. Noley said that he was still studying writing and literature and that sort of thing. And that wasn't just being modest. It was positively certain that one had to go on learning all the time. But one couldn't talk about these things to the "gang," nor to Amor, nor to Ernie neither. People would think it was pure swank. Syd Bernstein didn't say so, but it was a sure thing Syd would crack a joke if he saw one with the *Daily Telegraph*. It was just Syd's line to call other people snobs. Still, he didn't mind Syd laughing behind his back and calling him a snob, putting on airs, because the *Telegraph* was a good paper and the *Mirror* wasn't. It was two years ago that he began to take in the *Telegraph*, besides the *Mirror*, because it was no use trying to tell Doris to give up the *Mirror*. It was difficult to read the *Telegraph*, but not so difficult as when he first took it, when he sat down to it in the morning and had to read almost every line twice, and there were quite a good many words he couldn't understand. And the write-up of his matches in the *Telegraph* weren't half as flattering as the *Mirror's*, but still the *Telegraph* was class. One could see it went into good houses, because it always reported private dances and dinner-parties, and there was a column which said that Lord Marstock is 83 today and the Bishop of Newcastle 75 and the Hon. Miles Symington 37 . . . And there were long notices about books and the

shorter of these notices were easy to read and there were no cartoons and no funny drawings and instead of tarts in bathing suits there were the photographs of classy men who had received an order, or were appointed to something, or died. Yes, the *Telegraph* was a paper after one's own heart.

Still, one wished to find someone with whom one could talk things over. It wasn't always so. Not really. When he was younger there were always friends, but as one got older and rose in life one felt one needed other people. Not that one would snub old pals, but old pals were nowhere now. The boys he used to know in Bermondsey, at school, in The Ring, in the old days, where were they? Even if one could find them, one wouldn't know what to say to them. It would be so funny to meet them. Embarrassing.

With Paul it was different. He was the sort of man he always wanted to meet, to chum up with. And now this was a possibility. Positively. It was more in fact. It was a proposition. A partnership, he said. He sounded very businesslike and serious when he said partnership. He meant that.

He couldn't quite see what it really was, though Paul explained it very clearly, but he was sure it was to be an interesting affair and it was clean too. There was no hanky-panky about it. A secret conspiracy! Sounded something like those spy stories. Matter of fact Paul did look a little bit like a foreign spy. Only he had no " harsh, guttural accents," and his hair was fair. But still the affair was " mysterious," as if he had read the whole thing somewhere. But then, perhaps those spy stories and mystery stories one read had something to do with real life. Life is stranger than fiction. Now where did he read that? Where did this come in? Life is stranger than fiction.

He found Doris alone in the parlour, sitting by the wireless and smoking. Oh, how many bloody times had he got to tell her to switch off the mod. when she was playing records. She just didn't get it. I mean what's the use of getting a hundred-pound H.M.V. if one doesn't take proper care of it. It wasn't the money so much, but it was good, the

best on the market. He switched off the mod.

" You're early," she said. " Didn't you go to the party ? "

" Wasn't a party."

" You said you was goin' to one."

" I went to have supper with a gentleman."

" I thought you said you was going to a party."

" It was business. The gentleman said I ought to write for the papers."

" Fancy. Are you going to ? "

" Why shouldn't I ? "

" Well, you've never tried, have you ? "

" No. Still there's no harm in trying, is there ? "

" No."

" Have you been out ? " he asked. He didn't really want to know if she had been out or not. Didn't make much difference. She was always like that, dumb. She wouldn't change, it was no use. All his rise in the world didn't make no difference to her. Indifferent. That was the word. And that was stupid. One didn't want to be stand-offish when one got on in the world like some people did, no, but Doris was just the same all these years as she was when she was working for Reniers in Spa Road. She was still like she was when she was working for the chocolate people, she didn't change.

What was it Mr. Noley had said during supper ? Ever so smart. Yes, he said that Napoleon said when he saw his generals' wives at a party, he said that it was a pity my generals got married when they were corporals. It was so smart and funny. And how bloody true.

Other people were luckier with their women. For instance, Ted Hunter. He was younger and she was younger than Doris, only a couple of years though and she used to work in a factory too. Her dad was a foreman, but that wasn't so different. Ever so much nicer than Doris. Personality. And Ted Hunter didn't make as much money as he did. Bantams always get much less and Ted couldn't put on weight, but she was so different. Ted could take her anywhere, parties, anywhere. They always went together, Ted wouldn't go without Ada. And that's how it should be.

But Doris was just dumb, just a stone round his neck. Wouldn't take trouble. Didn't even look after the house well. Not half as well as other women would on much less money. If only somebody would come along and do something with her. Yes, yes, Doris was ill, yes, yes, the bloke in Harley Street said she could never have a kid, after that miscarriage. Well, that was a blow, because at one time he was thinking of having children. Not Doris ; she just didn't bother.

Funny he always thought of these things when he came back after a party or after the pictures to find her in the parlour playing the wireless. It was always the same. Always gave him the anti-climax she did.

People don't know their luck, some don't. The wife of a well-known British sportsman, good money, nice house, car, all sorts of comforts. Hundred-quid radiogram and as much kitchen money as she wanted and as much time as she wanted. A servant. Could have had two if she wanted. No good. And she wasn't bad-looking either. Not that he would really bother about that any more, he was beyond that long ago, but still she wasn't bad-looking. Thirty-three and she could have spent as much money as she wanted, within reason, of course, on clothes and shoes and the rest. But she didn't. Never wanted to go to good shops. All these eleven years they'd been married, she never wanted to go to West End shops and never to a good hairdresser. I mean one saw girls nowadays who worked in shops or in offices, there wasn't really much difference between the two, it was just snobbery, because they didn't get more pay as office girls, but still they did dress well and had their hair done like women on the pictures. Not Doris. Thank goodness he did get her to go to the dentist two years ago. That was a bit of a job too. And Elkan made a good job of it. She wouldn't be half as bad if she wouldn't eat so many chocolates, it wasn't the money, course not, but it was funny chocolates were her only passion ever since she was a girl, one would have thought working in a chocolate factory took one's appetite away from them, but not Doris. She would eat chocolates all day. No wonder that from behind she looked like one of them Michelin placards ; all that fat. The papers were full of

advertisements that made people slim and there was Reg Goldstein's gym in the West End. She could have gone there, and Reg wouldn't have charged full price. And look at the way she was throwing her things in a heap on the sofa. Indifferent, that's what she was.

He watched the lamp as she put on her nightgown, he always did that, he didn't know why, then she put her teeth into the glass of water by the bed.

The gold tooth among the white ones glittered in the silver water. Jerviss sighed.

Doris always made a noise sleeping, always. He noticed it when he couldn't sleep. It was really old-fashioned to share the bedroom because there was the spare room and it wouldn't cost much to fix it up. It had a bed in it, only the springs weren't much good. He'd thought about that before but there was always something that makes one forget things like that. It was midnight, he heard the church clock and he didn't feel like sleeping. It was mostly the fight of course, he was always like that, jumpy before a match, but he had drunk too much coffee tonight. It was French coffee and it was strong and he took it without milk, two cups. It was getting warm too.

No use thinking of Doris and things, and mistakes and the old story, it was no use worrying about things that couldn't be put right and it was a great piece of luck he had met Mr. Noley. It was serious. He wasn't the man who would go back on his word, he meant it all.

He said he had plenty of ideas, but in case he needed some more there was always the life story that he could do. He could do it, he was the man for it. He often thought it was like a story in a book he read some time ago. Just like a story. Bits of it stuck out, very clear like, others looked hazy, there were things one quite forgot. It was funny how bits of it stuck out as if one had just read them now, though they happened very long ago, and other bits one forgot that came much later. And it was the way he always felt the life story should be done, by " co-operation." The chap who wrote it shouldn't write it on his own ; they should get together,

" co-operation," he would read what the other wrote, and would tell him if he liked it or not. That was the way. The other way was no good. Take the life story of Webster. He spoke quite well, Webster did, like most Americans they always did, he had plenty of say in him—pep they called it—but the book was surely done by the ghost. Not because it wasn't the way Webster talked, because Mr. Noley said people talk different from the way they write, but it read exactly the same as other boxers' life stories. " Factory made style," yes, that was what Mr. Noley said. And how true that was.

And not only that, boxers' life stories were always about fights and about boxing and there wasn't much about the other things, that was what made them so empty. The sporting side wasn't enough, he would like to put in a great deal about his private life too ; The Private Life of Les Jerviss. No, that was common and funny too. People would think he was writing about women and goings-on, a sexy book. No, but a book on those lines, except for the title. Because there was stuff, any amount of it. It could fill quite a long book. Bermondsey. He could say a lot about that. Funny thing, lately he was thinking quite a lot about Bermondsey. But only lately. Say two years ago, he felt sort of shy about it. Not ashamed of it, he wasn't, but he wouldn't like to talk about it, not even to think too much about it. It was different now. It was just the other day, three weeks ago, he went along there. It had changed a bit and Waterloo Road was getting shabby, positively. Hadn't seen it for ten years. Quite that time. Number forty-two was still there, but nobody that he knew lived there. They had no children, these people. It was just off Jamaica Road, in Lock Street, four doors from the Mason's Arms. The people in the house had a wireless in the basement that used to be the kitchen and someone on the wireless was singing " You are my Heart's Delight." Shabby it was getting, a window broken on the ground floor that was the big room and it was mended with paper.

But the other house wasn't there. It was just a few doors off, in the corner of Pardoner Street, and it had been pulled down. They moved there after Dad got ill. Number seven.

Must have been pulled down, because there was a brand new house there, red brick. How well he remembered the day Len and Minnie and Mother went to Guy's to see Dad, when he had the rupture, and they were told by somebody they couldn't see him because he was on the danger list and how Mother defied doctors and all and went and saw him and Dad didn't look half so bad and they had given him a red nightshirt to wear she said and she had to take the one she took back. A week later Dad died.

Dad used to say his own dad was a stevedore too. And so was Len. He had gone to Australia, now, how many years ago was that? Before he got married, because he wasn't at the wedding. He would be forty-five now, at least forty-five, he was the oldest. They were seven. Sid was killed in the war and Lizzie died when she was a toddler. Then there was Bert. He was no good. God alone knew where he was now. He hadn't seen him since the fight with McWilliam, when he came round and asked for money. He'd been inside once. He was bad and it was no use trying to help him, give him a leg up. Maybe he was inside now for all he knew. Then there was Minnie, she married Bert Jackson, used to be a policeman in Bermondsey, they lived at Staines now. And there was May, she was the youngest. She was living up in Sheffield. He never went to see them. Palethorpe . . . that was what he was called, he was a Yorkshire bloke and they were keeping a pub in Sheffield. Both the girls were good-looking.

It was funny how things changed, he wasn't very young, no, but thirty-four isn't much ; still things had changed a lot since those days. The school was still there, the same old place. Weston Street. But it was all different. He went to have a look at the place, it was just early afternoon and he was thinking how they used to run about after school wild-like, but these boys he saw the other day were not half so noisy as they used to be. And they looked so small somehow. True they were twelve and thirteen and fourteen like they were, but these ones were older all the same. More go in them.

And it was different many ways. Kiddies didn't use to go

to the pictures in those days, it was during the War and the place was the " Elephant," but that wasn't for the kiddies. Inside it looked like a royal palace. Only been there once. It's a cinema now and looks different. And there was no radio and no dog racing either, but there were plenty of wet nights. This was funny, the weather must have changed a lot since then. Granted it still rains, but on a wet night now and a wet night then were different things. It was on a wet night, yes . . . that's how the story might begin. It was a wet night that night. Winter. Jim Aherne, he was a year older and there were two or three more, he just couldn't remember their names of their faces either, anyway they took him to the Club. It was funny how even a long time afterwards when one heard the word club one always thought of the gym. Near Drummond Road. It was pulled down, pity, he wanted to have a look at it. Monday, Wednesday, Friday they used to box there. Mostly youngsters. He was just thirteen then, and Mr. Saunders took a fancy to him right away. Bermondsey boys are all good fighters, Mr. Saunders used to say, and one supposed it was true. He'd heard that elsewhere too. Then Mr. Saunders said there was good blood and bone in him and he went every night to the club.

'Course Dad didn't half like the idea. He didn't like boxing. In the days—long before the war, when Dad was young—lads never used to box, nor grown people either. They used the knife instead. Dad's idea was to make him a motor mechanic, it was a good job, he said, with so many cars and lorries on the road and there would be many more after the war ; it was all up with horses. He was apprenticed to Mr. Belton, just off the Old Kent Road. Dad knew Mr. Belton, they used to go to . . . what was the name of the pub just behind Newington Causeway, that's where it was. But he still went to the club, after he finished work, only then he went every evening. And then there was that match he won against Jim Aherne who was a year older and a lot bigger too, when he daren't go home for the night because Dad said he would kill him if he did not keep off boxing. He spent that night with Mr. Saunders at his house and early in the morning Mr. Saunders went to see Dad. Les wasn't there himself,

but Mr. Saunders said they argued a good deal but they got on and the end of it was that Dad said he didn't mind. He was just over fourteen then. And Dad even bought him a pair of boots. But it was a long time, a very long time before he got his first dressing gown. The art silk one. That was another story. . . .

What came after wasn't so clear, he tried to think it over often, it was funny because it came later and he ought to remember it better. There came fights, only too many of them. They were just small fights and he didn't keep a diary or nothing and they weren't written up in the papers. And he mustn't tell Paul that with the first money he earned he bought himself a pair of shoes because the old ones were very worn and bad and they let the water in. But that was true all the same. In those days he spent all his money on clothes. 'Course he had to give most of it to Mother and he didn't mind that much in the beginning, but later when Dad passed away it was too much.

Well, it was strange how he didn't remember much about the first years after Dad died. It was just training and fights and training and fights, years and years of it. But he remembered well the time he went to Australia ; he was eighteen then. Len wasn't in Australia yet, no. A year in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth. Freemantle was a bloody place with that old gym going to pieces. The rest of it was ever so much clearer. A year later he went to America, but that was another story, he had been thinking about it lately, it could be written straightaway, he could dictate it to Mr. Noley if he wanted to.

Then that evening after the celebration. Just a few months after he came back from the States. It was a celebration after a match, he was making good money then. He was twenty-two and the *News of the World* said he was England's hope, he still had that bit of paper—saw it somewhere the other day. It was then he met her. No use getting bitter about it, it was nobody's fault really. Course he did think it was love, but one never knew what love was, one saw that later, but he meant to do the thing proper and respectable. And other blokes looked on one differently if one was married. One

went one up straightaway. And one was too old and important to go on living with Ma and the others. There was no independence. The only good thing that ever came of it. He'd been independent since he was married. When all was said.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

His first thought was to write an article on Jerviss' emotions during a fight ; he soon dismissed that. It was an interesting and original subject, but he knew little about boxing terminology and not yet enough about Jerviss' mental make-up. Besides, he knew that describing Jerviss' emotions would almost inevitably result in a metaphysical and too literary account which would, at once, betray a mind disciplined by education and more experienced in self-expression than Jerviss'. Later, when Jerviss' name was better established as a writer's, he might do such an article. For the time being it was decidedly unwise.

He felt he must go halfway : he might give the thing an intellectual flavour, just for contrast's sake, but . . . Yes, what about an article containing Jerviss' opinion on modern fiction dealing with boxers ? That was the subject he had thought about on his way back from the restaurant. The Boxer in Modern Fiction. But not under such an academic title, of course.

But what title would Jerviss give it, had he actually written it ? What would be the translation of that phrase in the Jerviss style ? The Jerviss style, yes . . . . It was certainly difficult to create a style for a person, who was only legally and physically existent but spiritually had no popular identity. No matter how original and interesting that identity might be. A difficult job, but an attractive one.

The beginning of the story was a little apologetic. " My line is different from the writer's," said Jerviss in the article. " The writer takes his punishment, when his work is finished. I get it while I am at work." Then he said he naturally made it a point to read a good many books connected with the

" profession " and among these, a good many novels. Not knowing writers, he did not quite know whether the boxer's world had interested novelists sufficiently, but there were few novels connected with boxing. And those few were bad. They may have been quite well written, but somehow they did not give a true picture of a boxer. The boxer, after all, was different to a certain extent from people who were outside the ring and that difference somehow escaped the writers.

He launched a mild attack on *Cashel Byron's Profession*, an interesting novel as novels went, but the boxer hero was nothing but a puppet pulled about and made to jump arbitrarily . . yes, *arbitrarily*, indeed, thought Paul, that's just the word that Jerviss might use in private conversation, but nobody would believe it. He would have to find the proper substitute word there.

The attack became a little more vehement on authors who were already dead and thus could not fight back. *Rodney Stone* and *The Amateur Gentleman* got it in the neck. Then came an attack on Capehart, who seemed to know all the dope on boxing and on Chicago boxers and yet made his hero completely unconvincing.

Paul rewrote the article three times. From the first draft he removed a few lines which he considered too vehement. One must be careful at the beginning. He had plenty of time; he could allow himself to be a little more controversial and even brutally critical later.

The second version seemed desperately logical and desperately competent. The sentences blended into one another as though they were sequences of a well-composed sonata. That would have betrayed a mind disciplined by years of journalistic routine. He eased the logic, the didactic finger pointing to the conclusion and put in two epigrams.

The third version was very much like an impressionist picture painted over photographic outlines. It was a clever fraud : the outlines were visible only to him. But it was what he wanted. It was uneven in style, simple in language, or rather a little primitive, reflecting a mind which was looking at the world not unlike an unspoilt and unprecocious child, to whom things were new. He wondered if he could make

literary capital out of the fact that Jerviss—in his writings—would react to things as if it were the first time he saw them and—more important—as if he were the first man to describe them. A good idea, but he had better be careful. Naiveté was the most difficult thing to produce synthetically. In a way it was easier to pretend to be educated than to be uneducated.

Jerviss smiled when he finished reading the typescript.

"Is that how I write?"

"Yes. Do you like it?"

"Sure." Jerviss went on reading it the second time, smiled as he read the comparison between the boxer and the writer taking their punishments at different times, then his expression changed to a kind of amused wonder as if he were, looking at an unusual photographic aspect of himself. "Well," he said in the end, "it would be nice if the paper liked it, wouldn't it?"

"And now," said Paul, "will you please get in touch with the *Post* and ask your friend to introduce you to the editor. Remember, the article is by you. Nobody has helped you, and if the editor asks you what it was that made you write it, you will say that you saw so many bad articles by ghosts under boxers' names that you were sure you could write one yourself. But I don't think you will be asked this particular question. Editors are busy, harrassed people, the easiest people to take in if you proceed the right way. It's only when you show them highbrow stuff that they suddenly begin to tremble for their circulations . . And that reminds me. Will you ask the editor not to alter the article? That is a vitally important point. If you say that to him he will never have the very slightest doubt that you are really the author of this article. It's the most important point about a writer, no matter how good or how rotten he is. He would feel annoyed if he saw that his story had been interfered with, had been altered by the editor, even if the alteration had improved the story. It's a question of vanity, I suppose, but there it is. Please remember this point. You have to bluff mercilessly . . ."

Jerviss smiled too. "I told you," he said, "I told you before that I've seen too many boxing promoters and journal-

ists in my time to be soft when it comes to bluffing."

"And one more precautionary measure. Sorry I shall have to trouble you. But will you copy out the whole thing in your own handwriting? The beginner usually hasn't a typewriter, even if he could afford one. As a matter of fact the paper would really prefer a typescript, but you don't know that and from you they would accept a handwritten copy. Later on, they might ask you to have your stuff typed out. Wait for that. I'm sorry to trouble you with copying it out."

"No trouble at all." He winked. "If I write it out, I s'pose I could say I wrote it myself . . ."

That afternoon Jerviss bought a new fountain pen. He already possessed a Shaeffer, which he had bought at Saks in Fifth Avenue. He wanted to have a larger one.

"One that will hold more ink," he explained.

CHAPTER THE NINTH

But finally he felt it was all over. All the nervousness and the misgivings of the last fourteen days seemed gone and he was sitting at the ringside. That was one of the most helpful things Jerviss could do for him, to send him a ticket. Because in the last three or four days he had really been feeling quite morbid. He thought Jerviss had forgotten all about it. That would have been so very natural. A boxer is always jumpy and excited just before a fight and he has plenty on his mind to think of apart from affairs like this, which were really quite unimportant for him, to be quite frank.

But when the post brought the ticket he knew at once that everything was going to be perfectly all right. Jerviss hadn't forgotten about it, he had obviously got in touch with his journalist friend and the article was being kept on ice till after the match.

Yet, as he was sitting among the dinner jackets in a lounge suit, just out of nervous forgetfulness (and recognising one or two people—the famous sporting earl and his understudy, a

younger sporting earl, who would step into his shoes when the famous sporting earl died) he felt as if he had bet heavily on Jerviss. He was no exception, he knew, because many of the spectators must have bet either on Jerviss or on Menzel, but he was feeling as if he had put most of his fortune on Jerviss : there were moments when he felt he was banking completely on Jerviss. Would he win ? And if he did would they print the article ? After all, its subject was fairly far removed from boxing. And then, of course, there was *definite* need to worry, because a week ago as he read the carbon copy of the article he saw with agony that he had left the words " sub-conscious " in the final draft. That was most definitely not a Jerviss expression. What would happen if the editor noticed it ? He was sure to notice it, because he would read any article by Jerviss with curiosity. He was feeling sick about it now, frustrated, sick and angry like a burglar who had carried off a job competently in rubber gloves and then left an envelope behind with his name and address in it.

It became suddenly clear that he had spent a whole hour in the Albert Hall, which he didn't know very well, attending a big fight for the second time, and yet he wasn't absorbing the atmosphere at all. He wasn't taking any mental notes. And it was amazing that he was beginning to " report " now, when Jerviss was already in, when he ought to concentrate on Jerviss. But he was looking round. The hall was very crowded. Dinner jackets at the ringside, well-dressed people behind and cloth caps in the galleries.

After the end of the second round he felt as if he wasn't interested any longer in Jerviss, he was looking at people round him, round the ring, the journalists under the ring, the dark outlines of the timekeeper's back. The twelve powerful lamps above the ring which were carefully put out during the intervals brought back to his mind a visit to a film studio. He saw them again glowing, powerful and yellow and dazing, stronger than the sun, and the ring suddenly looked like an operating theatre during an international surgical congress. The seconds—men in white—rushing from the corners, towels, bandages, bottles, pails, the smell of disinfectants, wiping blood with cotton wool. Then the referee, like an eminent lecturer,

explaining to the audience from time to time how the job was getting on.

They were moving much more slowly now. It was the ninth round. Menzel looked quite ugly, a blond giant with magnificent shoulders, but his nose running with blood and blood trickling at one side of his mouth like the half of a comic Chinese moustache, and he moved as if he were drunk. And his legs were thin, unexpectedly, quite ridiculously thin. Jerviss was an inch shorter, but had a better proportioned figure. Better legs. But Jerviss' legs looked tired too. He was shuffling wearily . . Was that an " uppercut " ? He was completely unfamiliar with boxing terminology, he had heard most of the terms, but didn't quite know what they meant and he was looking at the fight in terms of a brawl . . . yes, partly, but perhaps more so in terms of his literary future . . . God, what was that ? He was feeling as if it was on his own chin that Menzel suddenly, unexpectedly, landed a treacherous blow. He was feeling it in the back of his head . . . and Jerviss looked as if he was falling back in a faint, going down on his knees and would be counted out. The roar in the gallery was quite ugly now and growing in volume. People got up to see better. An elderly man behind him began to bark, loud and irritated, like a toothless fox terrier. Then . . . no, that was the bell, almost stifled in the uproar.

He was watching Jerviss now sitting in the corner with his back to him, men in dirty white sweaters surging round him anxiously as if to find the damage . . . what was broken ? One was rubbing Jerviss' leg, another washing his face, slipping a large piece of pink something into his mouth, but Jerviss as he got up looked as if he were pleased, as if he were enjoying himself as he turned round. He looked refreshed, revitalised by the blow. It was perfectly all right, of course ; it came from not understanding boxing ; this was his first really big fight . . . a blow like that was nothing to Jerviss. He watched Jerviss : less excited, but all the same anxious, expectant for a minute, for two. Then, it seemed that both of the men got very slack. Seemed to be hugging each other all the time as if they were wrestling or dancing, two drunken

men together. The bell went again.

" Getting dull," somebody said behind.

Yes, it looked dull. Is this how a well-advertised big fight looks ? An occasional highspot or two, that takes one's breath away and makes respectable elderly men with white moustaches bark like little dogs, then a lot of padding . . . because you must bring it up to eighty thousand words, or three hundred pages for seven and six . . . shuffling about and getting into slopping embraces, clinch is the word, people getting keyed up and nothing happening ? Is that really what it's like ? Supposing he knew a lot about boxing, he might feel quite bored, quite bored. Supposing he wasn't financially interested in the fight . . . but the thought that he was, made him excited again. Jerviss must win at all events ; but how slowly it was going, how slowly. They moved as if they were doing nothing and doing it in " slow motion." Agonisingly slow and quite quiet. The audience was not roaring . . . .

But after the fourteenth round, there was an uproar again, quite an ugly uproar, so that he thought he had missed something ; now what was it, what was it, the interval surely couldn't end as quickly as that. It wasn't a minute, no more than five or ten seconds. He'd missed something, something important. He got up to see better. It was confusing. He saw the referee, grotesquely short, standing on tiptoe, raising Jerviss' right arm with a triumphant smile, and some of the audience booed and the others cheered as it was announced that Jerviss had won on points Paul felt as exhausted and exhilarated as if he had fought and won the match himself.

He left the crowd, some of whose experts were still arguing and explaining to acquaintances and to total strangers why they thought the German had won the match. He soon found himself in the corridor leading to the dressing-rooms. When he found them he became afraid for a moment, lest he might be asked why he wanted to see Jerviss ; and he had just the answer ready (" Foreign Press," of course) when he saw that the corridor was empty save for a young airman, holding his swagger stick in one hand and a cigarette in the other, lounging by the swing doors. He looked very self-

conscious in his breeches and puttees and told Paul that Jerviss was inside.

The room was thick with cigar smoke. Surrounded by five men, all middle-aged, short and baldish. Jerviss was naked save for his blue silk underwear. He was putting on his socks, brown silk with clocks. Paul went up to congratulate him. Nobody took any notice.

"Could you see well?" Jerviss was smiling with a swollen upper lip. He smelt of sweat and Eau de Cologne.

"Perfectly," said Paul, "and thank you for the ticket."

He left the room before Jerviss could say anything indiscreet, still puzzled as to what the editor of the *Post* would think about the article.

As he arrived home after the match he found a note on the hall table. "*A Mr. Hoover rang up at* 7.30. *Please ring him when you come in.*"

It was only now he realised that, all things considered, he had been extremely rude to Hoover. When Hoover rang up that morning to say he'd booked seats for the play, for a time he couldn't quite understand what Hoover was talking about. He was meeting Jerviss. He muttered an apology into the telephone, becoming more firm and sure and businesslike as he went on. He was very busy with some urgent translation work, and would Hoover forgive him, because frankly, he had forgotten all about it. "You know how it is. In any case," (this little joke was a good line: it made Hoover giggle) "it was your fault, Reggie. I told you it was *my* party and not yours. Serves you right. I shall give you a ring as soon as I'm free."

He found Hoover in.

Hoover said he wanted to take him to a party on Tuesday. Quite a Bohemian party. Don't dress.

Paul felt as he walked upstairs that perhaps he had thanked Hoover too warmly for the invitation and was too eager to say yes.

Two days later he saw the article in the *Sunday Post*. It was on the top half of the leader page, trickily spread around a large photograph of Jerviss: "*Les Jerviss says Novelists know Nothing about Boxers.*"

Wasn't that rather too much? He became conscious of his heart beating fast. He never went as far as that. Perhaps they . . . He read the paragraphs rapidly. No, it was unchanged. A sentence or two which was left clumsy on purpose was changed, here and there, by the editorial pencil; otherwise it was the same article.

He pulled out his watch. It was half-past nine, but he knew at once it would be no use "taking a grip on himself," no use "coming down to realities"; he would read the article about fifty times the whole morning and wouldn't do any work.

Later, he would feel less rapturous. Later, because now that he had arrived on the leader page of the *Post* there definitely would be "later"; there was no doubt about it, not the slightest, that the plan had worked. It had worked perfectly, to full satisfaction, unexpectedly well, in fact. He had arrived on the *Post's* leader page.

But was it he who had arrived to the *Post's* leader page? This came at five minutes to ten; he cut his chin with a new razor blade. Would the article have been published, if it had not been under the name of Les Jerviss? Would the *Post* have even "considered" an article on this subject—or any subject for that matter by Paul Noley? "Considered." That ghastly word. It would have been "considered": of course it would have been. "*Carefully*" in fact; bloody carefully. In fact, the rejection slip that would have arrived a few days later would have made it clear it was "carefully considered." Or . . what was that other piece of dirt? Yes . . . "*The Editor simply cannot find room for this otherwise most interesting contribution.*" Oh, what a grand farce it would be to ring up the editor and tell him that it was written by the man who had only met with rejection slips so far. No, it wouldn't be a farce. The editor would have shaken himself like a dog after rain. Nothing would have happened. Nothing. Except that it would have been the end of the conspiracy. That's all.

But he did start work, after all. Towards half-past ten, he went through the papers, hurriedly and elated. He found two good bits, he went downstairs and rang up Emmerling, then he went back to the Sentry Box and typed out five

nundred words. Then he did a lot of cutting for his files.

It was only when he went out to lunch that he was reminded of the triumph. At the entrance of South Kensington station he saw the *Post's* contents bill. "LES JERVISS ATTACKS NOVELISTS."

The large red letters looked threatening. Their size implied a mining disaster, a railway smash, their colour double murder.

Vulgar, yes vulgar, but grand all the same. Vulgarity can be grand. The average newspaper-reading animal would think Jerviss had committed an outrage. For him the large red letters inevitably suggested a scene at a literary lunch where all of a sudden Jerviss got up from his seat and gave Aldous Huxley and J. B. Priestley a sock in the jaw each.

"*Post* sir?" the boy said.

"Yes . . . I mean could you sell me that placard?"

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"I mean this poster. How much is it?"

"Not for sale, sir."

"But I'd like to have it . . . I . . . collect posters."

"If you come back in the afternoon, sir . . ."

Yes, of course, the boy must have thought him mad. He *was* mad; but madness is an important thing. At times.

The man who sat beside him in the tube was reading *The Sunday Post*. Paul stole a careful glance to see if he was reading Jerviss' article. The unknown member of the reading public, however, was devoting his attention to another page. Perhaps he had read it already, or was going to. It would be so interesting to get into conversation with him and ask what he thought of it. The stranger's opinion on Jerviss' article, however, remained a secret for Paul, as he got off the train at Westminster, leaving his paper behind. Paul took the paper from the seat and looked at the article again.

"This is mine," he reflected as he read on, "yet it isn't." Suddenly without any apparent context the face of a long-forgotten character of his early youth stole into his mind. Old Rosenow. Ex-officer of the hussars, ex-beau, ex-land-

owner, ex-everything. By the time he met him Rosenow was at the end of his tether, his expression vacant, his lips twitching. Old Rosenow was said to be the father of Count Louis Guttenbrunn—the well-known, well-to-do, smart, good-looking Count Guttenbrunn—an Austrian edition of Byron in his youth. The gossip whispered in Viennese society was very likely true. The Count was the very image of Rosenow, even of Rosenow in his ruin, and had nothing whatever to do as regards his looks or anything else in the world with his legal father, Count Leopold-Joseph Guttenbrunn, short, stocky, and red-faced even when he was young.

Old Rosenow was a living ghost. Cashiered from the army, people said he lived on old women. Count Guttenbrunn pretended not to know him. He died in misery just before Paul left for London.

CHAPTER THE TENTH

"And who is Basil Tilstock?" Paul asked in the taxi. "I have heard his name before."

"We were at school . . ." Hoover remained silent for a second then he smiled. "I suppose that's all one can say about Basil. That one was at school with him. He works somewhere in the City : it's an old family firm. You will like him. He's very nice. Like most people who are passive and have no ambitions. Basil is a born friend, the same way as there are born actors, valets and waiters. I have practically nothing in common with him and yet I'm very fond of him." Here Hoover paused as if he suddenly changed his mind about what he was going to say. "His parties are usually quite—amusing," he added.

Paul did not notice the stress Hoover laid on "amusing." It was a slight stress, timidly made. Hoover was cautious. Experience had taught him to be.

"Very nice of you to take me."

"Not at all. You want a little change and Basil's parties are a change. Still undecided about Paris?"

" It isn't being undecided. I'm very busy all the time. Especially now. I'm doing long legal translations for money. Boring stuff," he added quickly. "All I can have is Sunday off. But I shall be so very tired by the autumn that I'll have to take a holiday. We might go together . . ."

" You mustn't take a holiday when you are tired," Hoover said. When does autumn begin? When will it be autumn? Could one just fall into a long sleep—like death—for four months?

The party (" It isn't a *party*, you know, just come round at half-past nine . . .") Basil Tilstock was giving was at a converted mews flat off Knightsbridge. Opposite his door they were sluicing a Rolls Royce.

Paul remembered Basil Tilstock. He had seen him at dances last season. He had the long upper lip of eunuchs, and a deadly pale skin. His hands were damp, his handshake limp. He looked sick and kindly. He spoke quietly as if speech was an effort.

For a moment after their entry Paul thought he was attending or rather intruding upon an Eton reunion. There were four or five young men who all seemed to have been to the same house as Hoover and Tilstock, and a middle-aged man whose laughter sounded exactly like bathwater running down in a Victorian house. "Glut . . . glut, glut," he laughed. " He looked as if he had plucked all his eyebrows away . . . too much of a good thing—glut glut glut . . ." He shut his yellow eyes.

A young man separated himself from the group and came up to them.

" Reggie, I haven't seen you for ages." Immediately afterwards he turned to Paul.

" I saw you last year at the Embassy. How is Frau Wurmser? You're Austrian, aren't you? "

It was difficult for Paul to keep from smiling. The young man talking to him looked exactly as if Emma Hamilton had suddenly left the frame and the background Romney the painter had provided for her, and replaced her Regency dress for double breasted flannels. He found that his name was also Reggie.

"Have you known Reggie long?" Reggie asked.

"We were at prep school together."

"You mean you're the same age as he is?"

"Yes, why?"

"Because you look miles younger . . ."

"And here's Nellie," Basil said with as much enthusiasm as he was capable of. He kissed a woman who had just come in.

"Who's she?" Paul asked Reggie.

"Nellie McDougall. Marvellous creature. She's in the Strollers'. Haven't you ever been to the Strollers'? You must come some time. I'm a member."

Towards half-past ten she sat herself at the piano and sang. She had a husky, Edwardian-music-hall voice. She sang *Heaven will Protect the Vicar's Daughter*, *Milly's Cigar Divan*, and *Mon Père m'a Donné un Mari*.

"You must do *Don't go Down the Mine, Daddy*," Tilstock said.

She sang it. They all sang the refrain with her. Then everybody clapped and Basil kissed Nell and switched on all the lamps again, and a pretty girl offered everybody fruit cup. The bell rang and somebody went downstairs to answer it, then a minute later Basil said: "Hullo Veronica. You know everybody . . ."

She was more dashing in her appearance than usual. There was a halo of flowers of coloured glass round her hair, and the straps of her red and gold sandals revealed toe-nails varnished a darker crimson than ever. She smiled at Paul. Paul bowed. The bow was deferential, but in a way automatic. After his unsuccessful pass at her in his rooms, three weeks ago, he had decided that in future he wouldn't know Veronica. Just wouldn't know her. And should he happen to come across her by chance, he would greet her with formal politeness. Whenever he had thought of the possibility of meeting her by chance, he had rehearsed in his mind the way he would greet her. He must, he felt, show her that it was really he who was insulted by her silly behaviour.

But now that he had done it, Paul suddenly felt embarrassed and sorry for carrying it out with such strict adherence to the

preconceived line. He felt he was being far-fetched and childish. She was, after all, a young girl in spite of her challenging appearance, and it was no wonder that she had acted in the way she did when he tried to seduce her. He was overdoing it.

He felt he must do something to undo the too successful effect of the act he had rehearsed so carefully in his mind. He did not realise that it would be so successful as to make her almost blush with shame. He must do something, he thought uneasily and nervously. But what could he do without appearing too deliberate—which she would misinterpret? Just to show that he had no designs on her but wished to remain "good friends," whatever that might mean. What if he smiled at her suddenly, or walked up to her and entered into conversation? No, that would never do; she might take revenge, and the end of it would be that he would snub her even more callously.

He saw, without looking too intently, that she had been introduced to one of the middle-aged men and that he was beginning to take an interest in her. But he knew that she was still uneasy because of him, because she must have noticed she was overdressed, and because the most attractive youne men in the room were hardly aware of her existence. He also noticed that Veronica was taking great pains not to show her uneasiness. She was demonstratively gay and drank a good deal of the fruit cup Basil kept mixing with Nell, running up and down the stairs to the kitchen and back and shaking the whole house as if it were built of cards.

They danced to the gramophone.

Towards midnight he went up to the kitchen, the one place where he hoped to find some water to drink. As he entered he saw Veronica combing her hair by the charwoman's mirror stuck above the china rack.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I was looking for some water."

"Come in, Paul," she said, and her voice was warm. "I'm only combing my hair."

He reached for the tap, by mistake turned the hot one

first, then let the cold water run into the sink. To the accompaniment of rushing water he tried hard to think of what he should say to her. The moment he raised his hand to take a glass from the shelf, he felt her hand on his arm. He was quite startled. He turned round.

" Still angry with me, Paul ? "

For answer he turned round facing her, and took her hand. Veronica suddenly came closer to his face, and before he could say a word she was kissing him on the lips as if afraid his answer might be in the affirmative. It was all very unexpected and passionate. " What a darling she is . . . Even if she's tipsy now, because she must be, just a little bit," he thought. What a darling . . . but the snubbing was perhaps an incentive. Her lips smelt slightly of spirits. He embraced her and pressed his body to hers so that it almost hurt. As he kissed her, a glass forget-me-not fell from her hair. He wanted to pick it up.

" Don't bother," she whispered languidly. A real darling. A real darling.

" You still haven't answered my question," she whispered.

" Oh darling, darling," said Paul, a little hazily, "why must you rub it in ? I'm such a fool, and you're so sweet. Have you been angry with me ? Of course . . . Naturally."

They heard the clock in the landing strike midnight and the singing and the music and the stamping of feet from below. A girl's voice shrieked " Let's ask the policeman in."

They walked into Basil's bedroom and sat on the bed.

" I think," said Paul, settling Veronica on his lap, " that you are the dearest and sweetest girl on earth. I've been thinking a good deal about you since that unfortunate evening, and I felt very sorry for my behaviour. . . "

He suddenly felt this was true and he said it with conviction. " Not so much for . . . because a lovely creature like you must be used to things like that, but I was sorry for what I did afterwards. The point is, you see I'm very sensitive. Like most sarcastic people. And—wasn't I very ridiculous ?"

" Yes, darling," Veronica kissed him. " You were. That's why I like you."

" What a waste of time," Paul said.

" Mm," Veronica said. She laughed a second later. How lovely she looked. She must have liked him for some time in spite of everything. Oh, how lovely she looked. A strong scent, old-fashioned and sweet, mixing with her own body smell. She gave the scent her own personality.

The door was opened. It was so very sudden that they had no time to separate. Even if they had wanted to. They didn't want to much.

But when he looked up, it was Hoover he saw. For the first second—Paul remembered this later ; much later, months later—Hoover did not say a word. He looked painfully surprised, shocked. Surely, a smart man, a cynic, wouldn't be shocked so easily. . . .

" I'm frightfully sorry," Hoover said with exaggerated courtesy, " I'm looking for something."

He was gone. Paul noticed that he closed the door behind him with the refined touch of a well-trained servant, his hand trembling as he turned the knob as if afraid he would make a noise.

" You want a hair-cut," Veronica said.

Later on Tilstock and Nell came up with glasses on a tray and offered them champagne cup.

" Personal service," Nell said.

" Isn't he a kill-joy ? " said Nell when Paul refused another cup.

" Now look here," Basil said. " You needn't think it's doped because Reggie Hoover said he was feeling sick and went home . . ."

" Has he gone already ? " Nell asked. " I wanted to ask him to lend me a book."

" He's gone. And he wanted Reggie to drive him back. They live near each other."

" I always thought Reggie lived in the Albany," Nell said.

" Look here, children," Tilstock said. " Nell and a few of us are making up a party to go to the *Three Keys*, before it's raided again. Would you like to come with us or stay. . . . To take care of the house ? Just as you like . . . I shouldn't go home yet. It's quite early."

Paul did not answer. He almost blushed with excitement

when he saw that the problem on which he had been reflecting for the last few minutes was offered such an unexpected and beautiful solution. Nothing could have been more perfect.

But before Basil or Nell could have said anything, Veronica, whose lips were in the glass, said in a distorted voice that they would rather stay. The voice sounded so patently comic that Paul encouraged himself to pretend that he was tipsy and echoed with the fixation of a drunkard that he too would stay.

" Right," Basil said. He assumed the expression of an amateur pimp, whose only interest was the true love of the game. " We shan't be very long. Be good . . ."

" There's the backgammon board on the bookshelf," Nell said, " in case you get bored." They all laughed.

They heard the laughter renewed downstairs, then the clatter of noises and voices died off for a second, only to be renewed by loud guffaws of appreciation greeting some piece of amusing information.

He watched her ; he felt his pulse. He knew why the voices had died away downstairs for a minute and why the silence ended in laughter. But Veronica was still smiling at him, and presently she reached for his hand. He took hers and gave it a grip.

A deep voice came from below the street : " Thank you ever so much, sir." Then the bang of the front door, the slam of the taxi-door, the slot-meter went down with a clink, the engine gurgled, rubber tyres slid over the cobble stones. Then it was suddenly quiet.

Paul went up to the window and moved the curtain. The night was warm ; the moon was green.

" It's hot in here," Veronica said.

" Do take this off," said Paul.

" Must I ? "

For an answer he embraced her and held her so tightly that she could hardly breathe. He began caressing her, urgently. " Yes, please."

" You'll take care of me, won't you ? " she whispered, and stifled a little hiccough.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

"HERE is something for you," Jerviss said as soon as he took stock of Paul's room. He handed Paul a long slip of paper.

London Post Trust Limited, P.C. Account. Midland Bank Limited, Chancery Lane Branch. . . . Pay Les Jerviss, Esq., Fifty Pounds. . . . No. 48,160. W. Peccgg, Secretary.

"It's very good," said Paul, "very good. . . . Later on you may have more. More articles, I mean." He felt everything he was saying was unreal. In his confusion he put his finger on the back of the cheque and felt the indentation of the two lines written by the cheque-writer in red ink. He looked at the three stars after the word "pounds." It was all too fast and unexpected. It came to his mind suddenly that he had not thought about how much the paper was going to pay for the article. Not when he was writing it and not since it was published. He looked at the three stars again, after the word "pounds." "Could you have it cashed, please," he said, trying to be matter of fact.

"Yes, and I'd better write out a cheque for you," Jerviss took out his new literary fountain pen.

"No. You mustn't." He frowned. "It's most dangerous. Not even a bank clerk must know that we have any dealings with each other. I'm sorry to be a nuisance, but I must ask you to give me cash each time. We mustn't take risks. Nobody must guess you aren't the author . . ."

"All right. I will give you fifty quid when we meet next."

"Twenty-five, you mean."

"No. Fifty."

"But why, I mean . . ."

"That's all right. It was you who did the stuff."

"Yes, but we made the agreement on a fifty-fifty basis."

"I can't take it from you. Not really."

"Now look here . . . please cut out the prep school stuff. You know jolly well that I couldn't have placed the article without you, and even if I could, I wouldn't have had fifty pounds for it. So just you go and put twenty-five pounds

into the bank or buy some books with it. That is if you are feeling remorseful."

"Yes, you said you would tell me what to read," Jerviss said.

"I shall. It will be a good thing for you to read a few novels. We shall eventually be writing fiction together, so you may as well investigate the field. What other people write and how. . . . Tell me what novels have you been reading?"

"Not many. I've been reading more straight books. The other day Gingham, that's the journalist I told you about, d'you know him? He's on the *Express*. Anyhow, he told me they were recommending *Whisper in the Dark* as Book of the Month or something. Well, I bought it. Cost seven and six. It wasn't the money, you follow, but I couldn't read half of it . . . All blarney. All about a girl, living in the country, Kent or something . . . and nothing whatever happened. It was all about how she'd sit by the fire, and how she'd go out alone to the hills, then she met her young man. I thought aha, now something's going to pop. But there was nothing. They talked and talked for hundreds of pages, about nothing. It wasn't highbrow stuff, they talked about nothing like that. I tried to skip a page or two, then I read the end of it. Nothing whatever happened in the whole book. You know, a 'tec story is ever so much more interesting. Well, I ask you, whose fault it was that I couldn't get on with it?"

Paul smiled. He had read *Whisper in the Dark*, which one critic had hailed as a "restrained but most powerful analysis of a young woman's mind. A book which reveals so much more than the average woman—about whom it is written—would care to admit, even to herself." He smiled because he remembered that "restrained" was the only word in the criticism he agreed about. It was certainly restrained; the author—a writer of Kent who ought to have been prosecuted for spoiling the countryside in terms of literature—had also managed to restrain everything out of it that was interesting in life or in letters.

"D'you know who wrote it?" he asked the boxer later.

Jerviss shook his head.

" I never looked at the fellow's name. It would have gone out of my head, anyway. And I don't always remember the names of the books either, but that was such a funny one, *Whisper in the Dark*."

Jerviss smiled a schoolboy smile, and Paul found him most likeable at that moment. Then the smile disappeared as he watched it. Now he looked sorry for himself.

" I mean—I told you this before—the trouble with me is that I had not what you call education. I just went to school like the others, then I went to work when I was fourteen. I tell you this 'cos I know you got brains. That's clear, I mean, isn't it? Don't make faces like that. You are a gentleman, you belong to a different class and yet you c'n understand what I call the man in the street . . ."

Paul looked at the smallness of the Sentry Box, the cheap Axminster carpet, the dusty walls. Jerviss obviously meant his father's landscape in its frame of mirror glass and his *Empire* clock.

" That's why I tell you this. I know it stays between us. It's like this. I made what *they* call a nice bit of money "—he laid a condescending emphasis on *they*—" and most people think I got somewhere. I s'pose I did. Championship, the Belt and headlines in the papers. Some people recognise me in the street. Sometimes I feel happy, but most of the time I just feel I got nowhere."

" Nowhere? What d'you mean? "

" I mean that when I'm alone I always feel Jerviss you're a nobody." He felt uneasy as he said this because when he thought of it he always thought of it as " Leslie, you're a nobody." But he thought " Jerviss " was more stylish. Better taste.

" Nonsense," Paul said with conviction, which steadily gathered force out of nothing as he went on. " If you mean that you've got no position in life you're wrong, because you have got one and it's an important one. And apart from being a sporting celebrity, you have money, a very pleasing personality and charm . . ."

" Oh, I don't mean that." Here Jerviss lowered his voice

feeling that it was rude to interrupt Paul's argument. " It's just that I feel I'm nowhere, because you know what I mean, I can't speak languages, I've read very few books and I don't know anything of Science and Culture. It's all very well being champion—but when I'm alone I always feel there's something missing. It's ever so funny," he added with a smile, " but I always feel it more in the evening, now isn't that funny ? "

" The vitality of body and mind is lower at night. Only natural."

" Is that what it is ? " He remained silent for a moment, trying to memorise the expressions he heard from Paul's lips. " I'm not what you call a happy man," he said a little later.

" D'you think other people are ? "

" I don't know that . . . But I know, I know for a fact that the life other boxers have wouldn't make me happy, either. Mind you, some are happy ; but I wouldn't have their lives. Always in company, from the pictures to nightclubs, from night-clubs to women, gambling, drinking, idling. And the way they talk and the women they have. I s'pose it's all right when you are twenty or, say, twenty-five—yes, say twenty-five," he added as an afterthought of accuracy. " That would never make me happy. Not me."

" But what would you like to do instead ?"

" I don't know. I'd like to write. Like you." He aded quickly, " I know what you'd say, because I remember. You said a straight left's a better thing than a bad book, didn't you ? Now," he added a little triumphantly, " I'd like to be able to write a good book. I've got the ideas, I've seen the world and I know I could tell people something about life. I could tell them more about it than the chap who wrote *Whisper in the Dark*. And yet I can't."

The mask became a little sad, the lower part of the face above the chin more narrow and pinched than he had ever seen it. It wasn't a boxer's face, it was the face of a tortured youth, young and yet somehow timeless.

Paul knew that he had to speak now, quickly, well, and fluently, perhaps amusingly, not giving Jerviss the chance to

think that he was taking pity on him or creating an impression that he was trying to patronise him or comfort him. And not giving him a chance of being ashamed of himself, a second later, for having let himself go. It wouldn't do. It would separate them, he knew.

"Nonsense," he said. "I am very glad you told me these things, because now I can see your situation clearly and because I can tell you a few things, Les. First of all, may I pluck up enough courage to tell a middle-weight champion that he hasn't enough courage . . ."

"I've been told that before," Jerviss smiled a sly smile. "But not the way you mean it."

"Besides," Paul continued, plucking up courage, "let us hope that now your life is entering into a new phase. Your craving for the things of the mind, for culture, is very easy to satisfy. At least, I find it very easy to help you. And I shall always be at your disposal, to tell you what to read and how to read."

"Well, of course, you will be. Thank you very much, indeed, Paul."

It was the first time the boxer had called him by his Christian name, and Paul liked the way Jerviss did it without any shy and conventional apology.

"You know," said Jerviss, "I always feel when we're together that I've known you all my life. Fact of the matter is, if I'd known you ten years ago, my life would have been different."

"Certainly," Paul said, and he winked. "Had you met me ten years ago and listened to me, you wouldn't be Light Heavy-Weight champion of England now, for one thing, but perhaps an embittered pen-pusher—as I very often feel I am myself."

Jerviss laughed.

There was a little silence, and Paul began to reflect. He became more conscious than he had ever been during their previous meetings that now he was face to face with a man who represented life. Not essentially Life In The Raw, but essentially Life Which Is Never In Bad Taste, and life enormously attractive. Apart from a little reflective impulse,

and a leaning towards a primitive kind of self-analysis, which rendered his type a little less clear-cut, but made his personality all the more attractive, Jerviss was a typically active man, who emanated life round him. A personality tasting of life, smelling of life. Life which Paul felt very often in his own case was neglected for letters and was gradually more and more lived by him at second-hand.

He looked at Jerviss' white sports jacket, his dark blue silk shirt and collar, his tie with its loud brown and gold stripes, his almost purple flannel trousers, his silk socks, his suede shoes, his rings, the gold bracelet on his very wide wrist, his cravat chain. How painfully ridiculous these gadgets would have made a man who was short and thin and anæmic and of blotchy complexion ! What a caricature of elegance and " smartness " they would have made ! For that matter, Paul felt a secret desire to dress up like Jerviss one day, to make an excursion out of his customary sober way of dressing ; just a little holiday from conventions ; but he knew he would never dare to do it. It was only people like Jerviss who could get away with it. His romanticism in dress could do nothing to contradict his enormous vitality, his fine boyishness maturing into manliness, his attractive aliveness. On the contrary, the loud notes of the textiles were a reflection of a very vital personality, of a great *joie de vivre* and of the cravings of the young mind for ornaments. Like the male of the more noble kind of animals, Paul thought.

" By the way," said Jerviss later, " Ted Hinchcliff (that's the chap who writes sports on the *Mail*) said that the editor thought a rare lot of our article, and said he'd be glad to see some more stuff by me. What d'you think of that ? "

" And you only tell me this now. . . . What do I think ? I think it means that we're made. It means that we shall succeed. It is a grand thing. But one thing you must always bear in mind "—he suddenly changed his tone—" we are on a new experiment. I'm a ghost. I never materialise except to you. There are, and there have been, many boxers who published stuff under their own names ; but it was understood that the stuff was written by someone else who

could write, or at least could put pen to paper. The editor knew it, Fleet Street knew it, and everybody in general knew it, except those who only use their heads to put their hats on. This was, and still is, a convention in Fleet Street, and the ghost did not even attempt to write like the person for whom he wrote the article. He wrote in his own style, if you could call it a style . . . Whereas I do my best to write exactly as if you had written it."

"That's right. It beats me how you can put it exactly as I'd have put it. How do you do it?"

"Well, Les, that's routine, a little self-discipline and something of being an actor—an actor who never appears in body but only in spirit. I shall explain it to you some day. What I want to say is this: Nobody, not even a newspaperman, can guess that this article was not by you. I'm certain of that. It was inexperienced writing but it had a personality behind it—I say this in self-praise. And now I am more certain than ever that they will never know. It has got to remain our secret. We've got to make everybody believe that you are a writer yourself. And we shall be successful. You perhaps can't see the whole point, because you are too much of an interested party. But for the public a boxer who has some original literary talent is unique and sensational. Editors will have to see it, because there's good copy in it. The whole thing is in the secret conspiracy, and we must be very careful about it. I don't want to exaggerate, but you mustn't even admit that you know me. We mustn't even meet in public, because with my notorious bad luck we might bump into someone who won't be such a great fool as most people and might put two and two together. You must come to my place or to a quiet restaurant. You mustn't even speak to your wife about me . . ."

Jerviss laughed. "No." His laughter suddenly disappeared. "No," he said again.

Paul changed the subject.

"And what did your friends say about it?"

"They pulled my leg a bit, specially Redfern, the ex-middleweight, you know, he keeps a pub up Tottenham Court Road; the Perseverance. He said one day I should

write a novel. I said why not. He kept on pulling my leg and I only laughed to think that he doesn't know that it's us who are pulling his leg really, isn't it ? "

" And what about the others ? "

" Oh, Amor "—he smiled—" that's my manager, he said it was a pity I didn't stick to boxing in the article. He said I'd have got more money for it. I said I didn't write it for money. Good fellow Amor is, but he's like the rest—thinks about nothing but money, money . . ."

" The main thing now is," said Paul, " that if ever an editor asks you to call on him, which he is most likely to do in the near future, you have to be careful. You can say that you have written a good many articles before, but you destroyed them as you didn't like them, and you were too shy to show them to people. You could also say what you told me about the things you wrote when you were a schoolboy, the Bermondsey paper and the rest. Now then, if they ask about your method you can say that you go through your stuff two or three times. Rewriting it. Say that you use *The Oxford Dictionary* and *Roget's Thesaurus*. Look, I'll write these two titles down for you ; you ought to buy them, they are very useful books. Then if he asks you who your favourite writer is you could say Ashenden. I shall get you a book by him. It's called *Rosie Gann*. It will interest you to read it. In any case, it's a safe book to begin reading with and a safe book to talk about till you find something better."

Paul pulled out his watch. " It's eleven—and we haven't discussed business yet. I keep on thinking about possible subjects and I think it would be a good idea to start a series of articles. D'you know anything about great boxers of the past ? " Paul took a slip of paper from his writing desk and glanced at it for a second. " People like Cribb, Gully, Mendoza, Fitzsimmons . . ."

" Fitzsimmons." Jerviss nodded. " Heard of him. D'you know much about him ? "

" No, but that wouldn't prevent us from finding out a thing or two. As far as I know, there are a few books written about them. I've already seen a reference book. What about doing say half a dozen ? "

" Okay, if you think it'd be worth your while."
" We might as well try. You won't lose by it, in any case."
" I'm sure of that," Jerviss laughed.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

PAUL seemed to like books which were difficult to read. He didn't pretend he liked them, it was all genuine, you could see, but they were difficult to read even if they were in good English because they were usually about people one wasn't interested in. Good books, of course, were an acquired taste and one had to force oneself a little bit but this one was really difficult. Veronica was quite pleased when a customer came in. She was a middle-aged woman in tweeds ; most of the customers of the Mercury were middle-aged women, as far as she could judge after six weeks. She offered her a seat by her desk and told her all about the guaranteed service. Then while she talked she changed the position of the vase, because the roses were very big and she couldn't see the customer, then the woman said she would take the guaranteed service and Veronica got up and showed her upstairs to Miss Buckley.

She took up *Soldier's Pay* when she returned, read a paragraph, then looked up. With this sort of book it was no use skipping pages, one had to read them cover to cover, or not at all. She looked out of the window. The row of first editions on the top shelf had been sold yesterday, and the shelf was empty. She could see the square beyond the window. The square looked green and lemon, and the shadow of a black van parked against the railings was lengthening. She could see those strange twin buildings on the left—one of them was a Catholic convent—and the back entrances of Oxford Street stores on the right. And the bank at the corner of Harley Street. Harley Street begins with a bank at one end and ends with a bank at the other. Daddy had said that when she was a little girl ; just before they went to India. As so often in the last six weeks she reflected that this was a nice

pleasant job. It was quite well paid and it had something good about it. One saw people entirely different from those at Mrs. Fife's. " I have a commanding position," she told Paul once, " I sit in a glass cage." " Just like a writer," Paul said. " The ivory tower nowadays is just a glass cage . . . and it is by no means soundproof." Paul shrugged his shoulders. " Some writers are deaf, of course." Well, her glass cage was soundproof. She saw the tops of vans and private cars floating towards Oxford Street and Portland Place and Harley Street, but she didn't hear them. She wondered what the time was. As she bent to look at the clock over the back staircase, she saw a young man, tall and smart in a striped suit and a black homburg, carrying an umbrella in July. . . . At once she knew she had met him or had seen him before, but she had so many subscribers. Before she could think, she remembered she had seen him at Basil's party and she at once began to take an interest in him. But he passed the cage without seeing her. She would have been glad if he had seen her and had come in for a chat. They had certainly been introduced, but of course one never hears the name, and he had been talking to Paul at the party. No, she couldn't possibly go upstairs and make herself known to him, because that sort of thing wasn't done. Even if she knew him quite well.

Really, when it came to that, the appearance of the man in the striped suit with the umbrella was just one of the reminders, just one of the two hundred and fifty things that made her think about Basil's party. It was some four weeks ago now, but it was naturally a thing one could not forget; one just doesn't want to. It seemed he was the one who came into Basil's bedroom when they were kissing on Basil's bed. Now she felt pretty certain it was he. People look different in a lounge suit and she had only glimpsed him for a second, but she was almost certain he was the one. Paul afterwards said it didn't matter because he knew him, he was a friend of his. Of course, it didn't matter. And Paul did say what his name was, too.

He certainly saw how it began, but of course he wouldn't know what had happened afterwards and since . . . and

before, because it really started much earlier, not at Gwen Simms's dinner, two years ago, when they first met, but at the Duke of Worcester's dance. He naturally wouldn't know all that, but what would he think if he knew? What would another man—not involved—think about a love affair? It would be interesting to know. And if he was a friend of Paul's, did he ask Paul about it afterwards? Because men are really quite as bad as women about these things. Except that they pretend they don't want to know; some men do. They make a humorous reference to it and try to trick each other into telling them things. But Paul was very discreet. He wouldn't tell about his other affairs, even without mentioning names. "Well, my previous affair was a bearded lady from a circus," Paul said. "She had a nice square beard." She laughed, then she asked him again, but he just refused to tell. "I wouldn't tell you or anybody else, or somebody else about you," Paul said. "Writing about it, is different. Putting it into a novel is different. . . ."

That was what people generally expected a man to say. With a woman it was different. There was definitely a need to talk it over with someone. This wasn't one of those things one went through at school and while one was a deb. This was important. The real thing. Sylvia was very wrong when she said that a real affair never came up to the preconceived ideas of romantic little girls. She said that over three years ago, the first time she went to Tenderness to stay with the Jenkinses. She was eighteen then. Just after she left Westonbirt, and looking back on it she was really quite childish and romantic. A little more grown up than Claudia, not not much more. Claudia was a child and she still is at twenty-one, and married. Sylvia, of course, is a good eight years older and she is a novelist who must have known a good deal judging from her books. Claudia, of course, exaggerated, she'd always said at school that Sylvia had a tremendous lot of love affairs and all she put into her books was absolutely true. She must have known a good deal and she may have had a good deal of experience, but she somehow didn't look it. She wasn't quite thirty, but she looked more. More, in rather an old-maidish way. Of course, Sylvia could

never dress. With all that money! She could never dress and once her knickers fell off at a dance. Everything she wore was expensive but nothing ever suited her. She looked down on the black frock she was wearing now. Sylvia must have paid quite a lot for it, though of course she had a rebate because she gave Molyneux write-ups. When the Mercury people said she must wear a black frock, because that was the regulation, Sylvia gave it to her. And it suited her much better, so much better that she made it a point never to wear it when Sylvia was about. And for the same reason—yes, for the same reason she felt she mustn't tell Sylvia more about Paul. If she did, it would only make Sylvia jealous and she would drop her. She was certain about that. She was really very kind, she would do a lot for her if she were down on her luck, she would give her things and do things for her, but on the other hand if she knew that she was having an affair with a good-looking boy she just couldn't bear it.

It was a pity, of course, there was nobody to talk it over with, because not only was it her first serious affair, and the real thing, but last week she thought Paul was just the lover she had always wanted. This wasn't clear in the beginning. Not because Paul was good-looking, because she always said she didn't like attractive men, but that wasn't quite true and in any case it became an additional attraction, but Paul was really very intelligent and he was cosmopolitan. He wasn't, of course, quite a foreigner. She had been thinking about foreigners before, but in all things that mattered he was. He was even a little bit mysterious. Or was it just that Paul really was reserved. It was funny, he didn't look a bit reserved, you had to know him a little better, then you saw he was.

But it was attractive all the same. There were things about him that only began to attract one as one knew him better. They were not in the least obvious at the beginning. One thought he was just a good-looking young man with brains, then it came out that he had a terrific, overpowering personality. He was forceful and strangely, strangely self-contained. One had never met anybody like him before,

but one heard, one imagined, one read that there were men like him. Cold, hard, aloof. He wouldn't cringe, he wouldn't flatter, he wouldn't court, he would go and get it. Yes, yes ; cave-man all right—it was no use saying that cave-men weren't attractive, but Paul was a good mixture. A cave-man with culture and intelligence. He wasn't crude, he was merely forceful. Sylvia knew nothing about about these things, she couldn't ; about love affairs not coming up to expectations. Because Paul did. One never knew what one wanted in advance, one only knew one wanted something and one wanted it very badly. One's nerves were in a frightful state before and now one was feeling definitely better. And this was what a modern love affair should really be. Give and take. One shouldn't be in love, shouldn't give too much, shouldn't take too much.

And, this was really very important, when they were in bed Paul was quite different. Not only passionate, but he became tender and affectionate. And that was the most wonderful thing.

She got up. She would go to the little Danish restaurant in Duke Street; the best coffee in London. As she crossed the hall she saw the stranger coming towards her with two books under his arm . . . But, of course, she wouldn't tell him the whole story. . . .

She smiled at him when their eyes met and she was just on the verge of saying, we met at Basil's house, when the stranger gave her a quick and insulting glance that swiftly ran through her. He looked at her face first, then down her dress. Then he turned his head quickly and brusquely. She felt as if he had slapped her face. He treated her as if she was a prostitute, soliciting.

She felt she was blushing, her face was hot.

Who the hell did he think he was ?

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

So it did work.

He did his German articles as quickly as possible straight on to the typewriter and regardless of grammatical niceties. Then he ran to the London Library and returned with the taxi floor filled with volumes on sporting history. He spent his mornings reading up material and his evenings writing up the sketches. One by one he wrote the life-stories of the great bare-knuckle fighters of the eighteenth century, and of the first boxers of the nineteenth. There was Belcher, Pat Henley, John Broughton and Mendoza, the Jew. The first two sketches on Cribb and Figg cost him the same agony that he had gone through when he did the first article to appear under Jerviss' name. He had misgivings, he was agitated, nervous, afraid. And after the first two specimens were sent in by Jerviss, Paul had a definite horror that the staff of the paper would find the idea fishy and cross-question Jerviss. It was madness, he reflected, to start with these. It was too dangerously, too stupidly early. All very well that a boxer would and could or ought to be, quite legitimately, interested in the doings of the early protagonists of the ring, but the writing of the sketches involved a certain amount of scholarship, selective power, critical sense . . . contrasted against. . . . No, it was madness, and in despair Paul reflected that he really deserved punishment for his rashness.

Then in the midst of his anxiety, there came in an envelope the letter Jerviss had received from the *Sunday Post*. Then Jerviss himself, blowing in the same evening with a whimsical grimace and pouring forth the story of the interview between the editor and himself. It was too much. The bluff had worked to perfection, and Jerviss by now realised what the idea really meant, considered it first-class farce himself and shared with him the pleasures of accompliceship.

By the time eight of the sketches were posted, one Sunday an advertisement appeared in the paper—a large square, a size usually associated with snappy, crisp, illustrated essays

on the beneficial effects of liver salts, the ill-effects of night starvation and the social disadvantages of " merely half-cleaned " lavatories—announcing under Jerviss' photograph that he was writing a special series of articles on great boxers of the past. " Starting next Sunday. Reserve your copy early." How could he ever think summonses like that were vulgar ? They were the very opposite of vulgarity. Nothing was so refined and select as success.

Then there came the first of the series in the *Post*. It occupied a whole page. There were hardly any alterations. He looked long at the paper. He read the story twice.

Then as one morning he crossed Piccadilly on his way to the London Library, a little uneasy that the Library staff might become suspicious, then arguing with himself that they were not likely to read any other paper but *The Times Literary Supplement*, he saw the bright magenta delivery vans of the *Sunday Post* with yellow posters stuck on their sides.

LES JERVISS ON BOXERS OF THE PAST

GREAT NEW SERIES

Too sober to give in to his desire to take a prolonged interest in these unexpected and dazzling consequences, he went on working. The only effect his success had on him that he plucked up enough courage to continue the work a little more in his own style. The style was still simple and restrained, he was still scared to put down anything which he felt would be too obviously " not Jerviss." But as he was writing them, one after the other, he felt as if he were an actor, an impersonator. But he knew the time was coming when he would be able to give more of his own self. When he was writing of Mendoza and of his Lyceum in the Strand, he felt there was no need to suppress his desire to re-create something like the true atmosphere of London in 1820. There was Byron, for example. Nobody ever seemed to have said much about Byron's relations to Mendoza and other boxers, beyond a few references to the screen he had made out of boxing prints. Then gradually a lyrical note crept into the

sketches. The stories of Gentleman Jackson, and Gully who became a member of parliament, were already more short stories based on historical facts, the love affair of Deaf Burke a variation on the theme of unrequited love. Bendigo was a problem. An exciting problem. No, Jerviss could not possibly feel all he felt about Bendigo. All that strange fascination of the period and of the forces that turned a prize idol into a Revivalist who ended his life in prayer. There was a good deal there that Jerviss couldn't possibly understand about Bendigo. He was material for a full dress biography or for a novel. But he doubted whether he would ever be able to write it under Jerviss' name.

" But didn't he ask you about writing ? " Paul asked.

" Not a word. He was very nice though," Jerviss said.

" Quite, quite ; but didn't he find it unusual, wasn't he struck by the idea of a boxer taking to writing ? "

" No."

" I wonder if he realised who you were at all."

" He realised it all right," Jerviss smiled. " He talked about nothing but boxing. He said he used to box himself at Yale."

" Yale ? You mean he's an American ? "

" That's right. I never met anybody more American than that young fellow."

" Young ? "

" Yes, about your own age."

Paul looked up. " I see," he said. " He's the junior partner at Granville's. Yes, of course—I understand now."

" I almost put my foot into it," Jerviss said.

" Why ? "

" When he gave me the contract and told me to sign on the dotted line . . . I got the wind up awful. I mean that's natural, isn't it ? A boxer soon learns to be careful about signing contracts. I only read the first bit and I said ' let me show it to a pal of mine '—I almost gave you away."

" No, that's perfectly all right. He might have thought you meant a lawyer friend . . . I must say, this has turned out better than I expected. To tell you quite frankly, the

letter from Granville's came before I even thought of sending you to a publisher to offer the sketches for publication in book form. It's marvellous. Much better than I thought. But tell me more about it. He surely must have talked about other things beside boxing. Did he say he liked them ?"

" I don't think he did, no. He only talked about business at the end. When I went in he jumped from the chair and said come right in, Mr. Jurviss. I thought you were grand, boxing Menzel—that kind of thing. Gave me a cigar, too."

" Not a word about the sketches ? "

" No. . . . Yes, in the end he said they saw the sketches in the *Post*, and that they wanted to publish them . . . but he wrote that in the letter. Why d'you worry about it ? "

" I'm not exactly worrying, but it's . . . well—strange. In any case, let me look at the contract."

" Looks fishy to me."

" No, it's perfectly all right," Paul said, when he read it.

" D'you think so—honest ? "

" Yes, why ? "

" This bit here . . . indemnify publisher . . . and the rest of it, this bit here."

" ' *Author undertakes to indemnify publisher of all suits arising out of libel or any civil actions*,' " Paul read aloud. " Yes, that's all right. The libel clause. It's in every publisher's contract. We are only writing about dead people, anyway, except Johnson."

" So, I s'pose I've got to sign on the dotted line," Jerviss said.

" Yes, and you have to receive eighty pounds advance, whether you want it or not."

He went on working. He knew it was success which gave him confidence, and he felt as very rarely before that he really enjoyed regular work. He did not need to prompt himself, his self-assurance—almost a relic of his late 'teens—had returned. He slept well and woke fresh. The days when practically anything he wrote in English was done on a very slender chance, when the fate of the results of anxious hours seemed for him to depend on the moods, prejudices and

fancies of editors and editorial underlings, were gone. The dreadful daydreams of being unrequired, unrequited, unsolicited, with their hideous implications of humiliation, were gone. He worked with assurance, pleasure, delight.

Then he sent Jerviss out to search for pictures, as the volume was to be illustrated. He was glad to go to the places Paul directed him ; little second-hand bookshops in Charing Cross Road and Holborn. He returned from these excursions, for him in an alien but exciting world, full of enthusiasm. In large portfolios he carried engravings, lithographs, mezzotints. He seemed to have bought whole stocks. Some of his acquisitions were crude, irrelevant, and uninteresting, but among them there was a print of a fine etching by Grozer of short and stumpy Tom Johnson against gigantic Isaac Perrins at the famous Banbury fight. The little fellow, in his light pink knee-breeches over white stockings and blue suspender-tabs, hardly reached his opponent's shoulders.

" I'm going to have this framed after the thing's over and hang it in my room," Jerviss said.

" Yes," said Paul, " and you should have some more, say about five or six. It was a very lucky period—the early nineteenth century. The best period of the engraver's art just coincided with the great days of boxing. . . . Those days are over. Nowadays the best engravers don't want to have anything to do with boxing. All that will remain of you and your fellows to posterity is a few camera angles printed on cheap rotation paper. . . ."

" I say," said Jerviss, too busy taking stock of his acquisitions to listen to Paul, " look at this, and tell me what you think of it ? And what d'you think of me for finding it ? "

He held up an aquatint of Tom Blake's *Interior of the Old Fives Court*. The golden brown background of the high stone walls against which Randall and Turner sparred in a roped ring, high above the forest of Regency dandies, their waistcoats of chrome yellow and hunting pink, riding-coats of buff, bottle green and mauve, mingling freely with the colours of guardsmen, jockeys, negro servants, beaux and pimps and the populace.

" Damn' difficult to reproduce," said Paul, pretending to be very businesslike, then he caught Jerviss' eye and burst out laughing.

" *Thought* you would like it," Jerviss said.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

She quickly pressed her lips to Paul's and got out of bed. She laughed :

" What a sight you are ! Just look at yourself in the mirror. With all my lipstick on. . . . And I am, too."

She sat on the side of the bed and pulled on her stockings. He watched her dressing. It was fast, competent, efficient, the way she dressed in a couple of minutes. There was a ladder in her left stocking.

" Oh, Paul," she said, when he got out of bed and began to look for his socks a little helplessly. " I'm taking dancing lessons from a professional."

" Better late than never," Paul said.

" Brute."

" Sorry."

" You never troubled to teach me."

" But darling, where ? I can't very well teach you on the landing between the Sentry Box and this bedroom, besides I can't teach. Dancing or anything. It just isn't in me."

" You are lazy."

As he kissed her they heard the clock of the chapel across the road strike seven. She was taking dancing lessons. It was welcome news. She was heavy on her feet and had no sense of rhythm. She weighed him down and embittered his evenings when he went to dance with her. It was a duty and he knew his duty. If she was given tickets to a Charity Dance or was asked to bring a partner he never got out of it, no matter how heavy the obligation seemed. And once or twice he himself took her out to Quaglino's. It was a duty, he just had to face it. In the end he always felt relieved and always thought dancing was the separating bridge between

them, dancing was the reason why so far Veronica could never become anything but a mistress to him. She was *keen* on dancing, yes, that was just the point. She wasn't indifferent to it. When she said I love dancing she meant every word of it. You could feel that. She was active on the floor, but offered no response to his movements, showed no understanding. Went along on her own. It was torture to take the floor with her.

If only I didn't take dancing seriously, he thought. If only dancing didn't mean so much to me. If only I had the patience, the opportunity and the time, the time, that was the most important—the time to teach her.

As he went downstairs with her and accompanied her to the corner of Prince's Gate, he decided he would go to the Chandos. It was a nice cool evening in July and it was Wednesday, so the Chandos wouldn't be too crowded.

He often thought it was significant that when he went out dancing he always went in a lounge suit. For him dancing was not a social function. He often thought he took dancing " seriously," but that somehow wasn't the correct word. He went to dance in a lounge suit, the same way as he wouldn't put on a dinner jacket or tails when he was going to sit at his desk writing a story. He often tried to find the proper word for dancing in relation to his life, because he knew, he felt, it was in a way an important part of his life. Sport . . . no, it wasn't that, only partly. A passion? Decidedly not, he could have done without it, certainly he could, but he felt it enriched his life. Escape? Perhaps, but not entirely. There was certainly a time when he used various means of escape ; when he was taking drugs. Only he did not know it then, and when he found out it was a drug he gave it up with a shudder. Those two years when Wurmser, the Austrian minister, his uncle by marriage, launched him in London society. Those two years of dances, dinner parties, government receptions, week-ends at country houses. For a time he enjoyed his excursions into Society. He felt he was accepted on his own level, at times he felt he was liked. It was an interesting landscape, far more realistic and certainly far less dull than he anticipated it would be. For

a time he kept regular notes of his impressions of a ducal dance, the conversational mannerisms of an ex-viceroy, the dinner-table habits of royalty, and he had long treasured his notes of a week-end when he went out fishing with the Prime Minister. He watched another outsider, like himself. He noted that the Prime Minister was timid, vain, vindictive and painfully jealous with a neurotic violence, but he also noted that no matter what his reputation was, the Prime Minister was not a snob, that he could be generous and that first and foremost he was a lonely man who craved for love and company. He made a note of the blue veins on his hands, the operation scar under his chin, the refined elegance of his spectacle case, his cheap, ready-made shoes, his splendid waves of thick grey hair, his frugal habits at dinner. He made notes of the inflection of the Prime Minister's voice, his commonplace remarks about two splendid landscapes by Samuel Palmer and a surprisingly intelligent remark about Dickens. He recorded his patience at fishing and the venomous and possibly quite untrue story he told about Bonar Law.

The notes he made during the excursions were long and detailed, and he put them into a few short stories before he found that he was making a fatal mistake in the choice of his material. He found that the life of the smart, the prominent, the rich was under a taboo in serious modern literature. They were forbidden material, as much forbidden as blasphemy in the sixteenth century or frankness about sex in the nineteenth. There was only one narrow way, one narrow means of presentation allowed ; to use smart society as charade dummies ; to make fun of them. And even humorous literature tolerated them only under sufferance.

After that he realised that Society was nothing but escape to him. To make him forget rejection slips. It was a drug, effective but quite dangerous. In retrospect he was now feeling relieved that he had got away so easily, that the drug did not leave fatal permanent effects.

Dancing certainly wasn't a drug. And it wasn't even an escape. What did he wish to escape from now ? But it was more than a recreation. He went to dance regularly about once a week and he felt it was doing him good.

He always went to the Chandos, now that he had discovered it. I take my pleasures seriously, he reflected once or twice. The Chandos was a serious place, though it was classed as a place of entertainment. Paul by then knew that these half-a-crown dance salons on the outskirts of the West End or in the suburbs were serious places, which most visitors entered in the same spirit their grandfathers entered the chapel. Boys and girls arrived hatlessly and hurriedly carrying their " dancing shoes " in newspapers, and the smell in the men's cloakroom always contained a faint suggestion of feet. They would meet their partners afterwards in the hall, greet them solemnly, then they would take the floor. The tone of the Chandos was very formal and critical. Under the coloured beams of light and the slowly rotating globe made up of fragments of mirror there was an almost religious atmosphere; the few whispers, and the shuffling of feet, could never be heard through the music. In the intervals between the dances there was little loud chatter and little laughter, these places had neither gaiety nor the unreserved ease of the the haunts of the rich and the smart. The Chandos had no licence and there was no flirtation (though a few elderly men —mostly foreigners—tried to use it as a hunting ground, with little success).

It was not crowded as Paul entered. He stood by a column and watched the dancers ; he knew most of them by sight. There was that earnest young man with the chalky face and with dark hair plastered down over his head like a wig, who entered every competition ; and there was Bert, who was a garage mechanic from Paddington, whom he had met here two years ago ; and Norman, a costing clerk with his pencilled moustache, who tried to become a dancing professional. There was Olive, she worked in the Garrard telephone exchange. And there was Kathleen. He saw her sitting by herself quite near the band. When the interval was over he walked downstairs and asked her to dance.

" You haven't been here lately," she said.

" No. I've been busy. I say, you've changed colour since I saw you last."

" Like it ? "

" Yes. I've always liked red hair, and yours is a nice metallic red."

" Venetian, it's called."

They glided along in silence. It was a slow fox-trot. Kathleen was a year or two older than Paul, a typist in Moorgate, and a splendid dancing partner. She very rarely spoke while she danced, you could see she was absorbed in concentrating in working in unison with her partner. She had a perfect sense of rhythm and she held herself beautifully. Dancing for her was a task which she accomplished with great and loving devotion, interest and self-discipline. Paul knew that Kathleen, who looked quite plain, a little anæmic and timid, became quite beautiful when she danced. At times he felt as if she were in a trance with her eyes open.

Dancing is self expression and " Life " for her, he thought again as he sat beside her ; she was watching the floor. Now she was her old everyday self. A little timid, a little reserved, a City typist on three quid a week.

" She's very good," Kathleen said now.

Paul nodded. " Yes. I danced with her once last year."

His gaze followed the girl in the green frock as she glided away from them in the arms of her partner. Her name was Mona ; she was a lady's maid. It was strange, he thought, as he was thinking about Mona, who had a beautiful face and a delicately beautiful body, that here in the Chandos—like many other young people, no doubt—he became almost completely indifferent towards any emotional or biological impulse. He felt almost matter-of-fact and businesslike about embracing the most magnificent body.

BOOK THE THIRD

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

He couldn't wait until Jerviss sent him a copy and as soon as he saw it in the window of a bookshop he bought the book. In the last week or so he had been getting impatient, childishly and unnecessarily so, he thought. It was the middle of September, when normally he was already away on his fortnight's holiday, staying with his mother near Linz. But when he heard from Jerviss that Granville's would bring the book out post-haste in September, he decided he would stay on and wait for its publication.

The whole thing was childish and irrational—to stay on and see it published—all the more because he was really tired and needed the rest, and it was childish and irrational to count the days till publication with the same expectation as he waited for Christmas Eve when he was a small boy.

But it seemed that the "Zirkus" was worth while, the moment he saw it in the window. It was not the main window, it was a side window, a little tucked away, but this didn't matter, didn't matter; so many other things were there that mattered. Before he could ask for it he saw it on a table, among the new books, a little pile of them. He picked it up. They had certainly made a good job of it. The dust jacket was designed by Rinehart, the American artist, pink and white lettering against a coal black background, and the whole book looked as if it came from America. It was beautifully printed on a creamy yellow paper and it was bound in flesh pink canvas. He read the blurb.

"*These revaluations by one of England's best-known boxers on famous pugilists of the past show great penetration, a splendid sense of humour and a perfect eye for atmosphere. The style is equal in descriptive power to the most perfect Regency sporting prints reproduced in the book. Mr. Jerviss has a natural gift for writing and he is as good in the domain of letters as he is in the ring. In him we introduce a new author of original talent.* 7s. 6d. net.

He opened it at random and read a passage. How different it looked on yellow paper. He looked up the chapter on Mendoza and searched for the passage on the Revivalist meeting in Islington. How good that was. He read it again. It had been worth while to stay on.

He held the book in his hand for a long time. Published. Published. On creamy yellow paper, printed in large Baskerville type, in solid canvas binding. It was tangible. It was nine inches by six in size. It weighed over eight ounces. Seven and six net.

His own work from start to finish. A reflection of his personality, his observations, his wit, his heart beating behind the rhythm of the sentences. It was his even in its shortcomings. His own superficiality, his horror of snappiness, of journalistic " punch," his tendencies for musical rhythm, his tricky, camouflaged sensationalism, his sentimentalism under a synthetic indifference.

The result of pain, torment, delight, anxiety, and a sense of revenge—this was important, the sense of revenge—was his child. His child now out of his hands and leading an independent existence. His child, but it did not bear his name. It bore another name, as if it were illegitimate. His book and yet it was not his.

He wondered what sensations a young author must experience when he sees his first book fresh from the printer. With what excitement would he open the title page to see his name in thin Garamond or thick Bodoni. With what nervous fingers would he take off the dust jacket, look at the binding and see his name again in red or black or gold on the spine. He absorbs the colour of the binding, sniffs it, and inhales the smell of linen, of paper, of ink, of adhesives. He

reads the blurb. If it was written by him, he reads it again and finally believes the self-praise himself. Then, feverishly he turns the pages and looks at his sentences for the first time in a bound book. How different they look now, how well shaped and well groomed the paragraphs appear. There are no unreadable words, scratches, corrections, words, sentences, paragraphs crossed out in impatient moods. The galley proofs with the cabalistic markings on their margins were already a thrill when they arrived, but the shiny white sheets were soon filled with thumb-prints, words overflowing into the margins and angry corrections of annoying misprints.

Yes . . . but the first bound copy, fresh from the printer, is more. It is something final and irrevocable. It means something concrete. The most concrete thing he had hitherto produced in life. It means triumph and responsibility. It smells to him more enchanting than the smell of flowers in a summer field or the smell of the body of someone he really loves.

Supposing—he mused on the top of a number fourteen bus—supposing one day I became a famous author—after all there is no guarantee whatsoever that I shall be a failure, no guarantee—how surprised and puzzled my future critics or interpreters will look, when he finds out about my first book. When he finds out that my first book did not appear so much under a pen-name as a certain number of books do, but under the name of a well-known English pugilist in the fourth decade of the twentieth century. It would be worth anything to know to what wild conclusions he would jump, what ridiculous comments he would make. Or perhaps in his time he might know that in the fourth decade of the twentieth century in England " news value " was regarded as a perfect substitute for literary merit, originality and intelligence. He would understand that a young author was brought into this strange and desperate swindle of becoming a ghost behind a name that represented " news value "—a significant example of human stupidity, snobbery, sheepishness, the least resistance towards mere repetition and the harsh voice of Publicity.

But supposing—he went on—I really became famous, will

my fame ever outshine Jerviss? Granted, we are representing two different kinds of activity. But what is likely to happen? He is a pugilist, a glorified cave-man, who will obviously and inevitably be outstripped in a few years' time by another glorified cave-man. He will be knocked down by a rude blow, and he will hear the count as if it were the last sound of some dreadful extreme unction. He will still be alive, as a private individual, as a voter, as a taxpayer, as a British citizen, a man with an interesting past; he will continue his existence as long as his heart pumps blood into his gradually hardening arteries; but his fame, most of his news value, will belong to the past. He will so to speak, survive his own self. He is thirty-four now. Already almost a veteran of a sport which gives the shortest of glories. He is perhaps an artist, but his art is of the type that leaves no permanent visible mark, just as the actor's does not. It is bound inseparably with his physical self and would perish with it. His art exists only in time, like the spoken word and the sound of music. Unlike the poet, the playwright, and the composer, he cannot leave a manuscript or a score to posterity; like his fellow performing artists, the pianist and the singer and the actor, he leaves behind no visible and tangible record in Space. He belongs to the more abstract and mysterious realm of Time. His is the fleeting moment, and the short aftermath of time that lingers in its wake like a whiff of scent evaporating into thin air.

But will the story be ever known? Paul mused on—I might tell it in my reminiscences. What a surprise it would create in a period when literary scandal had "news value"! It might assure Jerviss' name an additional claim to remembrance. And by a curious chance it might happen that he would be better remembered in a distant posterity as a man whose name concealed the identity of a literary figure than as a British champion in the nineteen-thirties.

One thing was certain, thought Paul. The hoax would be continued. It was no use crying over fine points. The venture was a success after many vicissitudes and he was feeling confident that he would be able to write anything now under Jerviss' name.

Short stories, articles, plays, novels. Anything. And also —which was much more important—he would be able within certain limits to say anything and be listened to. And be paid for it.

"Have you seen this book, in the Mercury?" Paul asked.

"Yes." She helped herself to a second cup of tea.

"Is it going well?"

"I wouldn't know. But I could ask. Why? Is it good?"

"Very. I have just read it."

"I never thought you were interested in boxing."

"I'm not. That's just the point. It is a book which is interesting apart from its subject. It's a marvellous book—in its way."

"Who's the author?" She dipped her head. "Les Jerviss . . . Isn't he a boxer?"

"Yes."

She drank the tea. ". . . It is a pity you haven't finished your novel. I could push it in the Mercury. Miss Manvers, the girl I know and the only one I like, says that people often just ask for an interesting novel. I s'pose most people don't know what they really want."

"Truly said, Veronica, truly said. And I had almost forgotten."

He went to his desk and took out a little white box. He handed it to Veronica.

"This is for you."

"What is it . . . ?" She slightly dramatised her excitement. From the shape of the box and from the figure in dark blue enthroned on a capital L on the lid she guessed what it was.

"*Arpège*," Paul said. "I do think it's the most heavenly smell on earth. Put some on . . . I'd love to smell it on you. . . ."

"I believe you really bought it for yourself. To smell it on me."

"Of course I did."

They kissed. He looked at Veronica's wrist watch. He really must buy himself a wrist watch. To fish one out

from his waistcoat pocket was such a cumbersome affair. Especially in moments like this . . .

It was half-past five.

" Let's go, darling," he whispered.

The press notices on the book were, on the whole, a little disappointing for him. The *Literary Supplement* was the first to appear. It was a shortish notice and a little reserved. It enlarged on the book and said little about its author, yet in its last paragraph it managed to say that Jerviss' was an original talent.

Then there came *The Examiner*. Paul had been a little uneasy, lest Honor Vereker, the literary editor, should chance to send it to him for review. That would have been embarrassing ; too much of a joke. After some struggles in his mind to seize the opportunity and hail Jerviss as a genius, he would have written a careful and sober notice, sparing in praise, tongue-tied and timid.

As it happened, the unsigned notice was flattering. Written by an elderly gentleman who generally reviewed sporting books, it said that the author " completely justified the blurb."

Then, in quick succession there came other reviews. These he received from Jerviss, who was sent duplicate copies by his publisher. Most of them were short and favourable, but few of them contained what Paul so ardently expected. With one or two exceptions most reviews confined themselves to the book and hardly mentioned the author, hardly noticed the quite obvious news element in Jerviss' writing a book. One provincial paper did not even say who wrote the book. It was only in three weekly reviews that Jerviss was actually hailed as " new writer." *The Onlooker* was the only one that filled Paul with real satisfaction. " *It is indeed remarkable,*" said F. Beaumont Gilbertson in the third paragraph of a column article, " *that the same hand which in the past ten years had gained a reputation for its owner as a successful and brilliant sportsman, could at the same time be employed to put pen to paper and turn out essay after essay so brilliant, restrained, and sophisticated in the best sense of the word. He is entirely free from cliché and yet*

never for a moment becomes stilted. . . . The book is more than promising ; it its own way it is a masterpiece. Mr. Jerviss' literary personality is most unexpected, attractive and interesting."

The *Sunday Post*, naturally, printed almost a column on the book. It was, in reality, a news article signed by its literary critic, who said that Jerviss was a born writer and that he (J. J. Sargeant) would look out for everything Jerviss wrote in the future. He praised his economy of words. "*I am surprised,*" he said, "*at Mr. Jerviss' consummate art in putting a limited vocabulary to such a perfect use.*"

Paul enjoyed reading this, but he reflected that most of the reviewers had escaped the point, perhaps because the subject of the book was not far removed from Jerviss' *mêtier*. They would be sure to take notice of him as a writer if his name appeared over more imaginative writing. In a way, perhaps it was unnecessary caution to write these articles? Who knows? It was easy to be wise after the event.

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

No, it wasn't heavier than a glove. He kept balancing the book in his left hand. Then he opened it and he looked at his name on the title page. For the tenth time. Paul was quite right, he ought not to have had his title under his name. Real authors don't need that. Same as he wasn't featured as an author on the big placards that advertised his matches.

He turned a page back and read the blurb again : "*Mr. Jerviss is as brilliant in the domain of letters as he is in the ring. . . .*" He was an author. An author like Warwick Deeping and John Galsworthy. Punch drunk, he thought with an uneasy smile.

Already the articles in the *Post* and the advertisements and the additional publicity had made him feel funny, made him feel the same as he felt after being pummelled about in matches when he was young. It wasn't like feeling he was dreaming, it was something between dream and wakefulness.

It was a feeling that he was either partly blind or partly deaf, but it was a pleasant feeling all the same.

He got up and took a cigarette from the box on the mantelpiece. As he inhaled the first draught he suddenly saw the whole thing from a fresh angle. Ever so funny. The secret behind the book, the Conspiracy. Such a lark to take everybody in by bluff. Absolutely everybody. Editors, publishers, journalists, the hundreds of people in the boxing world and the millions of people who read the *Post*. How many copies of the *Post* were really put out? They said two and a half million. Yes, but somebody who knew said that all papers lied about their circulation. They printed two and a half million copies, all right—but how many were unsold? Even then the number of people who read his stuff must have gone into millions. Millions all over England. Because so many people can't afford newspapers and borrow 'em from others.

Never thought it would be so easy. It was only now he realised what he could not quite get when Paul had first talked about his plan. Vaguely he knew that he was a "name," "news value," but he had never quite realised all this. It was funny. He could gate-crash into literature and get "Spiritual Values" without any effort, without a stroke of the pen he could become an author. Stranger and more mysterious than he had ever fancied.

But beyond the amusing aspect of it, beyond the farce and mystery, he felt something which touched his heart. Jerviss was accustomed to success. There were a good many flattering things printed about him in the press; sometimes they were just flattering lies; but these words on the jacket, and the other words in the first press-cutting his publisher sent him, were so different. They were words so gentlemanly, so serious, so quiet and dignified, yet forceful. It was—he felt it now with ever-growing certainty—the thing he had always wanted, but he could never put it into words even to himself. It was this sort of success and this kind of recognition that he had always yearned for. Yes, "Spiritual Values." He repeated the words in his mind with the fixation of a drunkard. And it had come as if by a miracle.

"Perhaps I could have been a writer," he mused, still

holding the book in his hand, " if I'd been given the chance." It was all chance, just chance. Paul had the chance when he was young. He said he had to fight, he was very poor ; but when Paul said " poor " it did not quite mean the same thing. Even Lord Colworth said to him once that he was poor, and he was a millionaire. No, these people high up meant something different. Take Paul's case. He was educated. When he went to school he must have been a well-to-do boy ; not rich, but comfortably off. He might be poor now compared with one's own way of living, his start was different. Not brought up in Bermondsey, but in a home where " Spiritual Values " were the thing.

Difference. He put the book down . . . A school excursion to Richmond, years and years ago. The last year at school. He was thirteen or fourteen and he was wearing Jim's old spiv suit. As they marched along the Terrace at Richmond, a noisy and disorderly herd, he stopped for a minute ; he had to. The view, he felt, was a picture-book, only a picture-book come to life, more beautiful than a picture. " Terrific," he said. The next moment he was hit on the head by one of the boys—a big bully, Irish he was ; the one who took him later to the gym. The Irish boy grinned and said something rude, another boy laughed. He said nothing, then. It was only months later that he gave him a good hiding in the ring. The other boy never came to the gym again.

And as he thought of the incident and was still left a little uneasy about it he remembered the school and Mr. Tremlett, the teacher—or rather two eyes framed in steel under glass. Funny eyes they were. A little dreamy, a little sad, never searching. What was his other name . . . ?

" Leslie, you ought to go on with your studies," he heard the voice again. It was a voice of an old man, and voice he had never heard since.

" I shall put it up to your dad. You must get a scholarship. And cut out that boxing altogether. Cut it out, sonny. Does you no good. All very well that you are a well-developed chap for your age, but what's the use of hitting and punching your time away ? "

"The story you wrote is ever so good." He heard the voice again, and it was full of warmth. "Only you must read a lot. Come to me before school to-morrow; I want to give you a book."

From the distance of twenty years he saw the book again. It was stout and squat. *Palgrave's Golden Treasury*, he remembered the top page. He could not recollect if it was a picture book or not. What was it about, was it fiction or just "straight," had he ever read it, what had become of it? Got stolen or lost? Palgrave. Never heard of the name since. Was he famous?

He looked round the room. It had been furnished four years ago. A chap from Tottenham Court Road—he was a supporter—a very business-like chap, did it at a "special price," though he said at the time that money did not matter. The room should have style in it. He liked it when it was ready. Easy chairs, reading lamps with silk tassels and the radiogram in the corner. (Joe twisted him about that; because he said you could get America ever so easily on it, and you couldn't . . .)

He was once photographed in this room. Just after it was ready. It came out in some picture paper. "Les Jerviss in his Highgate home," with Doris and him sitting on the settee. He wished the bloke had done more justice to the furniture.

That was then. Looking at it now, the room seemed poor and common, like so many other lounges in Highgate and all over London . . . if he compared it with Paul's.

Paul had only two tiny rooms. His lounge had hardly enough room for three men to sit in it, yet it was definitely stylish. Of course, Paul had style. Style is like good eyesight, either you're born with it or you never have it. Yet Paul said taste could be developed.

"It's largely a question of money . . ." Paul said.

That may have been his own reckoning, because he remembered the first thing Paul had done with the money he received from the *Sunday Post*. He bought a writing desk. An ever so expensive one. Funny, that. Other blokes

would have spent the money on clothes, or on women, on having a good time or would have saved it. But Paul bought a writing desk, which he really did not need, as there was already one in the room. True, he said that one wasn't his. He bought a fancy writing desk. Walnut. Paul said it was Queen Anne. Fancy calling furniture after kings and queens. . . . And underwear after cardinals.

Paul said he would buy a period chair to match the desk later, when he made some more money. He didn't spend it all ; he must be poor and he saved a little. He ought not to have taken fifty-fifty. He had all the credit for the book and for the articles and Paul was poor. Really, he ought to offer him a better share of the money. He'd never seen the cheques. He trusted him. So fair, so correct, so much a gentleman. And after all, there was a good deal beyond the " Conspiracy." It was so good to go over and see him or to go out with him anywhere. Pity he could never ask him to a really swell restaurant, because he said it was dangerous. If only he had met Paul earlier in life . . . (Oh, that bloody thing again !) One has to make the best of it. He made up his mind to offer a better share to Paul in the future.

Doris came in. " I'm going out," she said. " If Mrs. 'Oneyman comes in, say that I went to the ' Granada,' 'cos she said she'd come and go with me, and I'm fed up waitin' for her."

" All right," he said. " Can't Rose tell her ? "

" It's her day off . . . oh," she said, looking at the parcel with the half a dozen copies of *Heroes of the Ring*. " They're your book, I s'pose. You got a good many."

" These are author's copies," he said. " Publishers always send the author a present of some copies of his books."

" Fancy that," she smiled. " Mrs. O'Riley's husband said he read your stuff in the paper . . ."

" And have you read them, yourself ? "

" Oh, one or two."

" And what did you think of them ? "

" All right." She came up to him and picked up a copy

of the book from the floor. She looked at the wrapper, then took it off. Jerviss was a little annoyed at the sight of Doris handling a book.

"You may keep one," he said. "Read it and pray."

"Ta," she said and smiled. Then, plucking up more courage, she added, "The man was here from the Water Board in the morning. Said you was out; he'll call again to-morrow . . ."

Jerviss sighed, then picked up the copies of his book from the carpet and held them in his hand for a time, trying to put them somewhere. He placed them on the top of the radiogram first, but found that the five books would not stand up. He took them off and searched round the room for a better place. There was a cabinet opposite the fireplace with its glass doors. Save for a few glass dishes it was empty. He put them on the top shelf, closed the door, and looked for the effect. No. They could not be seen well enough. On the desk, among American magazines and a few books, he saw some of the new volumes he had bought recently on Paul's advice. In all he had about thirty of them. He reflected that he must buy a bookshelf for them. Not one as large as those in Paul's sitting room, they would be too big for this room; one on the small side. A bookshelf for a beginner of an author.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

"I CANNOT get over seeing you in Vienna," Caroline Lamb said. "Let's sit in here and you must tell me all about it."

"All about what?" Paul asked.

"Your disappearance. One doesn't seem to see you anywhere nowadays. What's happened to you?"

"Nothing. I'm too old for the social round and besides . . ."

"Besides . . ."

"I'm very busy when I'm in London."

"One mustn't inquire, of course. But it is puzzling, you know. One is always interested in changed men, reformed

characters." She remained silent for a moment, hesitating, then her expression became intent.

"Reggie is in Budapest," she said.

"Is he really? You know, I feel an awful cad about Reggie . . ."

"Why?" asked Caroline; a split second later she realised that her question was both unnecessary and ill-dramatised.

"D'you know if he is returning to Vienna, on the way back? The point is that I treated him very shabbily. We were at prep school, you know. I hadn't seen him for ages, but when we met again, it was at your dinner party, in fact, he was very nice to me. I was in a very bad mood then and he was most helpful and kind. He couldn't actually help me, but he did his very best. And I, just . . . well, you know how it is. I very suddenly became very busy, with a translation that took up all my spare time for months and months, and forgot all about Reggie. I feel very caddish about it."

Paul, as so often lately, talked as if he was talking to himself. He did not look at Caroline and did not notice her gaze, which was intent and curious to the point of rudeness. ("You mustn't mind Caroline staring at you, my dear," Mabel Conduit had often said in the past, "she is very shortsighted, you know. It's in the family. Conduit's father regularly took beaters for deer and shot them.") "D'you know if he's coming back to Vienna on his way back?"

"Yes," Caroline said, significantly. "In a few days' time."

"That's good. Will he be staying here in the Sacher?"

"I think so."

"Reggie," said Caroline, trying another shot, "is a very intimate friend of mine."

"He's a very charming person," Paul said.

"He rang up yesterday," Caroline said, giving up the game. Paul was perhaps an unconscious teaser, Reggie must have been wrong. There are people like that. Reggie, of course, exaggerated. He always did. He thought Paul had roused him then dropped him. There certainly was something mysterious about Paul, but it couldn't have been a really interesting mystery. Possibly there was a woman who was

keeping him, but even that wasn't certain. "He rang up yesterday," she said, "and said we ought to go over. Budapest is marvellous. I would quite like to go, but Mother wants to leave for Aix at once. Are you writing something now?"

"God, no. I'm having a holiday. I left London dead tired, spent a few days in the country with my mother and stepfather, then I came back to Vienna. I go to swim and sunbathe every day. That's all."

"But are you writing anything in London?"

"No. I've got to work so much more for my paper now. And there are other things. Very little time for writing."

"What happened to the story you read us at Neston? I can't remember the title. It was a story of how a man really dies. What happens after he dies. He was a solicitor. He gradually dies in other people's memory, then other people die, then the last scrap of paper which contains his name. . . . D'you remember?"

"What a memory you have," Paul smiled. He remained silent.

"A very interesting story. What was it called?"

"*Limitations of Eternity*."

"Oh, yes. Was it published?"

"No."

They remained silent for a moment.

"I love this place," Caroline said.

"Yes. It's only now that I begin to have a feeling for Vienna. Perhaps because it's fashionable, perhaps because I am getting older. I was brought up here, you see, and I used to hate it. I still couldn't live here. It's a depressing place. The climate weighs you down. That beastly Foehne, the wind. One feels one is walking about in a large cemetery, in which baroque is mixed with Adolf Loos. And I don't much like *Gemuetlichkeit*. All right for a holiday, I s'pose."

"They are awfully poor, aren't they? And they are the most charming people on earth."

"I don't know. I prefer the Latins."

"I don't like Latins. Now isn't that strange? I just don't like them."

It was a strange experience to be in Vienna again. The feeling of despair he had when he was young, the desperate urge that he must get away from his parents' home, from Vienna, from Austria or die. This was all gone now. It could no longer haunt him. He tried. He was looking at the unreal and dreadful Vienna of his childhood and this real and harmless and charming Vienna with a kind of detachment. Everything was a little familiar and a little new at the same time, whether it was Dehmel, the pastrycook, the Kohlmarkt with its mixture of Fischer von Erlach and Atlantic Functionalism, the Spanish Riding School, the Schottenring or the melancholy Mariahilferstrasse. He walked out to Favoriten, to Lerchenfeld without being depressed. For the first time in his life he went to see a Ronacher Revue. It was different now, the passage of time altered things. Of course, he was more prosperous now. He came by air, he stayed at the Sacher, he was part of the tourist traffic.

But he was restless all the same. Two days later he called on his editor to say good-bye to him, then he telephoned to the Air Transport Office and they told him that the Budapest-London plane had plenty of vacant seats. Early the following afternoon he took the bus to the airport at Aspern.

As he went into the restaurant to buy some *Dritte Sorte* cigarettes for Veronica, he saw Hoover having coffee at a table. He went up to him. He had forgotten to inquire at the Sacher about Hoover.

" Caroline told me you were in Budapest."

" Hallo," Hoover said as he saw him. There was surprise in the voice, but no friendliness. " You going back to London ? " he said a second later. The question was addressed to a comparative stranger, polite but without curiosity or interest.

" Such a long time since I saw you," Paul said. " I have been feeling all the time that I was neglecting you. I was very busy. This is the first time I have had a holiday. I rang you up, you know. Your valet said you were away."

" I was in France. When did you ring up ? "

" A few days after Basil Tilstock's party. That was the last time I saw you, I think."

The bell went. They got up.

Except for a woman and her little daughter, the aeroplane was empty. The steward put them next to each other in front, and fastened the belt around their waist.

" Awful thing this," Hoover said, " but you can take it off, once we are up."

" I love flying," Paul said.

" And you can't smoke," Hoover said. " I like your watch."

Paul looked at his watch. It was smart, as flat as a couple of half-crowns. It had a thin frame of matt gold and a pink dial with gold numerals.

" A nice toy," Paul said. " I bought it in the Herrengasse last week."

" You're getting prosperous." Hoover noticed that Paul was wearing a suit that he had seen some time ago in *Esquire*, and an ivory silk shirt.

" I'm working like a nigger," Paul said.

The landscape under them was already reduced to an enormous relief map of *papier maché*. Hoover said something about Budapest, and Paul noticed that he was making conversation. His old friendliness, his charm, his interest was gone. Just as he had anticipated. How right he had been about Hoover. He would take him up then drop him quite as suddenly. It was a good thing to be on the lookout. But now he was doing quite well. He felt that Hoover was noticing his changed circumstances, his independence, and it seemed that he was resenting it. Ought he to tell Hoover that he was buying a car as soon as he was back in London ? The idea had come to him when he went to stay with his mother near Graz, where she was on holiday He knew how to drive. He had learnt to drive when he was quite young and then Molly Ashmole let him drive her car in the country. Not the Packard, of course. He had shared the nostalgia, the unfulfilled nostalgia of Central European youth for cars, though in those days he had pretended that machinery did not interest him. Because he was a Man of the Spirit. But Kayserling with his " chauffeur-type " theory was a pompous old windbag. He was certainly interested in cars now.

He felt the desire to tell Hoover about the car, because something in his tone suggested that Hoover somehow looked down on him. It was, of course, rude to neglect Hoover ; but then they never had been very intimate friends and if Hoover had offered him hospitality, he had repaid him. So it was strange that Hoover now was somehow looking down on him, as if there was something slightly morally doubtful about his way of life. He had given the new suit a curious scrutiny.

He noticed that Hoover had fallen asleep.

He took the *Fremdenblatt* from his pocket and began to read it, then the door of the cockpit opened and he saw the two pilots over the controls. Both had red hair, cut short at the back.

It was in Frankfurt that Hoover woke up, as the plane made a few jerky movements trying to land. He yawned and rubbed his eyes. The plane came to a halt.

" *Bitte Reisepässe vorzuzeigen.*"

A German airman opened the cabin door behind him.

Hoover pulled out his passport and handed it to the airman. He was fully awake. He looked at Paul. And I could go to sleep sitting next to him, like this. Just like this. That he could become so completely immaterial to me, after all that happened, all the misery, that I could simply fall asleep next to him." The thought cheered him up. He put his passport back into his pocket. " Will you have a drink with me ? " he asked Paul. His voice was unusually cordial. He felt he almost liked Paul.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH

WAITING for the Imperial Airways bus, he rang Veronica's number from Croydon. There was no reply. He went home. There were hardly any letters. A postcard from Brighton : " *Are you back yet ? Weather is awful down here, Best wishes, Leslie.*" Bills from his newsagent, his bookseller, a charity appeal.

He carried his suitcase up the four flights. He noticed that Mrs. Darvill had replaced the bulb in the Sentry Box with a smaller one. The walls looked dirtier than ever and there was dust all over the furniture. He mustn't buy a car yet. He must leave the place at once. At once.

It was seven o'clock. He decided he would go to the Chandos.

It was Thursday night and the hall was very crowded. He went upstairs and walked round.

> " I've got the words, I've got the tune,
> I've been rehearsing under the moon,
> But I've got nobody to hear my song
> So I'm humming to myself . . ."

He smiled as he recognised the tune. It was old ; at least two years old ; huming to myself ; he remembered it well ; he glanced over the banister and watched out for the banjoists entering when the refrain came. Now comes a little solo on the piano, he remembered, about a dozen bars, syncopated all the way, then warbling, full of grief, the saxophone began to meditate :

> " I've got the place, I've got the time,
> I'd a lot of love once on a time ;
> But I've got nobody to hear my song,
> So I'm humming to myself."

Quite a hackneyed tune, yes, but a tune that took one back on its wings at once to the years when one had felt it was expressing one's mood. Wasn't it expressing it now ? Yes, and no. Difficult to say. It did two years ago, when he heard it first and regretted he had no gramophone to play it at home.

Canned music, tinned music, commodity music—yes, yes, but there was more to it. It couldn't be dismissed quite as easily as all that. It was popular music, a watery translation of tonal art for the masses. Its relation to great music was the

same as the relation of great poetry to journalism. It was *Kitsch ;* the masses always appreciate it more fully than great art. And *Kitsch*, which is immortal like great art, not the individual *Kitsch*, of course, but *Kitsch* as such. . . . He was no longer rehearsing under the moon, no and by no means humming to himself alone, but—yes—but, no. . . . He would dance. He saw the young nurse from St. Bart's, a Scotch girl, marvellously ugly, a grand dancer.

" Good evening," he said. " Maggie," he added. " Would you like to struggle ? "

They walked downstairs. They began to dance. As they reached the bandstand he felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned round. It was Veronica.

" Oh, Mother . . ." Paul said.

She was dancing with one of the regulars : a young man with oversized and outstanding ears. He knew him by sight. One of the best dancers in the Chandos. Stanley something.

" See you later," Veronica said. Her partner showed his bad teeth.

He manœuvred Maggie so as to see Veronica dancing. It was remarkable. Still a little jerky, a little stiff, but she held herself well, showed some discipline of ryhthm, and seemed to conform to the " Chandos Tradition."

" An old flame ? " Maggie asked.

" Known her for years."

" Good looking." The nurse trying to be " sporting."

" Not bad." Paul trying to be " Chandos."

When the dance was over he went over to Veronica. She stood along with the other girls on the edge of the dance floor. Her partner was gone.

" You aren't shocked at seeing me here ? " she said, as they seated themselves at a table. " I'm keen on practice and a girl at Don Miguel's, whose sister is a pro here, said that if I wanted to see good dancers, I should come here. I've been here three times already."

" And don't you mind people going up to you and asking you for a dance ? "

" No-o-o. There's an old man. He isn't here to-night though. He can't dance and he doesn't come here for

dancing's sake either. If he asks me I say that I'm tired. But otherwise it's great fun here." He noticed she did not say the words " great fun " as if they were in code language.

" A new world for you," he said.

" I like dancing with the boy I was dancing with just now. He's a marvellous dancer and really nice. . . . I mean he has better manners than most people we know."

" I being included ? "

" By all means."

The band struck up, and they took the floor. After the first dozen steps he was more surprised than when he had seen her dancing with Stanley. She was almost very good.

She was still a trifle heavy on her feet, but that did not matter. Practice had given her assurance, and she instinctively felt her partner's intentions. Inspired, Paul led her now in the way he led the " regular " Chandos girls. Long, even steps, a dip, long even steps again, left turn, long steps back, stand still. And Veronica reacted. Now he did a difficult side-step, deliberately, rather hoping Veronica would not be able to follow him, a side-step, rather a tricky one, letting her do her separate bit, and Veronica's steps flowed harmoniously into his. He said nothing, but he felt happy, a little proud of Veronica, and put his cheek to hers. The music came to an end.

During the second encore—while Veronica, true to the " Chandos tradition," remained silent all the time, perhaps because she had to concentrate on the steps, Paul thought with a pleasant surprise that they had more in common than he had ever thought. That they shared things. That they were not almost strangers, as he had thought before. Not only because now she knew how to dance. Something else. Was it possible—he reflected with growing inner excitement—that she would be as interested as he was in contacts with a class " inferior " to hers ? Did she go through the same emotional adventure when she heard cockney naked and unashamed ? Did she feel that curious sensation in all her senses, at the warmness emanating from the simple and genuine personality of some of the " working classes" ? Did she see, did she even unconsciously feel their sincerity, their

friendliness, their candour, that curious human glow he was yearning for so much and so often? Or was it merely their instinctiveness that appealed to her? Was it merely the "exotic element" in them, the "differences" that excited her? He wondered, agitated.

But there was something else to it, something which, now he had discovered it, made Veronica even more attractive to him, than the common bond of interests. He felt that she had a kind of bravery, that she tried to revolt against the prejudices—perhaps the interests—of her own family circle, of her class. She said the Chandos was "great fun"; in fact she said it twice, which made it all the more significant and suspicious. Wasn't this just a kind of apology on her part, a little excuse in view of his probable reactions? Or wasn't this the last feeble manifestation of her class-consciousness before it finally wore away?

She was brave, he reflected. She was a girl, and it obviously must have taken courage, curiosity, and a sense of adventure for a girl of the "stranded gentry" to come to the Chandos, all by herself. On the part of a really rich girl, with or without a title, a visit, even an unescorted one to the Chandos, would have been nothing. Not even an "original" escapade. An escapade perhaps, but only just. Original? No. She might have boasted about it, but it would have shocked nobody beyond an elderly, stupid, penniless aunt of a motheaten colonel or a shop-soiled earl. "My *dear*, you can't imagine how well they dance. . . . I danced with a young man who sells bath mats at Selfridges." Paul shuddered as he visualised the scene. Another minute's concentration on it and he would have hiccoughed aloud. But Veronica was different. She was Stranded Gentry, a member of a class which was desperately uncertain of its social position, and had little to sell beyond its assurance about its aitches, its knowledge of how to use knife and fork and how to look "gentlemanly" in rags. It was obvious that they would adopt a non-compromising attitude in self-defence, an attitude which was not comical to him because he knew what a tragedy it covered. He was feeling a little proud of

Veronica, as if she had achieved something important. And he was feeling just a little bit jealous.

" When shall I see you next ? " he asked her towards eleven, when they both got up to escape the rush on the cloakroom. (The Chandos habitués took such a long time taking off their dance-shoes and putting on the ordinary ones and wrapping up the dance ones in paper parcels.)

She made a vague movement and smiled:

" I don't know, Paul. You see, I made up my mind to dance regularly about twice a week, and I'm trying to look for a new job."

" Dancing-instructor ? "

She laughed. " It must be a hard job, I must say. I know that from my own experience. Those poor chaps at Don Miguel's. . . . But I'm trying to find another place. The library is all right in a way. But the girls are awful bitches. They are *refeened*, you know. . . . And I am getting on for twenty-four. . . ."

" I can't see the connection between refeened bitches and you getting on for twenty-four, but you are sweet."

He kissed her as the taxi had to stop before a red light.

" We must go to *La Vedette*, one evening," he said.

" It's very, very expensive."

" But the best band in town."

They did not talk much the rest of the way to Brompton Road. As the taxi stopped in front of her house he said :

" You got to be back to-night ? "

" Isn't it awful." She squeezed his hand.

He kissed her goodbye.

He still could not get over the surprise, the sensation he had felt when she touched him on the shoulder in the " Chandos." Was it possible that there was something more in common between them ? Was it possible that she felt instinctively about him, that instinctively she understood him ? He had never told her much about himself because he felt she wouldn't understand. He knew that he could not yet seriously discuss any of his more serious problems with her. She was not yet a friend. But now he felt she was more than a mistress. Could they one day understand each other, without long elaborate

sentences, could a nod, a gesture, a look coming from either of them convey that they sensed each other's mental climate? Could Veronica ever become a woman he could love?

He wondered. But he was feeling hopeful.

CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH

But finally Jerviss came back from Brighton. His face was bronzed. Paul told him he was looking well.

"I don't feel it. Holiday was a washout. Rained all the time. It was awful," Jerviss said.

"But what were you doing?"

"Oh, same as in London. Nothing. Staying at the Royal and there were people I know there and we went out every evening. Every place was packed. I'll never go to Brighton again. It's common. I ought to have gone with you to Vienna."

"Yes. It would have been a change for you and an experience, but then you had your fight on. By the way, congratulations. I read all about it in the papers."

"Thanks."

"You don't seem to be pleased."

"There's no cause to It was a washout. Orvieto hit me on the eye in the third round and I couldn't open my left eye. D'you see this stitch over here; just here just above my eyebrow? Had to be stitched afterwards. Doesn't show now. I nearly lost the fight. Bad from the beginning. Then he went on hitting me in the same place over and over again. It was bad from the beginning. I wasn't quite ready. My stomach was upset, too. I had a hell of a row with Amor. The morning after the fight he came to see me and got on to me awful. Said I ought to take boxing seriously. Like that. It was a bad show, he said. It was just good luck that I wasn't beaten on points, he said. I hadn't enough training, he said. That's not the way to talk to a sick man, I said. Why, I felt really sick, you know, Paul, really—diarrhœa

and all that. Had to go out every five minutes. He said no offence meant, only in your own interest he said. Then he began again. People were booing the referee because he was partial to me, he said. Now that's not true. Old Rowse hates me like poison. Always did. Then he said I ought to take boxing seriously, he said. I was in a good mind to show him the door."

He lighted a cigarette, he went on with the cigarette in his mouth.

" Mind you, Amor is a good chap, really. He's a bit, you know, one screw loose, but he's all right. Known me ever since I was a kid. And he's straight. And you know, Paul, he was right. Only I didn't want him to know it, but he knows it all the same. He was dead right. He's John Blunt but he knows about the trade. Dan was right.

" You mean you were really bad."

" I was a washout all through. All the way through."

" Well, everybody has his ups and downs. And you yourself said you were indisposed."

" Yes, Paul, but it's different. See, I was *indisposed* before." He pronounced the word as if he were brought up on it : " I was indisposed plenty. And yet I've done quite well. I remember in the Alhambra in Sydney. Ten years ago. I had my arm cracked. In the fourth round it was, with McGee. I had to go to dock after that. But I did well. I knocked him out with a cracked arm. It didn't matter tuppence. . . ." He shrugged one shoulder. " Fact of the matter is that I'm getting too old. . . ."

" One foot in the grave already."

Jerviss smiled. " It isn't like that, you know." His face gradually became serious. " You can't go on for ever. If you're a boxer. And I'm getting on for thirty-six. Been in the trade for very nearly nineteen years. You can't go on for ever."

" But surely it's too early to talk about retirement."

" Well, yes and no. Sometimes I think I might as well pack up." He raised an eyebrow ; the good one. He added suddenly : " D'you know what I'll do when I get licked ? "

" What ? " .

"I'll retire for good. Once I'm beaten. There's no return for me. Farewell performance, that sort of thing. I'm not like an old actress. Once I'm beaten I pack up for good. I've had enough. Nineteen years—Christ, if I come to think of it. . . ."

"I s'pose you've got your plans."

"That's exactly what I haven't. No plans whatsoever."

"Financially you're all right."

"I'm not worried about that . . . but plans . . . I haven't got. I s'pose I want to live."

"But Leslie, you have been *living* all the time. I look upon you as a man who has always *lived* life and really lived life. If you of all people haven't, who has?"

"It's different, Paul. One man's meat, the other man's poison. I want to see the world. I want to go to places. I want to live. Make up for the things I missed. . . ."

"Well," Paul said. "You only have to lift your finger. If that's what you want I'll be glad to be your guide."

"It's a mood," Paul said later, after a silence. "These nasty October days. It will pass."

"You really think so?"

"Yes. A question of adjusting yourself."

"*Adjusting yourself.*" Jerviss made a mental note.

Later on Paul began to talk about business.

"Are you in the mood to talk shop to-night?"

"Lit'rature, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Any time."

"That's fine." Paul laughed. "I have been thinking all the time how you could make your entry into real literature."

"Fiction?"

"Precisely. We shall do short stories. I worked out a scheme. I have several stories which I think are promising, but I think we must first write a story which is not far removed from boxing. And a 'careful' story. . . . Well, do you remember when you told me about the old sporting correspondent, the unpleasant one on the *Comet?*"

" Pa Philips," Jerviss said. He smiled. " The old blighter passed away last month."

" All the better," Paul thought. He said : " Now, you remember you told me how boxers used to hate him ? "

" There was every reason." Jerviss grinned.

" Exactly. Now I have worked a story round him. Listen carefully. We shall call him J. H. Gossamer. He's a boxing correspondent, he's a bachelor, an unpleasant, cantankerous person. He is very critical, knows all about boxing, but very critical. He never stands anyone drinks and he's mean."

" Just like Pa Philips."

" He is threatened publicly and in private that one day he will be beaten up. Only they never beat him up. He goes on being unpleasant. Now, so far the story is true and now comes my story. One day, Mr. Gossamer marries a widow. She has a small fortune. He becomes a changed man. He says he has had enough of ungrateful boxers, and of thirty years in Fleet Street. He is tired of the ' maddening crowd.' And he retires to a small house in the country and devotes himself entirely to gardening. He wants to grow flowers. Big, red roses."

" That's a good one," Jerviss broke into laughter.

" It isn't finished yet," Paul smiled. " Here comes the climax. Gossamer is already in his garden in the country. He's already dressed up as a gardener : overall and straw hat and gloves and Wellingtons and all. He's already worrying about subsoil and fertilizers and worms and whatnot, when all of a sudden a deputation of boxers arrives in the garden. He is afraid that the day of reckoning has come, that the boxers have arrived to beat him up. But nothing of the sort happens. The boys are very apologetic and on their best manners. Their leader, a heavy-weight, makes a speech in a timid voice. He tells Gossamer that they have come to take him back to Fleet Street. They miss his rude notices. The new man is too damn polite to everybody. Would he please leave the roses and come back. Well, that's the story."

" A good one," Jerviss said. He chuckled. He went on chuckling. " Very good."

" D'you really think so ? "

Jerviss gave three quick nods.

" Really. It's very funny. How did you make it up ? "

" If I could tell you. . . ." He became a little impatient. " Would you like to hear the first draft ? "

" Sure. Carry on."

Paul took the typescript from his desk and read the story aloud. Jerviss chuckled. " May I read one bit again ? "

" Now listen," Paul said. " I'll polish it up to-night and if I think I needn't repolish it later, I send it to you. Will you copy it out in your own handwriting ? Sorry, you've got to scribble so much. . . ."

" That doesn't worry me. I quite got used to writing."

" And I'll send you a letter you should also copy out and send to the editor of *Forum Magazine* with the story. O-kay ? "

Quite a magaziny plot, but he would have to be careful in the beginning. Besides, the treatment was not the least magaziny. He reflected he must re-type the copy, Jerviss would never be able to read his corrections. He would do that in the morning. He read the second part again. No, not the least magaziny. Dialogue all the way ; atmosphere and character in the dialogue, practically no comment ; moods and emotions conveyed entirely by arrangement of the dialogue. " *The Day of Reckoning.*"

It was quite a wise thing not to submit " *Ming* " first. An even more magaziny plot, true ; the millionaire who knocks down by accident the only treasure of an elderly married couple. It was soft with age that plot, almost maggoty, but the treatment was revolutionary and there was a message in it. It could come next, or he could do the railway story about Emmerling, whose Rumanian vocabulary was exactly ten words and yet he made a Rumanian train conductor believe that he was a Rumanian native and the conductor told him the greatest secret of his life . . . but Emmerling could not understand it. He must find a title for it.

Pity, of course, he couldn't submit the old stories under Jerviss' name. *Something Wrong, Limitations of Eternity, How*

Did It Happen? Those which were already written, those he liked, those which Radcliff said could be published. Mignon, the widow, who sold her husband's tombstone and got married on the proceeds, the convict's last wish before execution. (Only the feverish search of the prison officer all night to find out where the lines of the verse came from needed a little toning down. The main thing was that they did grant his last wish. But they told him Shelley. It was Keats.) Then there was *Home Exercise*, the private life of the young, good-looking gravedigger at Earlsfield, and finally there was *How Did It Happen?* He read it again. Possibly his best story so far. Not one unnecessary word. Not one single hint as to why he committed suicide, not a word about who he was, just how it happened, just the bare facts of his last five minutes. Now he found that it was not such a good bit when the young man carefully brushed off the cigarette ash of his last cigarette. (" *It took him quite a long time, because it fell on his waistcoat. He smiled; how stupid, how unnecessary. Routine to the end.*) Paul turned two pages :

" . . . *A schoolfriend, another schoolfriend, a third, a girl, another girl, money, a book, a summer morning in front of the music school; he heard scales on the piano through the open windows, the scales like long paper ribbons reaching the pavement. These thoughts would have gone on, would have gone on long, but he frowned, knitted his brow; put an end to them. No more.*"

" *He knew that trick. It was exactly the same the last time. He came into the room, just as he did today and nothing happened because he was thinking these thoughts. Angrily he turned to the washstand, but there was no water and no glass. Good thing there wasn't. He turned round. He felt his face was turning angry and ugly, ugly like a murderer's. He had a sudden desire to see his face in the mirror now. No. He would not. He would get on with the job.*"

Yes, it was his best story, no doubt. In every way. Among other things, it was wrtten about the most morbid subject and yet it wasn't morbid for one single second. How had he managed to make all the humdrum details so important?

He put the stories back into the file. There was no chance to re-submit them. All very well to reflect the editors or

readers who had read them and rejected them couldn't have given them a good reading and would, by now, surely have forgotten all about them ; it would be most unwise to risk it. By some incalculable mishap, one single reader might remember a title, the name of a character—and even if he changed the title or names, he might remember the plot, bits of the dialogue. It would be madness to do that. Especially now that there was a clear chance of getting stories published. These half a dozen stories would just have to remain apprentice work, or wasted effort.

He went through the notebooks again. There was the first one, he was twenty-one when he bought that. The notebook, bound in red canvas ; he had bought it in Vienna. How readable his handwriting was then.

" *Winners of Nobel Prize meet Alfred Nobel in Heaven (or Hell). Go up to him one after the other to express their gratitude. Nobel outraged when he sees them. Swears at Anatole France, knocks the heads of Kipling and Galsworthy together.* " *Back to the bog, Paddy,*" *he shouts at Yeats. Gives a vicious kick to Maeterlinck, and another to Sinclair Lewis.* " *Baa,*" *he says to Thomas Mann and puts his tongue out to Bernard Shaw. Finally, Selma Lagerlof and Sigrid Undset. He shrugs his shoulder at them.* ' *You wrote good stuff, yes, but you're so ugly, both of you. . . . Go away.*"

" *Every great city produces a great many strange and complex patterns of existence ; lives apparently unrelated to each other or to general system.*"

" *The man who is so bored with his uneventful life tt he sends anonymous letter to police, accusing himself of murder.*"

" *Roulette : I pray for you to-night, courtesan says to young-man, that you'll win. I pray tt number of my years* (28) *and colour of my hair* (*red*) *should come up* 5 *times in succession on roulette at midnight. Young man sells his dress suit, pawns his watch, begs and borrows money, goes to Cas., waits till midnight then puts everything on* 28 *and* rouge. *He loses everything. Following morning whole Monte Carlo is in turmoil : for t first time since* 1886 *it happened that* black *and* thirty-six *came up no less than* 5 *times in succession.*'

" *Resurrection. Gabriel makes mistake : sounds Last Trumpet before he should. They hit him on head, but it's too late, trumpet is already heard in Westm. Abbey. T dead rise from their graves. Princes without heads, Poets Corner. Etc. Thackeray begins to quarrel with Wilberforce, Mrs. Siddons, Gener. Burgoyne, Dr. Johnson, Irving, Newton, Warren Hastings.* (*Work in debunking details.*) *They all proceed to leave their graves. As they pass through North Aisle of Nave they meet a young man. He is in modern mil. uniform. He is v confused, because nobody understands what he says. Finally an old dead Dean who went to Heidelberg finds tt young soldier is a German. They read inscr. over his tomb. 'A Brit. soldier unknown by name or rank . . .' 'Wo bin ich, wollen Sie bitte Sagen? Krieg beendet, ja? . . . I come from Dresden. It was very cold. I put on uniform of dead English soldier. Mine was torn. He had nice boots, just my size. Then as I tried to run I felt a pain, here . . . no, here. But it wasn't really painful you know. . . . Just for* ein Augenblick—*a second.*' "

Paul smiled. The adolescent desire to shock, the adolescent desire for the dramatic.

He reached for another notebook. Here the notes were shorter, less detailed, plots less unusual, eccentric, ambitious.

" *Ophelia. Michael, when first in England—aged* 18—*falls in love with a pre-Raphaelite picture in Sth. Ken. drawing room. Tells hostess so : he would love to own it. Lady leaves him picture. But it's already* 10 *years later. He's* 28, *changed in every way. Work out plot in retrospect. Open with executor of will sending him picture.*"

" *Mignon and tombstone . . .*" He had done that already.

" *Milk bottle story. Romsey nr. Southampton. Elsie in t dairy* (19, *pretty but has squint*) *hs affair with milkman. Milkman loses cigarette case. Try Faulkner treatment, but speed up.*"

" *Prov. reporter sent out to street accident. While he writes in strict journaliese, he recalls in his mind real story, behind his clichés.*

He turned page after page. Plots got thinner, more and more unimportant as he grew older. There came long bits

of observations, lines of dialogue. Five pages of conversation overheard at Lyons ; notes he remembered he made while waiting for a train, the description of a garage, an interview with a sailor on leave in Hyde Park. Then turns of phrase, casual lines. He read :

" *You're drunk.*"

" *Well. Do I look any different ?* "

" *Wha'was you doing before you went to work for Mills ?* "

" *I's out of work.*"

" *How long you bin out ?* "

" *Six months the last time.*"

" *What did Mills pay you ?* "

" *Tenpence an hour. For a start. You want to know everything, don't you ?* "

" *Never mind about that. You never had tenpence an hour. Don't tell me that . . .*"

Paul heard the chapel clock strike midnight. He dropped the notebooks on the writing bureau.

BOOK THE FOURTH

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH

IT was a bright, clear March day and it was fun to go to a cocktail party again. The first for two years, he thought, how time passed. When Veronica had first asked him to come to Sylvia Jenkins' party he was quite eager to accept. It was to be a literary party with authors, critics, publishers. He was certainly feeling strong enough to face them again.

He saw faces he remembered from parties in the past. Young men and less young women with one foot in Chelsea or Montparnasse and two arms clutching hard at Regent's Park or investments in chemicals. How unreal they looked ; no longer " disgustingly " unreal, " pitifully " unreal as he used to think, just unreal.

He helped himself to a glass of sherry.

" I just heard from Bryan that Hugh Walpole has only two years to live. His heart," somebody said behind him.

" *God*, you mean to say he will go on writing for *another* two years. . . . At least three more rubbishy novels . . . God."

He turned round. *Not* so unreal. In fact, quite promising. He saw two young men, about his own age. They didn't look literary. The taller looked quite hearty and cheerful, the shorter like an athletic clergyman.

They said no more. Apparently they decided that two years was perhaps not such a long time to wait, after all.

Paul walked up to Mary Cassidy.

" Is Honor Vereker coming ? " Paul asked.

" No, she is away for two days."

" So now you are *The Examiner* ? "

"Yes, I and dear Mr. Hartnell. Come and sit down."

They passed a small table with half a dozen copies of Isabel's latest novel. So it was a coming-out party. He picked up a copy as they sat down. "*Jervis Bay.*" It had a gold dust jacket.

"Have you read it?" Paul asked.

"No, Mr. Hartnell is reviewing it. By the way, *Jervis Bay*, d'you ever read *Forum?*"

Paul became so excited that he almost dropped the book. He knew at once why Mary Cassidy had asked him that question. "Something told him" to come to Sylvia's party. Marvellous—that was the moment he had been waiting for for months. The very moment. Unsolicited. Patience repaid him.

"You mean the story by Jerviss the boxer?" Paul said.

"Yes. Did you see the make-up? It was brought out as if it were, God knows—a recently discovered poem by Byron. They had their best illustrator for the pictures and that blurb . . ." Mary Cassidy almost fell off the settee.

"D'you think his stories are bad?"

"Well, no. They are mixtures. Either a hackneyed plot treated in a most unusual manner, or a very new plot in a hackneyed manner. One wouldn't expect a boxer to write such civilised stories. But I s'pose he wants to show off. He's anxious to put everything in the shop-window. Disappointing. One would have expected a rough diamond: marvellous honesty, *cris de coeur*, inexperienced, genuine, and one gets a hard-working, crafty, cunning, old, intellectual . . ."

"But come, come, what about his dialogue . . . the most vital, most natural dialogue I've read for years. . . ."

"That comes from Sherwood Anderson . . ."

(Now that was really bloody. Cassidy had no more memory than a canary.)

"I don't suppose Jerviss has ever heard of Sherwood Anderson," Paul said.

"Don't you believe it. I *bet* he has a huge library. . . . Possibly carefully hidden under lock and key. Then he comes along and he says he's natural talent. . . . Why, I am sure he has even read Julien Green and Cocteau. He

must have. In translation, of course. . . . Cunning old fox . . ."

(Well, her memory isn't so bad, after all.)

"He has a marvellous feeling of atmosphere," Paul said.

"Not a marvellous one. A feeling, yes. It's quite infuriating. I was expecting something good to come, then it became a mercilessly well-balanced magazine story. To fit in with the *Forum* requirements. He Forumises himself. Quite slick."

"Well, I s'pose he daren't throw his weight about yet . . ."

"Why shouldn't he?" She raised her voice, her neck stiffened. "He's got into *Forum*. He could write exactly as it pleases him. But then"—she shrugged her shoulder very fast and angrily—"all this is nonsense. None of his stories would have the same chance if he weren't a famous boxer."

"I think you're unfair. He's a good writer. He would be published everywhere even if he were called John Smith."

"Nonsense. He would be published absolutely nowhere. He wouldn't be published in a commercial magazine because he would be too advanced and too literary for them, and he wouldn't be published in a literary magazine because he's too commercial. But that's not the real point. The point is that he's an escapist. He never writes about his own world. Boxing. He's missing his great chance. The boxer's world has never been done in intelligent fiction. Not in England, at least. And it must be interesting. And he could do it. He has the reporter's eye and all the tricks. But that doesn't interest him. Not his natural surroundings." She emptied her glass and put it on the table. "I don't know whether he's an escapist or merely a snob. He makes the same mistake as Hemingway. He doesn't write about America which he could do so very well, but he runs round in Latin countries and writes up synthetic atmospheres. *Death in the Afternoon* and *A Farewell to Arms* were exciting books, but so false, somehow. Rootless." Her expression suddenly changed to anger. "Well, of course, Jerviss needn't bother about that. He can trade on his name. '*Read this poignant story by one of our finest sportsmen . . .*'"

He looked at Mary Cassidy's bitter face, the mole under her left nostril, the ugly look in her shoebutton eyes, the wizened body. He no longer enjoyed the part he acted.

"But what is it he ought to do?" His voice, he felt, was almost imploring.

"He ought not to use his own name. He ought not to take the advantage. Write under a pen-name . . ."

"And put up with that awful ordeal of a beginner. It kills so much talent before it has time to develop."

"Ordeal, ordeal," repeated Mary Cassidy. "Ordeal on three thousand a year. I'm sure he earns quite as much, maybe more. I can't understand you. When I first met you you were full of bitterness. You used to say awful things about commercialism. . . . What a placid English gentleman you've become."

"But surely," Paul said, a little put out, a little challenging, "you must agree with me Jerviss has got style and talent. Well, hasn't he got talent . . ." His mouth remained open.

"Yes, yes," Mary said absent-mindedly, as if she were not paying attention, then suddenly added: "The thing is, he has an unfair advantage over most beginners, to develop that talent. . . . As likely as not Jerviss met Pontefract or Roe or Green-Radcliff at a party and told them that he wrote. They were, of course, glad to hear it. He could have been much worse."

She made a movement, which he in his excitement interpreted as her intention to leave. "Wait a second," he cried, then suddenly his voice returned to normal. "D'you remember last month's *Forum?*"

"I read *Forum* every month, because I do book notices for them."

"There was a Jerviss story in it. *West End Misfit.* I thought that was a grand story. The way he built up the character of that little shop-assistant."

"The one who saves money to buy a motorboat . . ."

"Yes," Paul cried. He could have kissed Mary Cassidy, mole and all. "So you remember that—Marley was his name." He raised his hand. "Marley is a most lovable character. . . . And it's a grand story. . . ."

"What's happened to you?" She looked at him. "I never realised you were such an ardent admirer of Jerviss'. It wasn't a bad plot—but I think he rather spoiled it by making it woolly and quite sentimental. It's his treatment which I didn't like."

"What d'you mean?" His vice was loud again, his face fierce. He was calling Mary Cassidy to account. "Because he's tender and full of feeling you think he's sentimental."

"What's happened to you?" she was smiling again.

"I don't know," Paul impersonated a successful stage laugh. "I s'pose it's the mood I was in when I read it. D'you know, sometimes one falls in love with a piece of writing. Then when one reads it the second time, one just can't see why one made all that fuss."

"Mm," Cassidy said.

They remained silent for a moment. He suddenly said:

"But you agree with me that Jerviss is a *writer*."

"I never said he wasn't. There are too many writers. I say, what time do people generally leave cocktail parties?"

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST

"So this is the last time I come to the Sentry Box." Veronica was making her lips up against the window. She screwed her eyes against the hot July sun.

"Well, not exactly. At least, I hope not," Paul said. "I can't move for another three weeks. So please put up with my misery for another three weeks. I often think it must have been an ordeal for you to come to this bloody place, ring the bell, and climb these dreadful stairs. . . ."

"Mm Haven't I been good to you?"

"Better than I deserved."

"Oh, I've made a mess of it . . . may I borrow your handkerchief?"

Better than I deserved. Yes. Since his material standards had improved and he was not feeling the more brutal implications of poverty, he noticed how his outlook had softened.

He was now busy all day and no longer had any time—and little reason—to brood over himself. His fits of bad temper and depression had become less frequent. He felt he was growing more tolerant, human, sympathetic. His feelings towards Veronica had also undergone a very important change. He did not quite know when the real change had happened, because lately he had been wondering whether he felt it before the unexpected meeting at the Chandos or not. In any case since they met in the Chandos he had felt with growing intensity that she meant more to him than he had thought and he began to feel happy because of the discovery.

Their relation in the past was easy to define. They were not in love with each other and it often seemed to him, even in view of the romantic reunion in Basil's flat, that strictly speaking they were not even " friends." They had little in common. Their conversation was intimate but full of mutual reserve. They were intimate, but it was the intimacy of the body and not of the mind. At the beginning of their relation he never thought of Veronica in any other connection except that of " hygienic necessity." How cruel that sounded : " *hygienische nuetzlichkeit.*" It was Burger, his news editor, who used the phrase, perhaps coined it, and Paul had translated it into English, and adopted it. But how brutal it sounded and how odious Burger now seemed with his philosophy of *Neue Saechlichkeit. Altmodische Saechlichkeit,* that was Burger, together with everything he stood for.

For quite a time, quite a long time, Paul thought their relation was a very good solution, perhaps the perfect solution. The connecting link between them being their mutual desire for physical satisfaction. The relation satisfied both of them and it left them both completely free. There was no sentiment, no silliness about it, no emotions, no sleepless nights. When he reflected how little Veronica seemed to think about the moral implications of their affair, how indifferent she was towards what the world might think, she attracted him more. And there was another point. Veronica's attitude towards the affair was something like the attitude of an " emancipated" woman in whom this indifference towards morals was a by-product of a scientific education, just like—yes, that was the

point, just like glasses, a " scholarly " body, bad skin and the kind of carelessness in which " emancipated " women sometimes indulge. But Veronica certainly was not the " scientific " emancipated, intellectual sort. On the contrary, her skin, her teeth, her whole body . . . No, it was the best of both worlds.

When he had thought of the affair in the past he was sometimes a little flattered that theirs was the " modern " love affair ; they both retained their complete mental independence.

But lately his feelings had changed. Little by little he discovered that there was a good deal in Veronica, in her silences, in her chattiness, in her frivolity. For the first time in their relation he felt that they were friends as well as lovers. She seemed to be interested in his work and the interest was genuine. Though ill-educated, like most girls of the class from which she came, Veronica was neither ignorant nor contemptuous about matters of the spirit. She was musical and her taste in music was unexpectedly and genuinely good, though she played the piano badly.

She had feelings, yes, and she had grown almost affectionate. He felt that she was a person to whom he could tell everything about himself, all his " little troubles." But were there any " little troubles " now ? He was making money. Not very much, but more than he had been accustomed to. He could afford luxuries and he knew that there was every reason to hope that he would make more money in the future. There was only one " problem " worth discussing with Veronica. A " problem " which had come almost to monopolise his mind at times. How many times had he felt the overpowering desire to tell someone about it, to share its excitement, which had proved to be too exciting, too agonising and too wonderful for him to bear alone. Communicative by nature, by inclination, by profession, he had felt lately that Veronica ought to know about it. She was intelligent enough to understand it But was she really the person for such confidences ? She was certainly loyal, she would never let him down, out of spite, if he told her the great secret. The greatest secret of his life. Yet (he shrugged a shoulder) the trouble was—he tried to sum it up—there was somehow very little permanence about

Veronica's mental make-up. Everybody is subject to moods, yes—but he felt that she did not always mean the same to him. Was it on her account? Perhaps it was. At times she was affectionate, candid and so understanding that he felt he was almost in love with her. At other times she became absent-minded and so moody that her mental attitude reminded him of their first year, when she was nothing but a mistress. If only she could remain permanently the same sweet and affectionate person she sometimes was, if her mood, her mental attitude could be fixed there and then and rendered permanent by some superhuman device . .

(" Infinite variety "—yes, yes, but why extol it. Why feature it as something magnificent. Infinite variety was a nuisance.)

Maybe it was his fault. Perhaps it was he who ought to have made an advance. To show her his confidence, little by little. He knew that lately he had less and less time for anything, including her. Still careful not to burn all his bridges behind him, he had not given up the *Morgenblatt*, and the paper had lately made a greater demand on his time. Then there were the new plans arising out of the conspiracy; ideas for stories, articles, the plot of a play, which occupied his mind for the best part of a week, and had to be given up in the end because there wasn't enough meat in it for three acts. He knew that lately his relation to Veronica had slightly resembled that of the big-business man husband, whose active life leaves little time for his wife, and he tried to make up for it in other ways. He gave her presents. A regular supply of *Arpège*, then he gave her a wrist watch on her birthday. Quite an expensive one.

But still, he felt that the presents could not make up for everything. Veronica was in no way a gold-digger. In fact, she was definitely generous in view of her limited means. But she had demands, definite demands. She *was* a golddigger, in a way, but the gold she tried to dig was emotional.

" Very serious today," Veronica said.

" Yes." He was taken unawares. " I was thinking about the new flat—and you."

"More about the flat, I should say."

"Not quite."

"Fifty-fifty."

"No, fifty-one you and forty-nine the flat."

"I see. You are improving beyond belief."

"Of all the people I have ever met you have the greatest capacity to make me feel like a cad," Paul said.

He kissed her.

"You must buy a few pieces of furniture, of course."

"Yes. And as it goes it might cost a good deal of money."

"You have expensive tastes."

"I am driving a hard bargain in a deal for four Regency chairs. In the end I think I shall have my way."

"They are paying you well for those German translations. A Russian girl I know used to tell me translation is very badly paid. But, of course, you are doing confidential stuff for the Legation . . ."

"Yes. But for goodness' sake don't talk about it. The Legation naturally wouldn't like me to tell anybody about it."

"All right, all right." She finished her make-up. "It's a pity in a way you aren't doing any writing now. It's all very well that you are making more money, but you ought to go on with your writing."

"I shall."

"When?"

"As soon as my fountain pen is repaired. It leaks . . ."

"Idiot. But I mean seriously. It's all very well that you are making more money. But you don't really like doing legal translations. I mean, you can't be quite happy . . ."

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't know. You are always talking about literature. Talking. And you don't write. You haven't written anything since that *Limitation* story. I liked that . . ."

"I know. So did I. But I can't get it published."

"Can't Sylvia help you?"

"Of course she can't. Kiss me."

"You are ruining my make-up. Oh, must you start chewing me again?"

"Oh, Paul," she said a little later, "I can't finish that

French book you told me to read—*Journey to the End of the Night.*"

"I told you you couldn't read it in the library, with people popping in all the time. You must read it at leisure."

"I tried it at home. I just can't read it. I think it's so depressing, so ugly. Don't you?"

"I don't. It's the book I would give anything to have written. It's one of the greatest romantic novels of our time."

"Romantic?"

"Yes. Céline is the romantic of ugliness. He loves it as other romantics loved beauty. And it's absolutely genuine. In the end one falls in love with squalor and ugliness. That's art . . ."

She took his hand, she smiled. He disengaged himself gently, he went on:

"It isn't only is atmosphere . . . he's marvellous about that. There are other things. He is a little like Rousseau, but an up-to-date and more genuine Rousseau. Rousseau was a bit of a swindler. He makes his great confession that he stole when he was young, but you feel all the time that with one eye Rousseau is watching your reactions. Céline doesn't *want* to shock you . . ."

"But the style . . ." Veronica said.

"Yes, that's where he is great. He has done something nobody ever did before. He has revolutionised the whole French language. You won't notice that in the translation, of course—but even then," he raised his arms as if he wished to lift a chest of drawers, "it's the play of associations that does the trick there. At times you suddenly look up from the book and close your eyes—not because of the story, not because he has said something profound, but because a sentence, a phrase very suddenly strikes a chord in you, it evokes a memory in you which is more interesting than the book."

She kissed him.

"I must go. Really."

"I'll give you a lift," he said.

But it wasn't her lack of appreciation for Céline that was making him feel doubtful now that he could ever be really

intimate with Veronica. Appreciation of books was a personal matter, after all. He himself found Conrad a boring writer and classed him as one of " The Great Unreadables " along with Kafka, Wasserman, Mauriac, W. H. Hudson. And Veronica was naturally intelligent and not incurious in literary matters. Was it lack of feeling, or shyness—because Veronica was really quite shy he felt—or lack of permanence? As he drove along Knightsbridge towards Soho he reflected that she could never give him the interest, the devotion, the understanding that Hoover had given him. The idea came very suddenly. It was only now that he realised Hoover's tenderness, devotion, interest. Well, of course, he thought, dazed and elated by the discovery. He looked up. But it was so very strange that he did not notice it at the time. All very well that his mind was fully occupied about other things, plans and the Conspiracy. How was it that he only saw it now, very suddenly and without any reason? That wasn't quite true, though. Last week he was reading *Si le Grain ne Meurt* and the week before that, he was reading Havelock Ellis, but these books did not bring Hoover into his mind.

He tried to see Hoover in view of his discovery, his intellect, his taste, his sudden changes of mood and behaviour, his attitude to life. So that was it; he smiled inwardly, not at Hoover but at the shivery flattery that Hoover had found him attractive and that he had solved a mystery that had not appeared to him as a mystery before. Elementary, my dear Watson. How he had liked to be the intellectual detective when he was fifteen. It was one of his parts when he was a child. It still was for that matter.

But surely there must be, there are, in fact, women, even if not as intelligent as Hoover, not as cultured, not as witty, but women understanding and affectionate, with whom he could be intimate. Really and unreservedly intimate. Without saying much, just a word, or perhaps less than a word, just a kind of accompliceship and afterwards their eyes would meet. He knew he would be in love with them at once. And such women were real. They certainly existed in real life. Not only in fiction. It was, of course

natural that they found their way into fiction and were in certain types of fiction more common than in real life. But they existed, certainly.But where did one find them, where?

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND

"AND when d'you think you'll be ready, Paul?" Jerviss' voice sounded strangely resonant in the empty room.

"Oh, only when I come back. I have to buy a good many things and that takes a lot of time and energy. And I'm rather tired now." He breathed in the aroma of fresh paint mixing with the warm air of early August. It elated him a little.

"Nice size room, Paul." Jerviss looked at the ceiling.

"As modern flats go, yes. I wanted a larger sitting-room, but that would have meant either an old house with no central heating or a flat at two-fifty a year. But why don't you sit down?"

"Can I help you unpack the books?"

"Kind of you, Les, but I don't think the shelves are dry yet . . ."

"By the by, I forgot to bring you back the book you lent me. You want it back quick?"

"Not particularly. What did you think of it?"

"Well, Paul, that was a queer story." Jerviss smiled as if he was thinking about a dirty joke. "I read it twice. Must be difficult to write a book like that." He shook his head. "A bit about the present day, then a bit about the old story, then the present day again, backwards and forwards. I read it the second time because I thought I could find out how the chap wrote it. I reckon he must have a good memory to keep the whole story in his mind . . ."

"You enjoyed it, didn't you?"

"I did, but you know . . ." Jerviss hesitated for a moment before he continued, as if afraid Paul wouldn't like what he was going to say. "In the end, after I read the book for the second time, I didn't like it. It's funny, I grant you

that, yes, but you know, Paul "—Jerviss paused for a moment as he had seen Paul doing it sometimes—" there's no feeling in it. No feeling." For a moment Jerviss felt proud of his well-chosen word, then he added as if it were not the right word, after all. " You know what I mean? It's got no heart, it's all brains. It's clever. It makes you laugh, but I felt afterwards he doesn't like the people he writes about, he just makes fun of the . . ."

" An interesting point," Paul said. " And many of Ashenden's readers feel the same. He characterises people by their bad points, because he knows that bad points are more interesting than good points and . . ."

" Yes," said Jerviss aloud, interrupting Paul for the first time in his life, " he took the easy way."

" Exactly," said Paul, a little dazed. How clearly Jerviss saw the point. He could not always find the right expression, his phrases were often primitive, but always to the point. As so often, Jerviss' observations gave Paul the thrill a grown-up person might experience in talking to a very intelligent child or looking at a drawing by an artist aged six or seven. The picture is in a way the caricature of an impressionist picture or of a " primitivist " picture, yet it is very true, sincere and shatteringly and disconcertingly expressive with its primitive economy.

" You said the other day that Whatshisname worked in a cold sweat . . ." Jerviss said.

" Yes. You can't be born with that style. You have to fight for it, reading, reading, copying classics, writing, rewriting, polishing. *Rosie* has thirty years' experience behind it, if not more . . ."

" Go on. You mean to say it takes thirty years to learn to write? I mean, as he writes . . . s'posing he has the knack of it . . . and the brains . . . and all that . . . ? "

" It depends. Some people write their best books when they're thirty, some when they are sixty. Just think of Marlowe. Isn't he wonderful at seventy-eight? You see, the brain goes on developing for a long time. It doesn't get flabby like muscles. A writer may be still young at sixty . . ."

"Not like a boxer." Paul did not notice that Jerviss' laughter was not easy. "He's usually finished at thirty. I must be one of the oldest men in the trade, you know." He became silent. "*Jerviss—it seems—is developing a literary style at the expense of his fighting style. It would not be entirely fair to say that he had a literary future and a boxing past . . .*"

That was in the *Standard*, after the fight with McKinley. But that may have been just chaffing. Any case it wasn't no good starting worrying about things. Life wasn't bad if one knew how to hold oneself. He began to think he would turn the parlour into a library . . .

Paul looked at his watch.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. A young lady is coming. Any minute now. She is one of your admirers. She admired you in the ring and now she is admiring you in the literary field." Paul gave a wink as he finished the sentence.

Jerviss gave an awkward smile :

"Don't you think I'd better go now, Paul? It's sort of . . ."

"It's sort of what? Don't be silly, Leslie. In the first place she's a pretty girl, and also I think she's the person who could introduce you to your reading public. I mean, she knows people, and it would be better for you if she took you along instead of me. You see? Then there would be no suspicion. Besides, she works in a lending library."

"I see," said Jerviss. "So she is in the conspiracy, is she?"

"Of course she isn't." Paul's manner became alarmed. "For God's sake don't tell her anything. She must believe you are the author of the stories. You've got to bluff her the same as the others."

"I see," Jerviss said. "Friend of yours?"

"Yes, an old friend of mine, but actually she is young. And very nice . . . And a flirt, Leslie."

"I know how to take care, don't worry."

"Oh, by the way, before she comes," said Paul, "I meant to tell you this. You need not copy out by hand all the stories I send you now. You can send them out typewritten now. I mean, the editorial people have no doubts now.

You can easily spare yourself the trouble. S'pose you have never written quite as much all your life as in these months . . ."

" Doesn't matter, Paul, I rather liked doing it. It was ever so much fun, copying them all out and burning your typescript afterwards. You know, I always lock the door when I do that. I tell the wife—when she's indoors, and wants to butt in—that I'm busy. She doesn't understand, of course, and asks what all the fuss is about. I say you don't know anything, and that a writer can only work in peace, I say. I want to be alone, when I work. I'll tell you what I'll do now. I've got a typewriter at home and I'll type them out. Matter of fact, I bought it some time ago and I can type quite well now (with two fingers,but ever so quickly). I bought it through a friend who said I ought to have a good typewriter. It cost fifteen quid. Portable."

" Oh, Paul," said Veronica, as they kissed in the hall and she looked round, " it's a grand place. What's in there ? " She pointed towards the door opposite to her.

" You are a genius, darling, you knew at once that it's the bedroom." He squeezed Veronica's arm in his hand. " It's the only room in the place which is ready. Let me show you the bathroom. I am quite proud of it, and that's ready, too, and then we'll go in to see Jerviss. He is here. Don't frighten him ; he is shy but really nice."

" Les," Paul said, opening the door, " I want you to meet Miss Veronica Ferrers. She's one of your admirers."

Jerviss got up. He had a book in his hand, one of the books which were lying on the floor in a pile. Paul reflected that Jerviss, who, after all, had not had to wait for it too long, tried to live up to his reputation of being a literary man, obviously because he saw literary celebrities photographed book in hand or leaning over a manuscript, pen in hand. In reality the boxer had picked up the book in his embarrassment, as a piece of self-defence. He walked up to Veronica.

" Pleased to meet you," he said, with an earnest smile.

" I like the walls," Veronica said later. " Nice colour, that pink."

" It's *saumong fewmay*," Jerviss said. He laughed.

Paul clapped.

"The true artistic spirit, Les. That's right. You *would* say pink, just pink, Veronica, when I spent half an hour quarrelling with the painters to get this colour."

Veronica laughed.

"You don't mean to say Paul is making you artistic, because I know the expression is just Paul all over. *Saumon fumée.* It's just him."

While Paul was talking Jerviss looked at Veronica. The slight embarrassment which he had tried to hide under a forcedly hilarious manner was already gone. She looked fine, in spite of a little too much make-up. It was curious that no matter what she did a born lady always looked like a lady. He was enjoying his silence and the conversation of the couple. He liked the way they talked and argued. They were childish in a way in which class people are, childish even when they are grown up, and their talk was so free, yet so gentlemanly and dignified. He had never seen this aspect of upper-class life before, only in the cinema sometimes. He was surprised at the natural way the two behaved. As if he wasn't present. She was as natural as Paul, and like him, very simply dressed and yet distinguished. They could talk ever so long about trifles and yet it was interesting.

Suddenly Paul looked at him.

"So sorry, Les. We have been arguing about furniture and neglecting you . . ."

"Don't use the plural, Paul, it was you who started the argument and it was you who talked all the time."

"Well, I reckon someone must do that . . ." Jerviss said. He smiled at Veronica.

"Well, before I forget or before Paul monopolises the conversation, I'd like to tell you how amusing your story in *Forum* this month was. I wanted to ask you how you thought of it."

Jerviss smiled.

"Well, you see, I can never say much about what I write. I am no talker. When the idea comes I just sit down and put it on paper as best I can. That's all."

Paul looked at his shoes intently. He was pleased to see how well and how naturally, with how much verisimilitude the boxer played his part, speaking the words he had taught him during their meetings. How completely and easily he played the part of the instinctive, creative writer, who had no elaborate theories of creation or technique, but wrote as the inspiration came. For a moment he felt a sudden impulse to look at Jerviss and give him a wink, but his commonsense soon got the better of his playful mood.

"And that is why," he heard the boxer say while he still looked at his shoes, "I don't really like to talk about the things I write. I'm not ready yet. I've got a good deal to learn. Do you know how many years it took Ashenden to get his style? Thirty years. Makes you think, doesn't it?"

"I didn't realise he was quite so good looking," Veronica said.

"But you saw him in the Albert Hall . . ."

"Yes, but I was miles away. Doesn't look like a boxer a bit, except that his hair is cut so short. Hasn't he got lovely teeth . . ."

"Yes. American dentists work wonders."

"Miaow . . ."

"It's true. His front teeth were knocked out."

"And yours ought to be."

"What's wrong?" He made her sit in his lap.

"Because you're going to the South of France and I've got to stay here in this beastly place."

"But why don't you come with me? I asked you before . . ."

"Because you don't really mean it and besides a fortnight is too short."

"I don't know. I'm dead beat and I want to have a

complete rest, and sun, just doing absolutely nothing, but I can't see why you shouldn't come. It's lovely down there. I've told you already I'll make you a present of your railway fare."

She shook her head.

"No. It would be difficult at home . . . and you must have your rest. And it's a smart place, and for a woman it'd cost so much. And you would be staying with people."

"Yes, but only in the beginning. I shall be on my own for a solid fortnight."

"And I've already arranged to stay with the Inwoods in September."

"Is she the American woman who wants to take you to New York next Christmas?"

"Yes."

He got up to mix a drink for Veronica. "I shall miss you," he said.

"I don't believe it."

"Yes. I shall."

"Will you write to me?"

"Course."

"Oh, it's twenty-five to six . . . I must fly."

"What is it?"

"A dress I saw at Lentheric. They have a sale and it's a model that's going for practically nothing. One of the girls knows me from Mrs. Fife's and I'll get it at a special price."

"How much is it?"

"Seven guineas . . . It's a lot of money, but not for a Lentheric model."

"I'll buy it for you."

"All right, and I want a couple of silver foxes."

"Sorry, I can't give you silver foxes, but I can give you the frock."

"Very well."

But when she saw Paul going up to his writing desk to pull out his cheque book from a niche, tear out a page and unscrew his fountain pen, she realised it was not a joke.

"Don't be mad, Paul."

" I'm not a bit mad." Paul filled in the cheque. He looked for the blotter, and said " I always wanted to give you a frock, so you can accept it from me . . ."

She laughed and shook her head.

" No, Paul. It's very sweet of you, but I just can't take it."

" Why ? "

" Because it can't be done . . For one thing you've already given me this watch . . ."

" Why shouldn't I give you a frock ? "

" It's different . . ."

" I know, darling. Of course, it's different." He drew her down on to his knees. " There is something very, very personal about a frock, and besides there is a dreadful old-fashioned association of the rich man giving clothes to his mistress. That awful, *fin de siècle* principle ' I have undressed you so often, so now I may dress you up.' It's rather sordid. But I am not a rich man and I am not giving you this frock as a return. I am merely giving it to you because I want to give it to you."

" How French you sound . . ."

" I like sounding French . . . And now," he said and kissed her hand, " you ring your friend up from here and ask her to send the dress to you, and tonight you dine with me."

" I still can't finish that French book," Veronica said. " I made an effort. I just can't finish it . . ."

" Then give it up. I think Céline must be an acquired taste."

" I don't think I could ever acquire it . . . Oh, you are hurting my neck . . . Do switch the lamp off. I want to talk to you seriously."

" Can't you be serious by lamplight ? "

" I've been thinking . . ."

" You don't say so . . ."

" Oh, can't you be serious for a minute . . . oh, your feet are cold . . . I know I've said this before, but you really ought to go on with your writing . . ."

" I'll switch the lamp off."

"No, seriously." She took his hand. "You ought to try a different style . . ."

"Such as . . ."

"Oh, I don't know. You are the writer, not I, but I feel you out to try a different style, a different style of writing. Well, I mean, take Jerviss, for example . . . No, no . . . God, I honestly thought you were having a fit. Paul . . . Paul . . . Please stop these zoo noises. Honestly . . . Shall I call a doctor? Well, go on laughing," Her voice seemed annoyed. A little alarmed, Paul turned towards Veronica in the bed.

"It's easy to laugh at people. And Jerviss is not a bad writer . . ."

"I never said he was."

"Well, then why d'you have fits?"

"Darling," he kissed her hand, "there are times in life when one just can't explain sudden impulses. To break into laughter, for example. It wasn't what you said because what you said was perfectly logical. Jerviss is a good writer and he has a natural touch and a popular touch. It wasn't the way you said it either, because you said it in the most normal way. But apparently what you said clashed with something in the subconscious and I couldn't help bursting out laughing. Bergson has a very interesting theory about this . . ."

"There you are," she said and took his hand in the dark. "You'll get nowhere with the subconscious. It's all very well laughing at Sylvia's style and Jerviss' style. You'll never make a name for yourself and never make any money if you remain so deadly serious and superior."

"But darling," Paul said and his manner became a little serious, "d'you know what you're talking about at all? You call me a highbrow. If you mean I'm an intellectual, that I s'pose is technically true, but highbrow also means a certain deliberation, a pose, it can mean people who deliberately set out to make themselves unusual and unpopular. And that's not true about me. And by now you ought to know it's not true . . ."

"I don't know . . . I may not know much about litera-

ture and writers, and I know you'll be very angry if I tell you this, but I feel you talk too much. You talk very well, granted. You're about the best talker I ever met and there's something wrong there. The other day I read an article in *Harper's Magazine*. It was called 'The Talking Writer.' And you know I was thinking about you all the time I was reading it. I know you'll be up in the air if I tell you this, but there it is. It's true. It said there are people who have got everything a writer needs and yet they don't write. They talk it out. Just laziness. Well, take Jerviss. He writes his stuff and never talks about writing."

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD

THERE was no reason to wake up at half-past seven. Everything had been arranged. His ticket bought, his clothes packed, there was the letter he had to write, but that wouldn't take more than ten minutes. And the train was not till eleven.

He tried to sleep, but he knew it wouldn't be any good. He would only think of sex, lying awake in the large, comfortable bed, and he would feel tired the whole day. He got up and drew the curtains.

As he was lying in his bath, he looked at the blue rubber floor, the blue towels on the chromium rack and the blue oilskin curtains with silver stars. It was making him feel good to look at these things every morning as he was taking his bath. He wondered how long it would take for the novelty of the new surroundings to wear off. Would a day come when his new flat would look miserable ; pretentiously miserable ? It was not likely. Boring possibly ; miserable never. For the time being planning the flat, going round the shops, making notes, making inquiries, gave him a delight, a delight which he knew very well, but had only rarely experienced.

" White Wedgwood," he reflected as he was having breakfast in the kitchen. It was quite inexpensive, that floral Regency design, and one could always get replacements.

He heard a knock on the hall door followed by a thud, then by another, then he heard the metal top of his letter-box tremble. He got up before he lit his cigarette.

There was the *Morgenpost* lying on the floor, in its familiar grey wrapping and an envelope. One of his own env . . .

" No," he said aloud, he felt he was blushing, " it won't spoil my holiday. I don't care. I'm going away this morning and I'm going to have a very good time. I'm going to spend money and I can afford to spend it. I'll stay at a good hotel and on my way back I'll buy attractive things for the flat. I shall eat well, I shall swim and sunbathe. I couldn't care less. I shall throw the slip into the lavatory. In fact, I shall use it for the purpose it should be used for . . . that is, if it's large enough and the paper not too hard, but I'll throw it into the lavatory all the same." He tore the envelope open. Let's see whether the slip is on soft enough paper . . .

The Editor of Forum *has carefully considered the enclosed MS but to his great regret cannot make an offer for it.*

Then—it was automatic and unnecessary—he opened the typescript. " *The Face is Familiar*," *a story by Paul Noley.*

Then it was no use, no use to try the other line, no use at all. He read the opening paragraph as if he had never seen it in his life. Maybe it's absolutely bad, maybe it's the worst story they ever received, that wasn't the reason. They were animals. Miserable little wriggling worms. They kicked out a story which was quite as good as the other twelve . . . Oh, what a fool he was to have the very slightest misgivings, after he posted it, that there was a similarity in style and treatment to the other stories . . . the worms wouldn't notice it. They featured the other twelve, they made a fuss of them, they made a contract with Jerviss. Yet they kicked out this one, simply because it wasn't under Jerviss' name. Not under *a* name. And since there was no name it was handed over to a little female worm, a little, half-starved cow (she would have glasses and misfit false teeth) along with others. " These are to go back, Miss Smith . . ."

. . . That would, of course, be a grand idea and a fine

piece of revenge. To retype the title page and put Les Jerviss instead of Paul Noley, and send it back to them by return of post. Or still better, still better, cross out " Paul Noley," carefully, so that it should remain visible and put under it Les Jerviss. Or, still better. Cross out the printed dirt on the rejection slip and put at the bottom :

WITH LES JERVISS' COMPLIMENTS

and send it back like that. What would happen ?

No, the worms wouldn't see the joke. Radcliff wouldn't. Or perhaps he might send for the reader, they would re-read it, discover the similarity in plot, treatment, style with the others and would ring up Jerviss . . . Yes, that's what would happen, and that wouldn't be fair to Jerviss. He would only provoke a scandal if he involved Jerviss. And poor Jerviss, after all, was not responsible for the sheepish, wormish stupidity of the *Forum* and for the whole system. The whole idiocy.

The pity was—he forced himself to be " businesslike "—blue skies, the smell of the sea and good food and French scents and *Caporal Ordinaire* and staying with Cornelia Spalding Sloan—the pity was that on account of a whim, a sudden fancy, because it was really a whim, he couldn't have meant it seriously when he sent it, on account of a whim he had sacrificed a perfectly good plot and quite a good story. Because now it was out of the question that the story could be submitted—at any rate for years—under Jerviss' name. He must not risk it. He owed that little elementary loyalty to Jerviss. And to his own prospects . . .

But it was not so simple as all that. Not the least bit simple. True, that the blue sky and everything that he was looking forward to, was a reality, and the flat was a reality and the Lincoln Zephyr was a reality, and his new suits and the money in the bank ; as much a piece of reality as shabby clothes, an aching tooth, cheap meals . . . and yes, the rejection slip. Both kinds were realities. One did

not exclude the other, naturally, but this was not important. Of course, they didn't exclude the other. What was important, bloody important, was that it looked as if it did not make the slightest difference that he had written and actually published some eighteen stories under Jerviss' name. There could be no mistake about it. He wasn't blind, the stories were good. And *Colour* had published five. And Radcliff had to swallow the fact that *Forum* didn't get the exclusive rights . . . So he could never achieve any literary recognition under his own name. He could never do anything except in the capacity of a ghost. As such he might go on under Jerviss' name for a time ; perhaps for ever, but he would never be able to do anything beyond making a little money.

So he could never separate from Jerviss . . . Like the Siamese Twins. Neither of them could survive without the other and they would both die if separated . . .

And he could never prove that he was the ghost. The Conspiracy was so clever—he had done it so bloody brilliantly —that now everybody believed Jerviss was a writer and the author of all the stuff published under his name. His fame as a writer was growing. He even had a follower. Follower ! That little bastard, in last month's *Colour*, stole the time sequence trick from " *Home Exercise* " and used it in his rotten little concoction . . . Follower . . .

He couldn't expose the bluff, he could never prove his identity. Yes, he could, in spite of everything, he could. But what bloody good would come out of it ? First of all, he couldn't really do it. Could never get himself—no matter how miserable, how disgusted and disgusting and low he would feel—to expose Jerviss. Jerviss was good and kind and a friend and he wasn't responsible. But even if in a moment of blind fury he did do it, what would happen ? There would be scandal, yes, but a tiny little scandal, a select scandal for people in the swim, a private scandal and, let's get down to brass tacks : an " uninteresting " scandal. A few hundred people would read about it—if it'd ever get into the papers . . . Literature in England is a strictly private affair, it isn't " news," except if a writer dies and his

will is published. Or scandal of a sexual character involving a writer.

He smiled and on the wings of his smile he slipped out of his anger. His watch had stopped, he took it off and wound it, then he went into his bedroom and looked at the travelling clock by his bed. Half-past nine. He would have to write the note to Emmerling. The worst of the whole thing was that he had wasted a perfectly good plot and much effort in writing *The Face*.

He must look for curtain fabrics in Paris. And he must go to those two shops in the Rue de St. Honoré. He remembered they had lovely lamps and shades and *bric à brac*. He would spend a whole week in Paris on the way back.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH

It was possibly due to Paul's influence that he was thinking Amor was funny. Lately he had been thinking about people he knew, like Amor and Syd Goldstein and Bert Wallacott and others, seeing them now as Paul saw some people in his stories. Amor made him laugh. He used not to. He had known Dan Amor for how many years: nearly eighteen? There was a time when he had looked on him as a father, a time when he thought Dan was a friend, then there came a time when he felt disgusted: "Amor's a crook," then it came out Dan wasn't a crook; just a fool. Then—about two years ago, maybe three—he felt Dan was common and loud and he felt shy about going into a pub with him. He was funny now. "The Old Firm." He was funny. Thirty years on the racecourse had given him a voice which was loud even when Dan wanted to whisper. He was sixty now and he had boomed all through those eighteen or twenty years he had known him. Funniest of all was that he was a great, big, fat man with a voice one could hear all over Kentish Town and yet he could look ever so sorry for himself, like a kid ready to cry at any minute. Lately he came to

look like that more and more often. Since Mrs. Amor had been pinched by the police for street bookmaking.

It was perfectly on the level to see Dan's funny side. Perfectly on the level ; neither of them owed the other a penny. There was cause for him to be grateful to Dan, yes. It was Dan who saw him first at the Old Royal and signed him on. Dan was just the same then as he was now. The voice, the big, flabby, baby's bottom face, the tweed suits, the bowler. Always out for " openings " and " good sidelines." Bookmaking was only one side to Dan. He tried a lot of other things. There was the furniture business in the Seven Sisters Road. Dan took that over the same time as he got Paddy Melia and him into his stable. Just after the Armistice it was. People were buying furniture, there was money in the country, but Dan couldn't make it. He turned the furniture shop into a wireless business with records as a side line and Alice Amor as manager, that was another flop. Then came "openings". He smiled as he thought about them. He sometimes wondered if he could have got on without Amor's help at the beginning. People often said he could. Much better. " You got on in spite of Dan." Sam Burke said that, after he got back from Australia. Burke was on the *Daily News* then Well, he'd treated Dan fair. Nobody could say he didn't. Many a boxer that struck good money went back on his manager. When the manager got into low water. Plenty. Take his case. Dan was down with pneumonia. Alice was " looking after " the business. You know what that meant. He was a coming man then. He beat McGee and was a safe bet for the championship. Yet he didn't go back on Dan. In America he decided he wouldn't have a manager in future. There were any amount of Yank boxers who had no managers, only an " executive," who carried out instructions. That looked more posh too. So he kept Dan on, the day he got out of hospital, as " executive " and gave him a couple of hundred a year.

He looked at Dan as he was sitting against the open window. It was a hot day and Dan was wiping his forehead all the time trying to make the best of his cheroot, which went out every other minute.

" It's a regular gold mine," Dan said and waved the faulty cigar about. " With your repewtytion . . . advertising . . . all the rest. Why, it's in the West End, just off the Edgware Road. A good place. It's a gift for two thousand five hundred. One of the best openings I ever seen. People are going in for it. A posh gym in the West End. *Under the personal supervision of Les Jerviss.* Just think. Physical Culture . . . Why, if I'd the chance . . . Just think."

" No, Dan." Jerviss spoke now after a long silence, suppressing a smile as once or twice of late, whenever Dan mentioned another " new opening." " It's no use to me, but thanks all the same . . ."

" But you 'aven't even seen the place, Les. You don't know what I'm talking abaht. No, you don't. It's in the very heart of the West End. Two minutes from the Arch. You could 'ave any amount of rich people coming to you. They would crowd on you . . ."

" I wouldn't take it, Dan, even if they gave it away free."

" Well," boomed Amor. He fancied it was a bad job, a bad job from the first, but his expression became surprised, pained, sulky. He wanted to say something, but he did not say it. He trifled with his cigar, nervously. Then he exploded. " And what are you going to do . . . when the time comes, I mean . . . ? "

" I have time. I'm not on the shelf yet. I have plenty of time to think about it . . . and if you want to know, I have my own . . . projects."

" Projects." A wave of anger passed through Amor's mind. For a moment, for one single moment, he became the Amor who wouldn't give in, Amor eighteen years ago when Les was just a kid from the slums, without a shirt to his back . . . Putting on flicking airs. Projects. He was now Sergeant Amor of the Middlesex.

" And what's that ? " he boomed, then he answered the question himself. " Books, I suppose," he broke out waving the dead cigar towards the " literary pieces " of furniture in the room, the bookcase, full of books, the typewriter on the desk, the wastepaper basket by the desk, the things he was seeing in Jerviss' place for the first time today.

"And what if I choose to write books?" Jerviss' voice was controlled and quiet. He suddenly said "Well?"

"All right," Amor said. It was only now he realised that his cigar was dead. He became helpless. "You needn't snap me head off. I only asked you a civil question. . . . I thought you wouldn't mind 'avin' a look at the place."

They were silent for a time after that, then Amor changed the subject. He began to talk business. He talked about the fight that was fixed for Jerviss early in November with Gunner Gillease. He talked a lot about Gillease. He enlarged on his form, his shape, on his punch.

"I'll lick him all right, if that's what you are worrying about," Jerviss said.

"I think so too . . . I honestly do. Only you must start training soon."

"Yes." Jerviss' face was drawn.

There came another silence. It seemed unbearable to Amor. Jerviss appeared to pay no attention to him, otherwise he would have noticed that Amor was battling within himself, to put himself out to win back his favour. Finally he brought out the phrase with great resignation and humility:

"When's your next one coming out?" Amor heard himself saying.

"It won't be long now. It will be announced this Sunday in the papers. *Number Engaged*, that's the name of it," his face lit up for a moment. "What you think of the name? Good, isn't it?"

"Aye," Amor said. How could a fellow sink so deep, Christ, so deep. After forty-two years in honest business. Trying to earn an honest shilling. Three years in the trenches, bringing up three kiddies. How could he? He might as well go and sell french letters in Piccadilly Circus.

"It's a book of short stories," Jerviss said. "The ones that came out in the magazines. And some more . . ."

"Jessie was telling us about them, the other day . . ."

"Did she read them? . . . In *Forum*, I s'pose," Jerviss looked up.

"Don't know, I'm sure," Amor said. "Sorry." He

looked sorry for himself all over. " You're writing some now I expect," he pointed with his chin towards the pile of papers on the desk.

" Yes. Trying to visualise a new story . . ."

" *Visualise* " . . . No, it couldn't be true, it couldn't. He was going, anyway. They'd be open soon. He would feel better if he had a drink or two. A hot day, too.

When Dan had gone he sat down at his desk and looked at the sheets of paper. The notes for a story he had scribbled down the evening before. After he finished reading *Battle*. That was a book, the autobiography of a young factory hand who worked his way to Cambridge. A good book, though not easy to read.

". . . *A dark evening was drawing near, the public houses were just opening when Mr. Lovibond amerged from the Tube station* . . ." There, he felt his lip slightly twitch. He reached for his fountain pen. A spelling mistake. EMERGED, of course, but was that good English and was that the word? Paul would read it and tell him. He read on. " *He knew he had shaved in the morning* . . ." His impatience grew as he read on. There was only one page written, with five words on another sheet. He dropped his pen and tore the sheets angrily. He felt a strange pleasure coming over him as he tore the paper. He tore it into small bits, as if trying to reduce it to nothing, then collected the tatters of paper together and threw them into the waste-paper basket.

And this was the second go at writing a story on his own, after the style of the ones copied from Paul's typescripts. It was no use. The two did not go together, no matter how he tried. He thought it would. And this was the second go. First time he tried after he came home from Mr. Tillett of *Forum*. It was ever such a miserable night that night and he felt he ought to have tried to have a go at it. Only he did not tell Paul about it. He would surely understand, still, it was no good. Just tried his hand at it. It was all so queer. That evening as he was driving home he had ever such a strong desire to write up Harry and how his wife ran away from him. He had it clear in his head, not the way he had it now, because he would have that story all the time

in his head, only natural, he knew Harry so well, they started together and all that, but he saw the whole story in a different way, not quite as it happened but the way it would make a good yarn, like Paul made them. It was all absolutely clear in his head, all of it and then as he was sitting at the desk, pen in hand, the whole story just vanished. It was no good.

Maybe, of course—he took the first, long suck of a fresh cigarette—maybe he wasn't in the mood for it. That may have been it. . . . "You cannot disregard inspiration completely." Paul said that. He had said it twice. Last time was when they drove out to a roadside restaurant near Hampton Court.

Maybe that was it . . . he didn't know. He was feeling queer the last few days. It couldn't be the heat. It wasn't so hot now as a fortnight ago. September. Soon he must start training . . . That was it. Bloody well that was it. He was worrying as always whenever he thought of it. Would it be always the same? Would he never get rid of the funk, his nerves, the bloody feeling in the pit of his stomach? Always worst in the last two days, when one ought to be the fittest. The last couple of days, the last couple of hours, almost the last two minutes. Just before one was leaving the dressing-room. Because then it stopped, it stopped, ever so queer. He was all right then, in fact full of beans. That moment. Always. And all through the whole hullabaloo. And after. The night after he slept like a top. Only natural, he was tired, but the next night it was queer again, he was always waking up in a cold sweat, thinking the fight was that night and he wasn't ready. It was all very well that other blokes were exactly the same. Sullivan used to run out to the lavatory every five minutes the last day, but he was all nerves, Terry was. Terry used to make a funny movement with his hands just before he climbed into the ring, ever so funny, he could not grasp it for quite a long time. Just put it down to nerves. Then one day he saw. Terry was crossing himself, and he didn't want other blokes to notice, he was shy like. And that was the way with others too, he knew. Practically all. And those who pretended to be cool as dukes were the worst . . . There were others, yes, but that wasn't

no bloody comfort. And the nasty thing was that it stayed with you all your life, long after you packed up.

If only he would have gone away with Paul. To the south of France. There he was ; course it would have been a good idea to go with Paul. Paul had friends there, but that wouldn't have mattered. Part of the time he would have been alone, all very well that Paul said he was worn out and wanted to take it easy. Just doing absolutely nothing, just relax and lie on the beach, the very best form of relaxation for men like me. Paul said that. But it would have been a good idea all the same, because surely Paul wouldn't have been lying in the sun all day long. And it was a change and an experience to see the south of France. He had only been to France once and that was Paris and he didn't remember much of it. It was a party and they spent five days in Paris and stayed at the Welcome Hotel and went out every night and didn't get up till noon. He saw the Eiffel Tower and what was the name of that famous night club, he saw that one and one afternoon they drove out to the pub Carpentier kept and Carpentier was out. He would have liked to meet Carp. Only seen him in the pictures.

He felt quite lonesome without Paul. Funny thing, come to think of it, yet it was true all the same. For the last eighteen months they'd been meeting regular. It was of course always at small places because the Conspiracy was the main thing and one never knew. Had to be careful. And it was ever such a good idea for Paul to take him to museums. They were under his nose all the time and he never thought of going to see them. Of course, it wasn't fun going on his own. Museums were not the same as pictures, though there were a good many blokes that went alone, but they were different. Intellectuals. It was fun to go to the National Gallery with Paul or to the Victoria and Albert ; Paul lived just behind it. He knew all about pictures and he talked about them most natural. One could listen to him all day long and never get tired. S'pose he had his ups and downs like most people, but he never showed it. " So you think I'm not temperamental . . . just wait." But that may have been just fooling. One couldn't think of him in a bad

mood. Queer that. He was always up in the air a bit, but always stayed there. And one couldn't really say he wasn't shrewd, Paul was plenty shrewd. Shrewd, but he was a gentleman all the same.

Anybody could see it wasn't no show off, it wasn't being a snob that one saw as little of the others as possible. One did, of course, still go to the pub with them and stand them drinks, but it wasn't the same. It wasn't being a snob, no, because he'd been feeling for a long time that they were no company for him. The same old people, the same jokes, the same places, the same fun. No, it wasn't fun. He would have given them the slip even if Paul hadn't come along, he would. Or perhaps he wouldn't, he was too much in the same old rut, too old to change his ways. But a good thing he wasn't seeing them half as much as he used to. "There are people who don't improve on acquaintance." That was ever so clever. Paul said that. "One simply gets used to them and puts up with their faults, that's all. The proof of the first rate is that familiarity doesn't bring contempt."

But then who were the "first rate"? Paul was one, no doubt about that, but who were the others? And how did one meet them? And would they be as chummy as Paul? That was a bit doubtful.

Because one didn't mean smart people, rich people. Those one had met and never thought much of, though they were all right. All right up to a point. Funny thing it was one always met them at night. Never during the day, never. Maybe they never got up till the afternoon, those people. He heard that before, maybe it was true. There was the King, of course, he shook his hand once, and King said howdoyoudo? In the Albert Hall that was, an exhibition bout for the Red Cross and that was all he remembered. No, there was something more to it. The King wore a double-breasted suit and a silk tie, dark blue or black it was, and a large pin, ever so large it was: a diamond. It was so big, if an ordinary bloke had worn it everybody would have thought it was glass. And there was the Sporting Earl and there was the Boxing Duke, he was a nice lad the Boxing Duke was, and he did know a lot about boxing really. Might have made a

good boxer, amateur like. And there was another toff, a marquis, maybe he was another duke, now what was his monniker, a short chap with a big moustache, that talked like country folk do. And there were the younger ones, he met several, and there was Jim Hobart, the American " millionaire playboy " who stayed at the Dorchester a couple of weeks every year. And there were women. There was one young woman, a lord's sister or something, she was real fine, she asked intelligent questions about sport and you could see she really knew about it. She was a bit like Miss Ferrers, only much taller. At least six foot.

These people were better than the " gang," only natural, but they weren't the sort of people he would really like to have been pally with. Better than the gang, sure thing. And better than people in the " trade." One should think so and one should hope so.

The following morning, just as he was reading, Doris came into the " study." The fact that she had entered the room had already irritated him. Lately, since he had rearranged the room as a visible manifestation of having rearranged his life, he did not encourage her to butt in when she felt like it. He did not exactly tell her that the room was out of bounds, and except for the periods when he was actually engaged in " writing," that is to say, copying stories out, when partly out of fear that he would be discovered and partly out of self-importance he had actually ordered her out—yet his whole attitude implied that " the study " was forbidden territory.

" What is it ? " he said, looking up from the book a little sulkily.

" I went to the pictures with Mrs. Amor last night . . ." Doris said.

" Hope you enjoyed yourself."

" And Mrs. Amor," continued Doris, who was pretty well used to him when he was in this mood, " said it's ever such a great pity you won't buy that Gym in the West End."

" Did she say that ? "

" She did."

" And did she ask you to come and tell me ? "

" Yes," Doris said.

He shut the book and got up.

" Why can't people mind their own bloody business ? " Then annoyed by the fact that he received no reply he burst out :

" She takes a blasted sight too much interest in my affairs, that's all I can say."

" She don't mean nothing, she don't," Doris said. " She only said it because she and Dan thought it's in your interest . . ."

" My interest, her grandmother. You can tell Alice Amor from me that it would be better if she looked after her own interests or street bookmaking will get her into trouble again . . ."

" She don't mean nothing, really . . ."

" No, she doesn't," repeated Jerviss sarcastically. " Well, Dan's already been here, yesterday, and told me all about it, if you want to know. And I told him that I don't want the blasted place . . . There."

" She means well . . . she does," said Doris, clutching hard at her only line of defence.

" And I know why you suddenly show such a great interest in my doings, Doris . . . Because Alice talked your head off and said that I was going to the dogs, because I don't want Dan Amor's openings. You needn't say so, because I know her and him and all of you. You came up to tell me this, because you got the wind up in case I miss my chances and you're afraid we shall be hard up when I'm on the shelf. We'd better get this straight . . ."

Doris did not answer and her silence confirmed Jerviss in his thought that he was right in his reading of the situation.

" Very well," he continued, " I can tell you straight now, that you needn't have any fear as far as *you* are concerned.

Much good you have been to me, I must say. But as long as I am alive, you will be all right. I have looked after my business ever since I married you and as long as I am alive and kicking, you will be all right . . . Now, you can run and tell that from me to Alice Amor, and you can tell her to mind her own business . . . And now I am busy . . ."

Doris trotted out of the room.

Too much. She was the limit, she was. He took a cigarette out of his case, then immediately afterwards it occurred to him that he was perhaps too hard on Doris. Paul—he felt—would not have talked that way even if he was irritated. He would perhaps have become sarcastic, but he would not have lost his temper, and wouldn't have used bad language, Paul wouldn't—but Paul surely never had to defend himself the way he had to and he wasn't married to a dumb wife like Doris. Subnormal, she is, that's what's wrong with her. Subnormal. He liked the expression.

He sighed and returned to the book. He reflected that he would copy out the good phrases on a sheet of paper.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH

". . . *to see what it is like. Following your suggestion I went to the Mercury Book Club in Hanover Square. Well Paul you could knock me down with a fether. Who do you think the first person I met there but Miss Ferrers, the one who came to your flat when I was there you said she was an admirer of mine. Well Paul it was a surprice I must say. I took out a supcription and they have a whole stack of* ' *our* ' *book* Number Engaged. *Yesterday I went to have a drink with Miss Ferrers at her home in Knightsbridge and she said a young lady who works there said it was popular and she would like to meet* ' *the author* ' (*! ! ! ! !*). *Your your friend is a proper lady but she is amusing the trouble with her is that she rather fancies my writing than my boxing Well Paul that is a pity . . .*"

He read the letter again as he was changing in the cabin

A good thing he had introduced them. Veronica could push the book in the Mercury. It needed pushing. Granvilles had apparently developed a mania for bringing Jerviss out in September ; a bad month for books. Especially for a book of short stories. And reviewers are away too Idiotic. As he adjusted his belt he wondered if he would see these things—paltry little worries, really—in a different light if he was amongst winter fogs or sulky winds or rain ? Because this was one of the loveliest days he had seen for years. It was not too hot, though hot enough, and not a whisper of wind. The sky was a picture postcard blue, the sea glassy green and there was music all over the place. There was one very important thing. He kept forgetting about it all the time. He must buy another pair of swimming trunks, to change into after swimming. It was amazing how fully his anticipation that he would feel a " different man " on the Riviera had come up to expectation. Past his expectation, in fact.

This was the first time he had ever spent on the Mediterranean, but there are no geographical surprises in the age we live in, he reflected. The cinema takes you everywhere, and there are other documentaries ; the world is becoming small. There was, however, one aspect of the Riviera of which he knew nothing ; it was an attractive surprise. The Riviera was democratic in the best, the most delightful, the warmest and most welcoming sense of the word. That was new. He was contemplating a *de luxe* holiday, a sense of exclusiveness, a sense of luxury, a sense of richness. The fortnight in the Miramare provided all this, the week-end on Cornelia Spalding Sloan's yacht, the white dinner-jacket he bought ready-made on the Croisette and the *Bal des Petits Lits Blancs* he was taken to and the dinner at the *Casa Estella* at Antibes, and the world of the Polglases—the American couple he met, but after it, when Mrs. Sloan and the others had gone and he decided to explore Nice and went to stay at a small hotel, he had exactly the same feeling of contentment and delight. In Cannes he had enjoyed Transatlantic luxury, in Nice he was enjoying solitude and the simple, warm everyday comforts of French middle class life. He had not seen newspapers

since he left London except the *Eclaireur de Nice*, he had read no books though he had bought the new Paul Morand, the new Malraux, the new Duhamel. Even Paul Morand was too much of an effort to read. Even Dekobra or Kessell would have been. In the *Eclaireur* he read an interview with M. Pierre Nouveau, the new *maire* of Cannes, about the murder at Marseilles, and the official announcement that the secretary of the *Club de Tourisme* was made an officer of the *Légion d'Honneur*. The war in Spain on the front page seemed far away. Far away. He would send another cheque to the Aid to Spain Fund. He had sent one earlier in the year. Conscience money? Not in the least. But one felt sorry for earnest, honest, idealistic and uninformed young men fighting for a lost cause; the school-book example of a lost cause. It certainly wasn't a Byronic pose on the part of Malraux and Hemingway and the others, the famous ones. Certainly not. It was an important gesture on the part of an *arrivé* writer. *Succès oblige.* He himself would too. As soon as he'd *arrivé*. But he would wait till then. He decided he would send a cheque for ten pounds, this time.

After lunch he decided to have his coffee in a cool, quiet place. He crossed the Place Macé and walked down the Avenue des Victoires. He felt happy whenever he walked through it. Nineteen-ten must have been like this. At its best. A lovely priceless atmosphere; period but not funny, not decayed. The Avenue was turned into a tunnel, a huge hothouse, by its tall trees, their top branches leaning on each other, completely obliterating sun and sky and breeze. The air under the green ceiling was a little stuffy, but it was a welcoming stuffiness, an atmosphere of petrol vapours, hot coffee, melted butter, cheap scents, expensive scents, olive oil, the collective smells of the sea coming from one end and the collective smells of transport coming from the railway at the other end.

Coffee on the terrace of the *Coq d'Or* he thought. He bought cigarettes at the *Bureau de Tabacs*, then he went back again, because he had left his swimming trunks and towel on the counter. He stopped at the bookshop. It was two o'clock. They were opening the shops, from the newly opened

door of the scent shop next door, a whiff of *Sous le Vent* came and tickled his nostrils, or was it the other fashionable scent *Vacances?* What lovely names, *Under the Wind*, *Tonight or Never*, *Rue Royale*, *Prétexte*, *Colony*, *Rumours*, *1940*, *Towards Nightfall*, *Holidays*. Yesterday when he passed *Parfums Royaux* he had coined a scent-title. It was *Altitude*. He remembered that two days ago he had seen in the window of the bookshop a copy of *Number Engaged*. He looked for it again. Between five other English bookbacks, almost obliterated by a large, white pile of Giraudoux's latest novel (*Vient de Paraître*, *Prix de Goncourt N.R.F.12*, *F.*, said the white letters on the red label) he saw the black dustjacket of *Number Engaged*.

He looked long at the window, then he shuffled away, past the red portals of the *Eclaireur de Nice*. He took a wicker chair under the red and gold awnings of the *Coq d'Or*. He drank his *bien noir* slowly, as if trying to enjoy the separate elements of coffee, chicory and brick-shaped sugar; Latin tastes; he inhaled the bitter strength of a *Maryland jaune*, then he tipped his ash on the saucer on which there was printed "2F.50." in black. Another sip of coffee, another whiff of *Maryland jaune*, he saw his naked toes, the colour of iodine against the dead whiteness of the sandal straps. He looked at his arms, the colour of orange, except round the elbows where they were dark brown, like an old violin, a green bus went past towards the *Promenade des Anglais*. It was a little dark under the green ceiling and soft and warm like a bath, and comforting and restful, and quiet. Life went on ambling, shuffling in sandals, in shorts, suntanned, relaxed, sweet, *tout va bien*, twice two was five, nothing whatever mattered. How lovely life could be. Then remotely, very remotely he began to feel something in his stomach. It was ever such a slight pain and gentle, very gentle. He only remembered this later when he tried hard to remember how it all began. A young man came, short and muscular, a small tattoo mark on his forearm, a paper in his hand. He shuffled past the terrace and Paul followed him with his gaze. He was passing the *Eclaireur* slowly with the uncertain, shuffling steps of anyone walking in sandals. But he walked as if he had no aim and direction in life. It was then that

Paul became conscious of the slight uneasiness in his stomach. But only for one single second . . .

The unknown young man disappeared from the Avenue but he was seeing him again ; this time very closely, he was standing next to him where a second earlier there was a chair. He saw his face, the attractive, disappointed face of a young boxer ; he was twenty-four. He was English, the paper in his hand was the *Daily Mirror*, which he had read all the way in the bus coming from Cannes, where he had had a quarrel with Mrs. Polglase, whom he had met in London and who brought him to the Riviera. It was hopeless and awful and Bert was miserable. It was, of course, partly his fault. He was a fool, he must see that. But how could he know about the susceptibilities of Maisie Polglase, who was now standing next to Paul and talking fast and excitedly with her neck slowly stiffening. And there was, of course, Whitney Polglase to consider. He was a fascinating rascal and one could forgive him a lot ; Maisie did. In any case Bert was to contest the light-heavyweight championship in the autumn and would have to start training and Maisie Polglase would come chasing after him in the middle of his training and Bert would have to start a formidable double fight . . . The dressing-room was full of smoke and the smell of male sweat and the smell of embrocation and the trainer was slowly and carefully winding the bandages round Bert's fingers. Bert wished people wouldn't smoke under his nose. It was a small room anyway . . . And the smell of the dying cigarette parked right under his nose was ever so unpleasant. It was stinking on the edge of a cigarette tin and the smoke bit his eye. It was biting his eye . . . Paul put his hand up to his right eye and wiped out a little water from it, then he killed the dying stub of the *Maryland*. As if he had emerged from under water, suddenly he heard the quiet murmurs of the Avenue again. Slowly, ever so slowly his stomach rotated. He searched the pockets of his canvas shorts and found his pencil.

" *Garcon !* " he called, loud, nervous, urgent, " *un morceau de papier*," then he added, " *s'il vous plaît.*" He had left his notebook in the hotel, he never had it on him, in any case,

except when he didn't want it. The waiter hurried back with the café's notepaper and an envelope. Paul put it in front of him on the table and almost knocked the *Eau de Seltz* over. It was strange, he thought, as he was writing, strange how it came out of nothing, like a sudden attack of sickness, like lightning out of a blue sky, like a stroke at night. It began with the slight uneasiness in his stomach, and now he suddenly realised this was typical. He always had that indescribable sensation just over his navel ; not a pain, something almost pleasant . . . Strange how it came, so unexpected, so inexplicable, so mysterious. And this time it was definitely a play. He reached the bottom of the sheet and turned it over. That little bit of dialogue was rather important. " Pain is the only real thing in life . . ." It was Bert, of course, who said this. Then he must put down what Whitney Polglase said to his wife when she left him. Of course, he must call Whitney and Maisie some thing else, but that wasn't important. He saw Maisie again. " And don't you think *fear* is real . . . or perhaps *you* don't . . ." She was standing by him. She was dressed in the same evening dress she had worn at the *Bal des Petits Lits Blancs*. Paul scribbled out of breath, Maisie was gone again and he was writing down the message, the important message which seemed to be coming from a mysterious broadcasting station ; unheard by anyone else. Perhaps straight from Heaven ; who knew ?

He reached the bottom of the sheet again, then he continued, quite unconsciously on the envelope. Then the message seemed to be over. He put down his pencil. He read what he had written. He must make the notes a little fuller. Experience had taught him to put as many details as possible, in case he forgot later. He tore the envelope open and put a few more lines on the inside. He was again conscious of his stomach, but this time he knew that was the end of the chain. He put the papers into his pocket. He went up to the waiter, who was standing in the doorway, and asked him where it was.

" *Deuxième à gauche*," the waiter said.

He went through the café and found the second door on

the left. He smiled as he entered because the very moment he opened the door he reflected that on the wall there would be a nail, on the nail a string containing a sheaf of pages torn out of an old telephone directory. French economy—he smiled again as he saw he was right.

He reflected as he was leaving the place that it was always like this with him. He couldn't put it into a book, of course, because those who wouldn't laugh at him would say that he was trying to be sensational, but all the same, in his case at least, there was always a visceral connection with inspiration. Could inspiration have any connection with bowel movements? He must tell Sanborn all about it, he was a biologist as well as a writer. He whistled as he walked through the café again. He gave the waiter a large tip. He was happy, but he suddenly felt tired. He pulled his watch out of his shorts pocket and put it on his wrist. It was three o'clock. He would go back to the *Univers* and sleep until five.

The maid was sprinkling "Flit" in the room when he entered it. "*Ils sont méchants . . . les moustiques*," she smiled as she released one extra whiff, a large, enthusiastic one as a finishing touch. He took the notes out of his pocket. He read them again. No, not now. The notes were copious, he would remember everything. The second act, of course, ought to be written while he was here, or at least he must put down details of local colour, because it was clear that the bit where Bert quarrels with Maisie would be the second act.

And this time he had enough material for three acts, there would be no need for padding, and if he was skilful enough he would distribute the plot evenly, yes, he must read a few plays by Sherwood, Clifford Odets, Moss Hart and one or two others. For technical reasons. Their timing seemed perfect. Yes, this time he had enough material for three acts. It was such a mistake even to try to put that other plot into a play. It wasn't big enough. But that was four years ago, when he knew nothing whatsoever about the theatre. He had read it again, only a month ago when he moved from Elvaston Gardens and had sorted out his papers. Two acts were written. It was a bad effort in every way, deadly

serious and full of very forced and highbrowish tricks covering a hackneyed plot. Some of the dialogue, however, seemed quite promising even after four years. He remembered that, when he re-read it four weeks ago he felt it was a masterpiece in the way it showed up all Schnitzler's faults. That's what happens when one is trying to imitate another writer, instead of learning from him.

"*Your friend is a proper lady.*" He must send a postcard to Veronica. Good thing Jerviss had met Veronica. She must have felt a little left alone in town in late September, now that she had returned from Mrs. Inwood's place. And it was certain Jerviss would enjoy Veronica's company. . . . It was strange that in spite of all his lately developed affections towards her, he did not wish her to be with him in the South of France. True, he was very tired when he left town and wanted a complete rest. A complete change of scenery, surroundings, air, ideas and faces. And he was now more sure than ever—as he thought of it—that Veronica could not possibly enjoy the quiet relaxation of his conception of a summer holiday. She would want to go to places every night, she would want to be desperately smart, would prefer Juan les Pins and Cannes to Nice—and above all—she would feel desperately energetic when he would want to sit and read or to sit and think, or just sit and do absolutely nothing. She would never understand Pascal's phrase about the man who was happy when alone in a room. She would be perfectly all right in Jerviss' company, and at the same time, it was a good opportunity for Jerviss to meet someone approximately near to those circles for which his stories were written. And Veronica would surely boast about his friendship and introduce him to people. Perhaps Jerviss then would be less reticent the next time he was asked about his "literary methods" and about writing in general. He wouldn't be quite as frightened and alarmed when they congratulated him on his work as an author. And finally he would be able to give a credible answer to a question that might be raised as how he managed to get such a clear view of people belonging to a class so different from his own.

The plot for a play was in his pocket. Veronica was

taken care of, Jerviss was developing a literary personality, and he himself was enjoying a *dolce far niente* in the *Côte d'Azur*. Life was lovely.

He reflected he would buy the Chinese picture he had seen at the Rue de la Boetie ; if they hadn't sold it in the meantime.

It was a large white squirrel.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH

VERONICA thought Jerviss was a marvellous driver, an artist, gaining self-expression at the wheel. The way he overtook every single car on the Great West Road, the way he zigzagged from left to right, " spinning " it, gave her the thrill the merry-go-round used to when she was a child. Paul was a poor driver. Too careful. He liked speed but he had too much discipline ; always on the " safe side " ; never taking a risk. " I've never been so scared in all my life," Paul had said one day, " as when Jerviss took me out in his car. He gives school examples of dangerous driving." That was Paul all over.

She liked Jerviss' car. It was the first time she had sat in an Omikron and as she was taking stock of its low chassis, its alarmingly long bonnet, its silver body and dark red upholstery, she tried to reflect why it was that in the past she had always regarded these cars as flashy and " common." It was perhaps because Omikrons and the rest were always associated in her mind with short, dark men with pencilled moustaches, teddybear overcoats, greasespotted suede shoes and pale, dyspeptic blondes. Perhaps. In any case, the car went well with Jerviss' personality. It seemed to have been made for him. There was something slightly common about the car and there was, she was forced to admit, something slightly common about Jerviss, but she could not help feeling —and this was not the first time—that this was an attraction. She was a little impressed and a little uneasy that Jerviss seemed to be so busy driving that he spoke little during the

journey ; because since their last meeting she had become more intimate with him in thought than any actual happening would have made justifiable.

" And what are your plans for the future ? " she asked when he had to stop at a level crossing.

" A contest next month with Orvieto . . . the Italian light heavy-weight. . . . It's for the British title . . . I shall have to start training soon . . . worse luck."

" But I mean, your literary plans. . . ."

" Oh," Jerviss gave a short laugh, " I couldn't say much about that. I'm a boxer first and only then a scribbler. Lit'rature is a sideline you know. . . . You never can tell though. . . . The other day a journalist said that my lit'rary style is getting better than my boxing style. Maybe he was right. . . ."

" I'm certain of it."

" Thank you very much. You're kind, aren't you ? "

" Well, not really." She laughed. " I told you before, I know nothing about boxing, and well . . . not really much about literature either. But I read, like everybody else. I forgot to tell you, my mother read your story about the telephone girl. She liked it very much. Did it take you a long time to write it ? "

" No . . . not particularly."

" You must be very prolific."

" I suppose I am. Why ? "

" Oh, because there are writers who go through agonies when they write, they re-write everything five times and in the end write little. . . ."

" Like W. R. Talbott," Jerviss said quickly.

" And there are others. There's a man whose name I can't remember, who wrote *Passage to India* . . . not really a very good book, but Daddy said it ought to have been banned. Now that man has only written about five books all his life. A girl in the Mercury told me he's getting quite old." For a moment she tried to recall the name. " Forest . . . oh yes. Forester is his name. C. S. Forester. I think he wrote another book called *The Gun*, I just forget. Anyhow, Paul thinks Forester is the greatest living English writer. . . .

You told me you weren't interested in literary technique, why is that ? "

" I don't know. To tell you the truth I'm not interested in boxing technique either. Both is just fighting, I s'pose."

" So you are spontaneous. . . ."

" I must be if you say so."

" Oh, you are pulling my leg all the time. Tell me why don't you ever talk about your writing. . . ."

" Because I've got nothing to say about it." He had used this answer, this formula, so often lately that constant repetition made it polished and natural. He was sometimes surprised afterwards how effectively he brought it out and what a good reply it was. Lately he had made little departures from the lines Paul had given him at the beginning, using new words, becoming daring as he grew fond of his part.

He was silent now. The road ahead was wide and clear. Fifty-five. . . . A kid's game. . . . The engine roared, the wind blew . . . fifty-five. . . . The wind blew. . . . *Interviewed yesterday, after the presentation, Sir Leslie Jerviss, as usual, said he could not make a statement on literature. " Please believe me," Sir Leslie added, " I am not trying to impress you. I have always been a simple man, and I am one still. I could never talk about boxing technique and I cannot talk about literary technique."* *Associated Press . . . Associated Press. . . .* The engine roared, the wind blew. . . . Sixty-five. . . . TRAFFIC SIGNALS AHEAD. . . . Oh, well. . . .

He slowed down. He said :

" It's the same as boxing, Miss Ferrers. The goods speak for you, whether you're writing or boxing. It's no good talking about it. It's the goods that matter. . . ."

As they were drinking a cocktail under Elizabethan oak beams in the atmosphere of garden flowers and synthetic scents and the smell of good food, Veronica asked Jerviss how he spent his days.

" Well, you know," Jerviss grinned ; " boxers are the laziest individuals going. . . . Too much time on our hands."

"So I suppose you began writing because you were bored. . . ."

"To keep myself out of mischief. . . . That's a better way of putting it."

"We get up mostly at six in the morning," he said later.

"I wouldn't call that laziness."

"No. Just wait. . . . We drink a glass of orange juice, then we start running. On the road. We must do that early, see, because the air is fresh and nobody's about. We dress up rather warm, even in summer. Then we take a shower bath after it and have breakfast. Then we are off till di. . . . till lunch so we mostly go to bed till then. Then we eat little, because at half one, we have to be at the Gym. Working. That is sandbag, punching ball and sparring. For three quarters of an hour. Then we have a shower bath and that's the day's work."

"And what about afterwards?"

"Nothing." He shook his head, he smiled. "I may read," he added. . . .

"And when d'you write?"

"Oh, at night."

"D'you think your imagination works better at night?"

"Definitely." His expression was earnest. He said: "The daily round, I mean, what I told you is only on when we are in training. After the fight we rest the whole day. Loosening up, see. You need it. Then next day, exercises again. To work off overwork. But that's only when you are in training, mind. When you aren't in training you just do nothing."

"But what do the others do with their time?"

"Oh." Jerviss smiled. "Just laze around, doing nothing." He reflected he wouldn't tell Veronica about the others. They were common. They talked common. Not worth even thinking about 'em. "Will you have another . . ." he added "cocktail?"

"No, thank you."

They got up. He felt anxious now. They were shown their table. He remembered he must stand behind Veronica and push the chair gently under her. The first time he had

ever done it. Then he showed her the menu card. The dinner had been ordered in advance on the telephone. He remembered the rules in the magazine : *How to Take Out Your Lady Friend.* Would Veronica notice that he had made a note of her favourite dish when he asked her the day he went to have a drink with her ? Because this was one of the rules for a " discerning gentleman " entertaining a lady friend—try to find out. Luckily it had an English name. *Lobster Newburgh.* That was easy.

" I love lobster," Veronica said.

Jerviss smiled, modestly at first, then a little pointedly. It was then that she got it. She smiled back. " Very nice of you," she said. The smile remained on her lips long. " Yes, please," he beamed at the waiter, " a bottle of hock."

They were both very silent for a time. Jerviss did not like to talk while he had his food. He had taught himself late in life to eat smartly and he had to concentrate on what he was doing, though he enjoyed eating smart. He wondered if Veronica took notice of the way he was eating. She did. You could feel it the way her voice changed, and the way she wasn't paying attention to what she said. Then he noticed she was staring at him, a little surprised, impressed.

The conversation flagged at the next table. While they were having the lobster there was no end of talk. Jerviss had seen them in the lounge before they came in, a party of three women with their boy friends. They weren't class. He could see that at once. The way they looked, the way they talked. They were loud and he didn't like the boys either. One or two of 'em were yids, there are any number of decent yids, but these weren't nice ; fresh they were. He wondered if Veronica was noticing them. He had been to the place before, but with other people, and that was different. They really ought to have gone to Great Fosters ; that was real class, pity he didn't think of it before.

He noticed that the silence between them was long and awkward, and he felt he must say something to her. And something really amusing. But before that, he reached for the winebottle to fill up Veronica's glass. It was then that the thing happened. The silence of the room was suddenly

punctured by a loud metallic bang. Good thing he had already put the bottle down else he would have dropped it. He heard the chair creak under him. The lights were on full, there was a roar. Then, it wasn't. . . .

" Oh, Harry, you gave me such a fright. Leave that gong alone or we'll be turned out. And you Sidney, too. . . ."

He turned round, still a little awkward, he saw the large ornamental gong by the fireplace. Bloody yids, why can't they behave? With a faint smile about his lips he watched her face. Was she laughing at him, did she think it was funny, because she must have noticed the show he'd made of himself, almost jumping up.

" It's just nerves," he said.

" You must have been thinking of your coming match."

" It's the strain. And later it gets worse. . . ."

She was a little dazed. It was the first time she realised that a big fight must be agonising for its participants. And it was so strange to see a man of Jerviss' type and build and temperament so highly strung that the unexpected sound of a gong behind him would make him jump. It was clear he thought he was in the ring. She was undisturbed because she had seen it coming, had seen one of the young men get up and hit it. But then, of course, he wasn't an ordinary boxer, like others. He was imaginative and highly strung. The artistic temperament. Very attractive too. Suddenly she began to hate the prospect of Jerviss being dragged into the ring and hit senseless. He was too fine a person in spite of his build. He wasn't really tough. She couldn't see anything about him to show he was a boxer, nothing. Except the operation scar on his left ear. She had noticed that the first time they met.

" We call it punch drunkenness," he said because he could not live the thing down quite as easily as all that. " We all get it sooner or later. No matter how tough you are, you always end up punch drunk. And it's hell . . ." suddenly he raised his hand to his lips ; " pardon me."

" But then, must you go on with it? " she said, smiling because it was touching the way he apologised for a word she used twice a day, " I mean you have another career,

your writing. It's marvellous the way you can do both, but . . ." she raised her right hand slightly above her elbow.

"That's difficult." Jerviss shook his head, his face was drawn and serious. "You couldn't really understand it . . . I . . . I just can't say . . . you see this is my last year or so in the ring. Maybe it's my last fight. Because if I lose I'll just pack up. No comeback for me. It's a business proposition you see. A business proposition." He was smiling now. "It's two thousand pounds. So don't be all that sorry for me. . . ."

"Well, that must be more than you ever made writing."

"It is. But then there are writers who make much more than boxers." He pursed his lips. "Marlowe," he said, and quickly added, "not that money matters . . . really."

"And what have you in mind to write when you retire? Writers usually have a long programme ahead."

"I don't know." He shook his head. "I've got no plans." Again his face was serious, drawn, anxious. He looked sorry for himself. "I want to write . . . I mean I want to go on writing, but I want to do different stuff. Nothing like the ones you read . . . I . . . I can't put it the way I feel. . . ."

"That's only natural." She spoke quickly now. She had noticed that he was feeling awkward. She changed the subject. She told him a story about her father in India. They both laughed. Jerviss kept wondering what sort of man the Colonel was. He wasn't in that day he went to have a drink with her, and Mrs. Ferrers neither. He only saw their drawing-room, ever so fine and gentlemanly with flowers all over the place and the things the old boy must have brought back from India. And Miss Ferrers and her mother in the large photograph on the piano, he was looking at that while he was waiting for her to come down, they were in Court dresses with white feathers in their hair, on their way to the Palace.

She was drinking her coffee. What a strange creature he was. Long, long silences, interrupted by moments when he suddenly became talkative as if he wanted to relieve himself. Then he became silent again. Was he afraid he was boring

her? And did he think it "wasn't done" to talk about himself? Because he said as little as possible about himself and that only on provocation. And nothing about his writing. Was it because he was being modest or because there are many writers, many artists, who just can't talk? Strange this was, and attractive. And he was candid, almost like a child and so touchingly awkward. A big strong man, a boxer who looked helpless. She suddenly realised that the three times they were together Jerviss had never shown by any sign that he was attracted by her, though she was now conscious of it. He never even retained her hand a second longer when they shook hands saying good-bye. That was strange. Was he naturally shy and reserved? Or did he think, did he know that she was Paul's. . . . Did he? Of Paul they talked little to-night, and little generally speaking, and it was usually Jerviss who brought the subject up. She noticed that he thought very highly of Paul. "He's rare fine," he said the day he came to have a drink; "so different from the other people I meet. Lots of brains and good taste and ways, style. A real gentleman." She wondered if Jerviss knew. It wasn't likely because Paul was very discreet, one had to hand that to him, but don't men feel, guess, the way women do?

How different it was with Paul. Slow to awake. In fact he hardly seemed to notice her at first, then dropped out of her life completely, for quite a long time, a year or two. Then came the dance, that very smart dance in Worcester House when it all began. How hateful he was that night, goodness how hateful; posing all the time.

And what was he doing now? Since he left—and that must be nearly three weeks now; two postcards, that's all. Postcards, not even a letter. He was obviously having too good a time to think of her; of anybody. It would be silly to get upset just because he wasn't writing love letters, but still one had some little feeling for romance even if it wasn't smart to be romantic, at least not in the old-fashioned way. And all this was so very very strange, after the last time. Just before he left. No, not because of the dress . . . she was wearing it now, it wasn't quite that. It was sweet of Paul

and very naughty, but . . . it wasn't the dress. What he had said in the morning when they were having breakfast. When she was *officially* staying at Tenderness with Sylvia. When he brought in the coffee on the tray and put it on the bedside table. " I ought not to tell you, Veronica, I feel it's a mistake to tell you, because it is an embarrassing condition of life, but for the first time I feel I am in love with you. I needn't have told you, after all these months, but it just happens to be a fact. Stupid of me to talk about it, but still, there you are." Why did he say that? He surely wasn't lying, Paul never lied as a matter of fact, he could be unpleasantly brutal, but he always spoke the truth. " Truth is a kind of snobbery with me, or, if you like, an expensive passion." Was it just the way he was feeling that moment? It was true, that was the first night they had spent together, the first whole night actually " sleeping " together. Then he had sent a wire from Dover, which was really quite unnecessary, then a postcard from Paris, then nothing for ten days. Then another postcard from Cannes. A fortnight ago.

But it was so typical of him to go away for weeks. It was the same last year, and he didn't send more than a few lines. " Letter-writing is no longer an art-form ; we only write business letters these days, or say it on the telephone." Then to come back in high spirits out of the blue and ask one to dinner. " You are looking lovely, let's go to Soho tonight. . . ."

He wasn't lonely, that was certain. But was he with a woman in the South of France? It was all so mysterious. He did say he would be staying a few days with Mrs. Sloan. " *One of the best dressed women in New York,*" yes, and all those well-advertised parties. People said she was kind and generous. Wasn't she the woman of whose parties Paul used to talk a little too much? No, that was the Countess Monostory, another American. But that was long ago. When they first met. He was always talking about smart people and about ducal weekends. He talked so much about them that one might have thought he was lying had one not seen his name in the papers. Usually the last one—" and Mr. P. Haller-Noley—" He was an awful snob in those days. Then he suddenly gave up his

smart friends. About the same time as the thing started. Or perhaps *they* gave him up? But it was strange that he never talked about smart people any more. From one day to another, just like that. No, it wasn't because of that, because he never had any political views. "I like socialism and dislike socialists. . . ." That was good, but Paul had read it somewhere. And he'd given up writing, too. He'd taken up that "dull, confidential" work from the Austrian Legation which brought in some money. Or what brought in the money—could there be another woman?— No, it was impossible to be really intimate with him, because he was so secretive all the time and it wasn't a show, she knew him as well as that, it wasn't a show. She kept on shrugging mental shoulders, raising mental eyebrows, mysterious, yes very, but she felt it wasn't an attractive mystery.

"A penny for your thoughts," Jerviss said.

"Not nearly enough," she said. She smiled again. This time her smile wasn't forced. It remained on her face. "I've been thinking . . . such a bore for you . . . I'm sorry." She offered Jerviss one of her cigarettes and talked for a while, told a story about the library, then she looked at her watch; and immediately afterwards opened her bag and searched it.

"D'you mind very much if we go? It's quite late, you know, and it will take us some time to get back. And I haven't got a key on me."

As they were getting into the car, he said:

"It was a very nice evening, Miss Ferrers."

"Oh, please, I wanted to tell you before . . . don't call me Miss Ferrers."

"Yes, it's ever so much nicer, isn't it?" He flushed slightly. He remained silent till they got on to the road. It was a lovely evening. It was a lovely day all through. Just as if it were summer.

"D'you know," he said. "I always wished for someone who was different. I mean fine and spiritual, that sort of thing, always. People like Paul and you. He's grand. The greatest friend I ever had in my life. But, of course, it isn't the same thing, is it . . . with a man, I mean. . . . Only natural. You can see that. . . ."

" Yes . . . Les. . . ."

" Paul calls me Leslie."

" I like Les."

" You see, that's so very wonderful about you and Paul. You can feel exactly what I feel, even if you don't say it. I mean, sometimes I just can't. . . ."

" D'you really think Paul can ?"

" Every time. Why ?"

" I just wondered."

" Why ?"

" Difficult to say. I have known Paul for a long time. He used to come to us when Mother gave parties for me, and I like him quite a lot, but sometimes I wonder if he really has feelings. He's got brains, yes, but I don't know if he has feelings."

" What make you think that ?"

She didn't answer at once. " Oh, I don't know. Maybe I'm quite wrong about Paul. You see, I've known him a long time, but I don't know him really well. I don't often see him, you know," she added quickly. " We are not really intimate friends. . . ."

That was true, quite true . . . it wasn't betraying Paul, was it ? It was the truth. Besides I can't very well say to Les that I'm having an affair with Paul and he isn't in love with me and I'm not in love with him ; we just go to bed when he wants me, and he doesn't really care for me, not because of other women, no, but because he doesn't really care for anybody. He is just like that.

She enjoyed the wind blowing her hair, it was a slight wind, warm, a little dusty, like a caress. The car was speeding up the road. The Great West Road was really quite attractive at night, with all these green lights over it, and those floodlit factories right and left. Why did he wear his hair so short ? How serious his face was now in the flickering lights ; and how attractive. Now that she knew he wouldn't notice it she looked at his left hand on the wheel. How frightfully big, and hardly any hairs on it. . . . A scar between his thumb and forefinger. Was that boxing ?

At Hammersmith Broadway she said :

" You doing anything Thursday night ? I'd rather like to go and see *The Sun Also Rises*. It's a new American play. Would you like to come with me. . . .?"

" With you ? No, I will take you. . . ." Jerviss said.

" No, it's my turn. . . ."

" But are you sure it will be all right ?"

" Perfectly."

She decided she wouldn't tell him she was being given two tickets by an actress she knew from Marjorie Fife's.

BOOK THE FIFTH

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH

YES, the opening was superb. It couldn't have been better. Paul read it again.

" *The younger English story-teller of talent begins to have the character of a group, with common tricks, twitches, style and outlook. I would call them the Childe Harold school of fiction. We are led speedily along a personal itinerary. We are taken into a number of private or semi-private worlds recognisable by a smattering of class signals and various innuendoes. We are allowed to stay in these worlds long enough to form a very clear impression of people—but we are whisked away lest we blur that outline, filling it in with the long, foolish or tragic dream of human relationships. The new author is revolted by the explicit, he is an expert in implications, he likes to be known by the things he has left out. It is a point of honour to notice that human relations do not come to anything; that a characteristic of our time is the failure to make contact because of the ease of contacts. Like Childe Harold arriving on his promontory and looking at the sea, we are expected to exclaim, at the sight of a new face, or another life, 'Is this the Mighty Ocean? Is this all?' And move off quickly in case it is not all and there is more to it than the eye would care to meet. These avoiding moments are endemic in the modern story.*"

" *The answer to this criticism, the answer which is suggested by some of Mr. Les Jerviss' stories* (Number Engaged, *Granville, 7s. 6d.*) *is that there is a new tacit character in his stories, a new tacit character which dogs, shadows, nags, and looms in all lives: the situation of our time the condition of the world, our strange condition of life. Take the story, 'Home Exercise! . . .*" '

Yes, that *was* magnificent, really magnificent. Couldn't have been better. This was better than a preface to the book. It meant that the book was "classified," it was placed in a definite category, it was admitted into a 'group,' it was recognised as literature by a great critic. When he read it first he was very hasty and excited: naturally, because it was signed by W. R. Agnew, and it occupied two columns. "*He is revolted by the explicit, he is an expert in implications, he likes to be known by the things he has left out. . . .*" Agnew was a great critic; sensitive like the chemist's scales and exact like a surgeon's knife. More. . . more. He made criticism an art form.

"*. . . The contemporary story has a liaison with life, not a marriage, and in consequence Mr. Jerviss' talent comes out best in the narrative passages—I am thinking of the remarkable description of the telephone exchange in the title story or the horrific atmosphere of the surgery of the suburban dentist in 'Today is Wednesday'. . . .*"

He had seen few of the reviews of the new book yet, but this was the one he had been waiting for, it seemed, for years, with the anxiety of a patient facing a doctor, the accused facing the jury. What a pity he couldn't send a letter to Agnew to thank him for it. It was more than a flattering review; much more; it was a beautifully written and perfectly balanced critical estimate. His place and position in literature as it were. Something like the judgment of posterity. Every sentence rang a bell.

And on the whole, he reflected, Agnew was kind, because the unpleasant bit at the end was short and not really unpleasant. "*These points of criticism, however, only apply to about half of the stories under review.* Number Engaged *contains a number of stories that ought to have been left out of the selection. Stories like 'Bargain Basement,' 'Roulette,' 'Old and Mild,' are sad concessions to the taste of the magazine-reading public. They avoid clichés, there is no dead wood in their prose, but, all the same, they conform sheepishly to the worst conventions and requisites of the. . . .*"

He heard the front door bell. He went out to answer it. It was the parcel. He knew very well what it contained, yet he attacked its strings and wrappings with as much excitement

and urgency as if opening a surprise present. That morning he had gone to Sloane Square and bought a mirror to go over the sofa table. They'd packed it carefully. One couldn't be careful enough, packing these carved, mahogany frames, with all these brittle curls and flourishes. The gold on the little pheasant on top looked just a bit new compared with the successful " period " tone of the rest. Especially as he was looking at it so closely. But it would look well over the table and it would look 1810. Quickly, he worked out the position for the hook with inch tape in hand and hung the mirror.

He walked backwards, as far as the door. Between the two windows the mirror reflected the glass chandelier with its six candles alight and the white squirrel over the mantelpiece. When he got the curtains they would complete the picture for the time being. That Regency silk at Peter Jones was grand stuff with those little golden lyres on it, but it would cost quite a lot of money. He would have to wait. It was pretty good that the chandelier had been passed as antique by the customs ; that was a pleasant surprise. The wall-brackets would be up by Tuesday, the electrician said, and by Tuesday there would be a striplight over the squirrel too. He looked at the " interior " for a long time. The left hand corner was still empty. If he could afford to buy that corner cupboard he'd seen that morning. It could be wired for indirect lighting, and white Wedgwood or *Capo di Monte* would look splendid against its background of mahogany and gold.

But there were other things ; he must have the floor entirely covered in both roms with grey Wilton, another thirty pounds for the very cheapest. And there was only a table in the kitchen and Woolworth crockery and knives and forks. If only the play could be successfully written and launched now, then all these problems could be easily solved. He could buy all the things he needed—and inevitably some which he didn't—and start saving. He must accumulate as much capital as possible, in case . . . and apart from " in case." And Jerviss, this time, would prove useful, apart from the Conspiracy ; he was sure to be able to give some " inside information " for the second act. . . .

He walked to the window. The rain had stopped, but the

street lamps over the shiny pavement were surrounded by a greenish haze, there was a fierce wind as if autumn had already settled into winter.

Jerviss could perhaps supply a few incidents that must go into the second act (he shut the window) which was the shakiest thing in the play. And, of course, he must have a very good look at dressing rooms, he must have the most realistic atmosphere the stage would tolerate. And that wouldn't be too easy. In fact, it would be a bit risky to go along to boxers' dressing rooms with a notebook in hand. . . . That was the very worst thing about plots that occurred to one dealing with people one didn't know intimately. Many writers did the same, invented the plot first, then went out, studied the necessary characters and made a compromise between prefabricated conceptions and living people. Many writers did it, yes, but somehow it wasn't the real thing. The real thing grew out of characters one knew intimately. The plot should be spun not by passion but by actual contacts and direct experiences with living people. But still, the plot was a rich, strong one. Somebody would have to help with the dialogue and continuity, but that could be taken care of. The stage was different. If a manager liked the plot, he would get an experienced playwright to "touch it up" and the actors themselves would put in a line or two. And there was definitely money in this play.

There was money in it, that was certain. He looked at the reflection of the chandelier in the new mirror again. A good angle, a good "shot" . . . except that Technicolor would bring out these delicate shades of yellow, pink and golden brown in syrupy tones of chrome, burgundy and burnt siena . . . The conspiracy in these new surroundings didn't quite look as it had looked in the "Sentry Box" when it was nothing but a plan. The difference between theory and practice. He smiled inwardly. When it began—nearly two years ago—it seemed terrific in proportions. A revolution, a complete change of his life and circumstances, almost an aim in itself. Almost an aim in itself, a glorious sort of revenge. Conceived out of spite and despair. More than an exciting adventure. Yes, revolution. And what had happened?

Let's draw up a balance sheet. He began to walk up and down the room.

He had become a different man to a certain extent. To a certain extent. Not " fundamentally " different, but certainly " different." Even his health had improved. That was natural : more comfort, better food and less time for worry and introspection ; less need too. He was busy now, and he enjoyed being busy.

He was perfectly right about the fundamental theory that under the " name," one could publish practically anything. Even good literature. Even that stuff which the young writer writes with his own blood—or thinks he does—and the stuff which editors *think* the public doesn't want.

But was it just like that ? This was the debit side. And it seemed it wasn't entirely the question of theory and practice. Those last half dozen stories. . . . No need for Agnew to tell him that. Honor Vereker said last night at dinner—on provocation—that the last story in the new issue of *Forum* was a washout, " Sidney Horler does that sort of stuff much better, Jerviss is a writer and he is merely trespassing on 'extra-literary' ground." He laughed because he liked the word " extra-literary." Yes, he did feel that about *Twice Shy*, he had felt vaguely that he was writing a pot-boiler story as he read it aloud in the bedroom at the Miramare. But he was in such a hurry. The evening was grand and he was driving out that night to Bandol to a local festival and he wanted to buy the chandelier.

But surely it started earlier ; earlier. When was it that he began to write " extra-literary " stories ? When was it that he forgot about the " Crusade," the idea of forcing good literature down the throat of the allegedly unwilling public, the idea of making use of their alleged stupidity in order to enrich their lives ? When was it that he gave up experiments, when was it that he forgot those things which years ago he simply " burned " to tell ; ideas which came in those days of bitterness, when his stuff was unrequited unsolicited, uninvited, when he was thinking not only of a new way of saying old things, but of saying new things. He never had intended to turn out propaganda tracts ;

no, politics was an *a priori* conception, like Catholicism and nationalism, but all the same it was one of the functions of a writer to show people in relation to their times, working in his own way, of course. That is by implications, suggestions, indirect means, so that his stuff shouldn't be entirely *Unterhaltung*, dope, amusement, escape.

Hitler, Mussolini, Fascism, Communism, New Deal, Franco . . . no, no, certainly, he didn't mean that, but it was, all the same, interesting that he had lost even the little interest in the outside events of politics that he had when he began the conspiracy. He simply " gave up " these things, as if they didn't exist and moved into a . . . what? You couldn't exactly call it an Ivory Tower, could you? Gide called it a " Glass Tower " and someone else a " Leaning Tower " but tower all the same, or if you like, the belly of that whale Henry Miller wrote about. The Spanish war was as good as lost, Goering was boasting and the two dictators were certainly working in accord. And—this was more important than Spain and Abyssinia—Wurmser was very gloomy yesterday on the telephone; he must see Onkel Franz and Tante Frieda again or ask them to lunch. He was very gloomy, saying that England was absolutely encouraging Hitler to invade Austria. Onkel Franz was, of course, a little old-maidish, like elderly Viennese invariably are; he was a *Trott'l.* " *Lieber Paul, ich bin imma so müde, so müde*" he saw the minister's bearded spinster visage and smiled, Onkel Franz was a *Trott'l*, but all the same his fears were justified. Emmerling seemed very gloomy when he saw him yesterday in the Foreign Office; he was naturally afraid he would lose his job on the paper if Hitler invaded Austria. Well, for that matter he might lose the *Morgenblatt* too. It was supporting Schuschnigg now and it would be the first to go. But what could he do to stop Hitler and to stop the whole awful *schimozzle?* Nothing. And if he lost his seven pounds a week on the *Morgenblatt*, he might get a job in Fleet Street, or devote all his time and attention to writing under Jerviss' name. Quite unconsciously he did the best, the only thing he could do, not to care, not to bother about

the thing he couldn't alter.

No, no, no, he didn't want the old bitterness back, thank you. He had become calmer and more of a realist, but was it a really good bargain? He'd lost his bitterness, the sleepless nights, the almost unlimited time and capacity to brood over his misfortune, but wasn't there something else, that wasn't meant to be lost? Yes, but what was it? Bite, originality, fire . . . yes, he was certainly more "civilised," more "balanced" now, that was only natural; poverty and bitterness gave him a false outlook, a clarity, but a false clarity: the world wasn't such a hopelessly rotten place; "a good life if you stick it out." And he was certainly older both in years and in outlook.

He wrote one story each month, sometimes two, in July three. But that surely wasn't overwork. He had the plots and he had acquired a good deal of routine; "earn while you learn" Now that was a bit of his old sarcasm . . . so rare nowadays, but that wasn't the real reason. He certainly wasn't overworking and if he was, what compensations: what luxuries, what comforts to overwork in!

Greed? Not really. True, never in his life had he made quite as much money as in the last two years. But did he think of money when the plan was new? He did, vaguely. And when all was said and done he didn't really make so much money after all. Altogether about five or six hundred pounds, that is apart from his seven pounds a week from the paper and the fiver a month or so from *The Examiner*. Say twelve pounds a week, all told, the last two years. It was certainly more than he was used to, but it didn't go to his head. The change had little to do with money. Money was compensation. Com . . . well, of course, now he saw the thing as clearly as the smoke of the cigarette he had just lit. Absolutely clearly. He made money, he saw the publication of all the stuff, two books, all the stories. Books, yes, because he was thinking more of books than stories, books were more solid, concrete. Then there came the reviews, most of them missed the point, were a little automatic in fact in their praise, but still there came recognition. But it was recognition for Jerviss. He never

saw his own name in print, except in the *Morgenblatt* and the *Examiner*. It was always Jerviss' name which received the credit, the honour, those vulgar solicitations in the Forum . . . "Read this poignant story. . . ." Vulgar, vulgar, but how much he would have liked to read all that vulgarity about himself. . . . And people talked, not many, true,—this was strange—in fact fewer than he had expected, but still a large number were talking about Jerviss' books, about the fact that he wrote. In the beginning it was a joke, he was in fact a little impatient that there weren't more people talking about Jerviss as an author. Had he been blind and dumb not to see that this would happen, that all he would get was money and the only man in whose eyes he would be a great man would be Jerviss. When those idiotic inquiries came, he was merely "annoyed." They were meant to be friendly. Conventional inquiries. When would *he* publish *his* book, the book he *always* talked about. When would *his* book, *his* story come out? Who is publishing *your* book? Wasn't there irony in Caroline Lamb's voice when she asked him in Vienna? True, she had really enjoyed listening to *Limitations of Eternity*. Honor Vereker asked once or twice and Veronica all the time. Why the bloody hell had he talked so much of literature to all and sundry? Why the bloody hell did he ask people to come round to the Sentry Box to listen to his stories?

This wasn't a reasonable question. He had to. He wanted to. The same way as men with unsatisfied sexual hunger would talk of women all the time.

And it was no use to try to expose Jerviss. It would be a filthy trick, because it would only expose Jerviss, not the filth, the brutality, the merciless, shortsighted brutality of the system. Not Jerviss. It wasn't Jerviss' fault. And even if he did do the filthy trick in a moment of rage, what would happen? Jerviss was not yet an established author. It would be BOXER EXPOSED and certainly not WRITER EXPOSED. No, there was no way out. Yes, there was. Certainly there was. Amazing how . . . it was really amazing (there was no need for all this emotional upheaval) amazing how he had been feeling all the time,

sub-consciously, unconsciously. The way out was money-making. He saw the whole thing clearly. It wasn't conscious. Started about six, seven months ago, quite unconsciously. . . . Compromise. The glorious, English tradition. Money wasn't perhaps a substitute for thwarted ambitions, but there was " something about money." Something he had never quiet guessed before. A magic quality. It did make up for a good many things. " Unhappy in comfort." . . . What a brilliant phrase that was. One of Hoover's. And there was no doubt, no doubt at all that an intelligent man, a sensible man, a man with an elastic, an athletic mind, could buy happiness with money. Yes. Buy it. One of course must never admit this and must never mention it to poor people, but even affection can be bought, yes. Affection. A dreadful piece of truth, or facet of truth, but there it was.

But if it was money, it should be real money, serious money. Not an additional two or three hundred a year, but thousands. He must turn himself into a factory. If he was forced to compromise, he must make it worth while. Then the fact that he was not given credit for his stuff would not matter quite so much. Perhaps he would be able to discover means later, to establish his authorship. But in the meantime, money.

There was obviously more money in a successful play than in a successful novel. (That was the last link in the story of his development ; the whole thing fitted perfectly. Like the jigsaw of the clues in a detective story. He smiled. He was both the master-mind-detective and the criminal in one person). Besides, the play might be written in a shorter time than a novel. That wasn't certain, though. And out of this particular plot he could make a novel afterwards. Perhaps under his own name. (Based on Les Jerviss' successful play by Paul Noley. . . .) Then, he could make a transition and on the strength of the book could perhaps force himself into the market..

It was nearly half past six. After dinner he would have to type out the article for the paper. No. Not tonight. True, he was behindhand with articles, but tonight, no. . . .

He must see her. Had she got his message the day before

yesterday? Funny she had not rung up. Or perhaps she had. That was the only disadvantage of living alone in a flat.

"Could I speak to Miss Ferrers?" he said when he was connected.

"Sorry, sir. Mr. Noley, isn't it? Miss Veronica is staying with Miss Jenkins. We are not expecting her back till Monday morning. Any message, sir?"

"No, thank you."

He was already looking for Sylvia Jenkins' country number in his address-book. It was half past six. He must see her tonight. Besides it wouldn't be a bad idea to ask Sylvia to let him come down to the country. She had often told him to suggest himself at any time. Sylvia surely wouldn't mind, and it would do him a lot of good to get away to the country. She was not a bit ritualistic. After all he had nothing really to do in London with Jerviss away.

As he waited for the call to be put through, he reflected that he had better ask Sylvia for trains. The car was being repaired.

"You are through."

"Could I speak to Miss Ferrers?" Paul said.

"Miss Ferrers isn't staying here this week-end." a voice said. "Unless . . . Could you please hold on a minute. I'll inquire."

What the hell did this mean? He got up when he heard the confirmation. She was supposed to be staying with Sylvia, and she wasn't. Then where the hell was she? . . . Supposed to be staying with Sylvia! . . . "And I am supposed to be staying with Sylvia," she had smiled when she said it, and he had kissed her. She'd said this in a gay and naughty mood six weeks ago, one Sunday morning in this very flat. He was making breakfast and she was looking at the fashion page of the *Examiner*, smoking in bed. He laughed and his whole mind was suddenly filled with the sweet taste of the Forbidden Fruit, the sweet feeling of accompliceship, the consciousness that they were sharing a lovely secret. That Colonel and Mrs. Ferrers and the whole world, whoever cared to inquire, was under the impression that Veronica Ferrers was staying the week-end with the Honourable Sylvia Jenkins

at Tenderness, near Maidenhead, Surrey, whereas in magnificent reality she was spending the week-end with him in Fitzhardinge Court, Seymour Street, W.1.

"Supposed to be staying with Sylvia" . . . the phrase now sounded in his mind in a different key. It was not "flat," sunny, full of champagne, *allegretto;* it was sharp, brutal, with a dark hint of *lento* in it. . . . And with whom? The musical prase concluded in a sudden dramatic *fortissimo.*

No, that was impossible.

But no sooner had the denial crossed his mind than he already began to despise himself for his egoism. Why shouldn't there be anybody, even if it hurt him to think of it? Why? Was Veronica his private property, his monopoly, his right of way, his uninfringeable copyright? Did she belong to him in any way? Now perhaps she did—he tried to answer his indignant mind. Now he felt differently towards her than in the beginning. It was not only habit, not only a custom of two years, not only the comfortable certainty that "she was there," and that she was his, but he had discovered a new person in her with whom he had a good deal in common. He discovered that she was a friend as well as a mistress. She impressed him. But why should she be his private property? What did he offer her? A certain amount of physical pleasure. Yes, but the thought, the certain knowledge that Veronica enjoyed love-making as if she were a man, made her all the more desirable. What else? He questioned himself more brutally than any stranger asking the same question. What else? Was he really affectionate? Did he regard her as a woman? Why should she be tied to him?

For example—the idea suddenly leapt into his mind—he had not even bothered to ring her up on his return to London. Yes, he had—he retorted firmly. He rang her up the very evening he arrived. She was not in. He was a little angry—he remembered because in the train he hoped he would be able to spend the evening with her. So rather sulkily he left his name with their maid, but no message. The following day, he did not ring her, true, but it was then he received the wire from the paper. They wanted him to get the serial rights of

a novel and he had to go out early in the morning to see the publisher, then the agent. Besides he was behindhand with his articles because he overstayed his time in France. Then on the second day he had received some press cuttings of *Number Engaged* in a letter from Jerviss and spent the whole morning reading them through. Then he had to ring the *Examiner* to tell them he was back. Then Honor asked him to dinner. It was very important. Chalmers had died a fortnight previously and this had meant a reshuffle of the reviewing staff, so there was a chance for him of a more permanent job. True, Honor, was non-committal, but he was certain that something would inevitably come out of it. It was past eleven when he got home last night. Finally, this morning he had to go through his letters, and had to see his pass book and pay bills and ring up the agent about a charwoman, and answer a few urgent letters, and go out to an auction to try to pick up a few pieces of furniture and, unsuccessful in that, he had gone to Peter Jones to see about curtains.

True, he'd only rung her once. But, surely she must have heard he was back and she had not rung him since. She'd done nothing about it either.

But then surely . . . (he was counsel for the prosecution again) he ought to have sent a wire from Paris, or ought to have written to her. Written. . . . He realised with annoyance that he had sent her two post-cards in all.

It was his fault, if anybody's. He hadn't treated her the way she aught to have been treated. No, the " Gentlemen's Agreement " they had made, laughing, to the effect that both of them would reserve their complete freedom (feeling pride over how matter-of-fact and thoroughly modern they were) would never really suit a girl, no matter how much she pretended it did. He liked " sporting " girls, who were a little masculine in outlook, self-reliant, with whom he could be as " man to man," partly because the contrast appealed to the feminine traits of his character, but mostly because the girl who was independent, who " took care of herself," suited his convenience, his egoism, his selfishness. But that " man to man " arrangement would never suit a woman, however

" sporting," because under the varnish of " independence " she unmistakably had the fundamental characteristics of a woman. There were cases, yes, when a woman gave everything to a man, but then she must be desperately in love, losing her senses. And Veronica was not in love with him.

Now he felt a great affection towards her. Next time he would be different to her. Entirely different. This was a good lesson. He would be affectionate, genuinely affectionate. The thought that she might be away with someone in secret had made him jealous for the first time in their relationship and made her all the more desirable to him.

But I am thinking this only because I am jealous. . . . No. . . . He tried to see clearly. Even in physical relations she had become lovelier and more attractive. How magnificent she was the last time, and just before, when they had spent the week-end in the flat together. " The Honeymoon." The discovery of the sleeping Veronica in the morning beside him in the bed. How lovely she looked in the early morning light, when most women look their worst. He looked at her long, as if taking stock of a precious property. The softness of the skin on her face, the thick arch of her eyebrows, the firm line of the strong lips, the darkish roots of the platinum hair. Carefully he lifted the blanket and looked at her again. Her body was muscular, with strong, tiny breasts, a little like a boy athlete, yet the hips were wide and most maddeningly feminine, and how elastic and strong. With what force she could press his limbs against hers, and how she could enjoy the raptures as they became more and more intimate, with what utter lack of shame, inhibitions and reserve she could give herself to him. And how maddeningly lovely was the contrast of her quiet, Brompton Road-Mother India background against her passion. She was in her prime, could never be lovelier and better, and she was the perfect harlot, the perfect whore. She was made for loving, not only with the lips and the senses, but entirely, with body and soul, fully and without reserve. And he felt that he had ripened her.

Yes, the fault was his. He had laughed when Veronica told him that a woman could never say exactly what particular

little affection she expected, but she expected them all the time and they were never fulfilled. He treated her shockingly, simply because he had never bothered to understand her, and he was feeling. . . . Yes, it must be love. For in that moment, sitting in his room, he did not wish to sleep with her ; not really, it was not the desire of the body he felt towards her. He just wished to be with her. Just to talk to her, to see her in the arm-chair opposite, to listen to her, no matter what she'd say, to be alone with her so that with her help he might be able to run away from this madhouse of ideas and problems, that hand-in-hand they might make an escape out of time and place.

He felt very lonely. He felt as sometimes when the heaviness of the day entered his soul, that there was not a single person in whom he could confide. Not a soul with whom he could share his mind. Hundreds of acquaintances or past acquaintances all over London and not a single friend. Under ordinary conditions and most of the time this state of affairs seemed to be satisfactory. He had got used to loneliness. He even grew fond of it at times. And in broad daylight things seemed all different. When the idea of his solitariness occurred to him, he, with the false clarity of youth saw himself in a flattering position. A Strong Man, a Lonely Figure, a little statuesque in his superior loneliness. He felt he was strong, because he was alone and because he had to fight. But now, in the October night, alone with his troubles and separated from the world he felt that there was no substitute for friendship, just as there was no substitute for health, youth, or talent.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH

"BLOODY awful," Amor said. "Not three weeks till the fight. . . . Not three weeks," He raised his forefinger to his nose.

"You mean he sneaked out during the night?" Burke said.

" Must 'ave done. First thing in the morning, 'e was nowhere to be found. Sparring partner, trainer all waiting for 'im to come down. No sign of him. They made a search. Thought 'e'd met with an accident. All got the wind up like. In the end, Carnegy found a note on 'is bed that 'e is goin' away for the week-end. To the Spinney, it said."

" That new roadhouse on the Kingston by-pass ?"

" Yes."

" It's a gay place all right," Burke said. " But Les never used to be like that. Never was much of a womaniser. Not before a fight."

" But it isn't a tart," Amor said. " That's what makes me mad. It isn't a flicking tart. When a boxer plays abaht with a tart before a fight, that's a flicking stupid thing to do, but it's nachural like. But when he runs away from camp and says he wants to write a flicking story. . . ."

" You don't mean to say. . . ."

" Yes, I do. The minit Carnegy told me abaht it, I put a call through to Les. You ought to 'ave heard wha' 'e said when I got on to him. You ought to 'ave 'eard it. Mind your own bloody business, he said. I am not a bloody kid to be ticked off, he said. I have an inspirayshon, he said. A new story. . . . Now, I ask you ?"

" And what did you say, Dan ?"

" There wasn't no flicking time for me to say anything 'E rang off as 'e finished his say. Never seen him so wild. . . ."

" He was always a bit funny," Burke said. " D'you remember the time he wanted to be a film director when he retired ?"

" He always had new queer ideas, but lately he is queerer than ever. All this writing stuff . . . stories . . . 'Spirichual Values,' he say. . . . That's a new one on me. What does he want ? Another Gene Tunney ? Another literary heavyweight ?"

" Have you read his stuff ?"

Amor shook his head with great indignation. " Never. Am I his manager, or am I ? . . . I am not complainin'. . . . mind. He's treated me fair. But it's always his own way. . . He knows everything better. And now this new stuff. He's

got the wind up awful. God knows why? He's a good chap, always has been, but queer. Gives the cold shoulder to his old pals. He is not stingy, I don't mean that. He is still there to help them and the like, but he never goes out with 'em. Says he is busy with his writing. . . . Well, it's too much lit'rature for me I can tell you. He ought to be concentratin' on his straight left, 'cause that is not as good as it used to be. You saw it, didn't you, in the *Clarion*. He didn't like it. But it's true. That's what he ought to do; givin' himself lit'rary airs. . . . Orvieto not only has the punch, he can box, too. . . ."

"And he's younger. . . ."

"Aye. A chap like Les ought to be thankful to God Almighty that 'e's still good to carry on. Ought to work hard for the chance he is havin'."

"Do you think he wants to retire?"

"By the look of things, yes," Amor said. He almost smiled. "Why, Orvieto has beaten Schmidt, and made a draw with Curtis in Soljer's Field. . . ."

"Les could go on for that. Why shouldn't he? He's been beaten before. . . ."

"Now you're talking. But that's just what 'e doesn't want. That's just it. He doesn't like the idea of a come-back. That's between you and me, mind. 'E wants to retire after the fight. . . ."

"I know that. There is no more serious money in it. But what does he want to do?"

"*Writin'*. Now you've got it. I don't mean, Les is clever. He managed his fights quite well without me. Mind you, not as well as I'd have done it for 'im, that goes without sayin' still. Well, I mustn't grumble. He treated me fair . . . only nachural, I treated him fair when 'e was a nobody. It was I who made him, that's clear. . . . Well, anyhow. What I mean to say is, Les today is worth at least thirty-thousand quid, if no more. . . ."

"Funny thing he had such a good head for business," Burke said.

"Nothing doing." Amor said. "He had luck, that's all.

He lost money on Simmonds, but not much, and he made that up since. . . . I don't know, some people seem to have a way with them. Les is just the kind everyone wants to oblige. Now, take old Seligman, the broker. . . ."

"The old bloke with cornflowers in his buttonhole in the ringside?"

"That's him. It was him that gave Les the tip where to put his money. . . . And the old boy knows. That's all good luck. Les is born lucky. If he went out to 'ampstead 'eath after Bank Holiday, and collected all the french letters there, there would be a boom in rubber the next day. . . ."

"Aye," he said. Amor suddenly became grave, "but his good luck won't go on for ever. There may be another crash, a worse than we had. And by the look of things, all this rearmament talk . . . and what then? Plenty of fighters that went into business done well. There is everything open to him. Everything. . . ." Amor made a sweeping gesture indicating the walls, which were covered with boxers' photographs and the framed letters of thanks from hospitals. "He could open a gym, or a beauty parlour, or a pub—anything. 'E has the personality. But he just won't. All this writin' craze. . . ."

Amor became silent for a moment and when, later on, the discussion was resumed in a pub kept by a retired boxer, Burke reflected with regret that there were no more picturesque figures in the ring.

"Jerviss has a nice personality," he said to himself. "But he is only funny, not picturesque. . . ."

"Aye, it's *concession* of the brain, caused by blows," said an old timer next to him. "Got a fag on you, Sam?"

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-NINTH

"Could I speak to Miss Veronica?" Paul said. It was the following Monday, early in the morning. Later he thought his voice had been a little too aggressively cheerful.

"You are speaking to her, Paul."

" What have you done to your voice ? It doesn't sound like yours at all. . . . I say, haven't you had my telephone message . . . must be three days ago. I rang you up the moment I arrived. . . ."

" Yes. I had it, but I left town on Saturday, and I had no time to ring you."

" Where have you been ?"

" Staying with Sylvia."

" I see," he said ". . . D'you realise I haven't seen you for five weeks ? I have a lot to tell you. Look, could we meet to-day ? In the afternoon ?"

" Sorry, Paul. I can't."

It was coming : bloody-well coming. " I see," he said. His voice was calm, almost cheerful. " You're busy. Could we meet to-morrow, then ?"

" 'Fraid not."

" What d'you mean ?"

But he only heard the muffled sounds of the traffic in Brompton Road through the microphone.

" What d'you mean ?" he said.

" . . . . I don't want to go to your place."

" But, Veronica. I can't understand. . . . I mean. . . . What's wrong with you ?"

" Nothing. I just don't want to. . . ."

" You mean you don't want to see me any more."

" Don't be stupid. Of course, I want to. . . . Couldn't we go out to dinner somewhere tonight ?"

" If you like. Could you come to the Ivy at eight ?"

" I'd love to. Excuse me. I'm going to be late, goodbye."

It was very simple, he thought as he replaced the receiver. After dinner he would ask her to the flat and there would be a little scene, he would tell her exactly what he thought of her and that would be their last meeting. Very simple. No use getting desperate about it. All was lost. He would have a little kick out of telling her a few home truths, then he might feel sorry, very sorry in fact, for a few days, weeks. Possibly days. Till he found someone else. Amazing how different the whole thing looked this morning. Even before he made

the call. Amazing. No use getting worked up about it; it wouldn't help. It was, of course, fundamentally his own fault, or fundamentally *not her* fault, and this might cause regret and pain, regret and pain . . . if her behaviour hadn't provided such a good *remède contre l'amour*. One couldn't possibly love a woman who treated him like that. A few idiots, of course, might.

As he was lying in his bath before dressing for dinner he reflected that it was all rubbish, the whole idea. There may have been a misunderstanding, there mayn't have been a misunderstanding. She may have a lover, she may not have one. He would certainly do his very best to win her back during dinner. I want to talk to you. Let's go back to the flat. Naturally no. Veronica. How can you think I had anything in my mind like that, and after what you said on the telephone this morning. Really, at times you are. . . . The point is that we can't talk here and I feel that there are things we must get absolutely straight. Yes. That was the framework. The rest was just a question of skill. He would have to play his cards well. He must know precisely what to say. He must be very calm. And if he was skilful, then they would continue " as if nothing had happened." There was absolutely no need for careful resolutions that he " never loved her," no series of auto-suggestions that it would be " good thing " if they parted company. He could do that, of course; he could do it, but why should he do it when with a little skill he might succeed? Naturally, he would behave at dinner as if " nothing had happened." Yes. And not as if he pretended that nothing had happened. *En-parlant-un-peu-de-Paris-tout-est-clair-et-tout-vous-souriez*. . . . What were the other words? He hummed the tune without the words. He must listen carefully to the record. Where's the soap? Hell, he must climb out, it's on the washstand. . . .

He left her alone in the sitting room for a moment to fetch the box of cigarettes. She had been horrid all the evening. She had a cold in the nose and she looked quite ugly, with those deep shadows under her eyes. How could he ever have

found her attractive? She looked exactly as if she masturbated. She probably did. And the way she had behaved in the Ivy. As if she had conferred a favour on him by coming along to dinner. And not a word in the taxi. True, he had seated himself as far from her as possible. Yes, it is very simple. He offered her the box.

"No, thank you."

All the better. The way she said "No, thank you," all the better. He lighted his cigarette slowly. He seated himself opposite her on the settee.

"I think you know," he said; he noticed she was avoiding his glance. "I think you know I didn't ask you here to seduce you or to have a row with you. After what happened I have no wish to do either. But I think I'm entitled to an explanation. . . . You are behaving in a very unusual way. . . ."

"I'm sorry." He felt she sounded almost triumphant.

"You needn't be. But I feel I ought to know why you are behaving in this strange way. . . . To the best of my knowledge I've done nothing to offend you."

"You see, Paul," she looked at the bare floor. "You see, you must remember that you said often enough that we were both free to do anything we liked. That we weren't tied to each other. . . . You remember, don't you?"

"Yes, but those were different days. I said that long ago. When it began. We were not in love, we were not even friends; merely lovers. . . ."

She didn't reply. For a split second she thought she would ask: "And are we different now?" but she didn't. She must have felt, she must have known that he was expecting it and was ready with his reply. She said:

"I am sorry. . . . You know I didn't really mean to come and see you . . . because . . . it's painful . . . I just can't tell you what I feel about it. . . ."

"You mean, you don't want to see me any more?"

"Don't be silly, of course I want to. We'll remain friends. . . ."

"Oh, no," he flung his cigarette into the fireplace. "We

won't. And you know we won't. I think you know me well enough for that, and you also know that I'm not different in this respect from anybody else. I'm not vindictive. It's simply that friendship after this is impossible. You know that yourself quite as well as I do. So why pretend," he looked pained, so pained that the curve of his mouth almost showed a smile. " Why pretend ?" he repeated.

" I have behaved very badly. . . . I know. . . ."

He waited long, thinking she would go on, but she didn't. She was now looking at the squirrel on the mantelpiece ; she was seeing it for the first time and he noticed she was admiring it, but he knew they wouldn't discuss the squirrel, now or ever.

" You have," he said at length. He got up and stood with his back to the fireplace. " Matter of fact, you have made it very easy for me. I've only got to think of your behaviour today, and I'll have no reason to have any pain, any regrets for losing you. . . . You have provided a perfect remedy against love, I must say. . . ."

" Must you be quite so cruel. . . .? "

" Cruel ?" he asked with a stage bow and a stage smile, as if he didn't quite know what the word really meant. " I see. . . . There are certain things, you don't realise. Please remember them for further use. Don't do it to your lover, for example. . . ."

" Who's my lover ?" She was using sarcasm as self-defence, miserable little worm.

" I don't know, and please don't be offended. I am only telling you what I feel. And what I feel is I don't know who your lover is and. . . ."

" And you don't care. . . ." She smiled.

" Precisely." His smile was hideous, but neither of them saw it. " There are things I needn't say. I don't care, but that's neither here nor there. What I mean to say is, please don't repeat this performance. I mean it seriously. I loved you for your independence, for your passion, for your loyalty. You impressed me. Don't think I imagined things about you. I didn't idealise you. I saw you as you were . . . and now I see you as you are. That's why I feel so nauseated, so

disgusted, because your bitchy behaviour is not in keeping with your character. It's just not you. . . ."

" Maybe you don't know me."

" Now that's precisely what I mean," he raised his hand triumphantly. " Maybe you don't know me. . . ." he said, giving a horrid parody of her voice and intonation. " A silly little bitch, a brainless little bitch would say that. A little shop-girl from the suburbs, giving herself airs. . . . Why can't you be true to yourself? Why can't you be open about it, and say ' I fell in love with somebody else,' or ' You bore me, you are an unsatisfactory lover, you are ugly,' and say it bravely into my eye. That's what I would have expected. . . ."

" I only wanted to spare you. . . ."

" There you are again. A *cliché*. . . . And a bad, out-of-date *cliché*. If we are going on like this the next thing you'll say is, ' *please adjust your dress before leaving*.' . . ."

She couldn't help breaking into laughter, but she checked herself after a second or two. She tried to assume an insulted expression. She didn't succeed. Inside she laughed.

In the silence between them, he thought it was funny, too. He didn't mean it to be funny. It just came out. It was the truth. But it made her laugh. He resented this. He wanted to hurt her.

" I'll get you a taxi," he said.

She got up.

How ugly her hands were. He had noticed that the first time they met. Her hands were small, but the fingers stumpy, the nails a bad shape and the dark varnish on them accentuated the bad shape. He looked at her hands as they were walking downstairs, almost in triumph. And she was ugly, not only tonight, she was fundamentally ugly, insipid. It was only her hairdo that gave her a kind of uniformly attractive expression. And there was a ladder in her stocking. As usual, as usual. And, of course, in bed she sweated, it was no use scenting herself all over ; she sweated.

A taxi drew up to the house the very moment they stepped on the pavement. Paul saw the young Jewish surgeon who lived above him. As he paid the taxidriver he looked at

Veronica ; swiftly, discreetly, appraisingly, then he raised his hat to them ; a whiff of hair-oil floated in the air.

" Good evening," Paul said. He smiled cordially. " You arrive just in time. . . ."

He told the driver the address ; Veronica was already inside. " Well, goodbye. . . ." he said. He shut the door, he turned on his heels, he walked upstairs fast.

Sickness was coming. She had been feeling sick the whole day, but it was only now, as the taxi was gliding across Park Lane, that she knew why she was feeling sick. This morning, irritated, anxious, frightened, she had mistaken it for something else, it wasn't the usual sickness. There was no headache. She had a cold all over her body, yes, but now she felt a headache coming. And she was glad. There could be no mistake, it was coming. She had been feeling awful about it, because it ought to have come the day before yesterday, but it hadn't and this morning she'd felt awfully anxious and frightened and irritated. She must do something about it next time. It was sheer good luck. I suppose Les expected me to see to things myself ; perhaps he though it wasn't done for a man to see to it. He was very shy. Paul wasn't. On the contrary. At times it was quite indecent how businesslike he was in such things, quite revolting. But she did really bitch Paul. He was awful tonight, that was only natural ; she was worse. In any case it was good luck, she must see to it herself the next time. Awful thing, of course, to go to the chemist and ask for it . . she must find a way to do it. She was feeling pleasantly sick. It wouldn't be so pleasant tomorrow. She'd report sick tomorrow. The night was lovely. Hyde Park Corner looked sweet.

CHAPTER THE THIRTIETH

" It looks as if everything had conspired against me," Honor Vereker said. For a moment she looked at the half a dozen medicine bottles which she kept, out of superstition, on her

desk. Fleet Street seemed to float on the rhythm of the rain.

" It's only Tuesday, and we have already. . . ." she looked at a pad on her desk, " an interview with Professor Werbezierk, a special article on the Nobel Prize Awards, two long obituaries, there is the Zoo sensation and the Jerviss fight on Thursday. So far . . . And anything that may come in the next three days. Everything to trespass on our space. It's always us who are cut down. Look at these. . . ." She picked up a large bundle of proofs. " Overmatter from the last three weeks. God knows when I can print them," She sniffed. "Still," she sniffed again. "I told you I can't promise to give you McDougall's job, so for goodness' sake don't throw up your gallant *Morgenpost*. But you can try your hand at it. It's a trial. I tell you quite frankly that you have a strong rival in Hicks. The editor wants him to take McDougall's place."

" Really ?" Paul said.

" Strictly between ourselves ! You are not supposed to know. So what I propose is : you come on alternately, every other week, with Hicks . . . . Well, *faites vos jeux*. . . . I am trying to push you but keep quiet about it. . . . Well, now, you do these three novels and quickly. I must have your copy by Thursday the latest. . . ."

" Could you make it Friday ?"

" Very well, Friday, then. But don't make a mess of it. One thousand words. . . ." She made notes on the outlay sheet. " Home fiction, second article," she said, as she scribbled. " Noley . . . one thousand, Friday, twenty-second. . . ." She looked up. " Friday, midday at the latest."

Paul reflected that he would not be able to go to see the Jerviss fight on Thursday, but it was immaterial now. After all, if he came up to Honor's expectations, here was his chance. Chalmers, the principal fiction reviewer, was dead, and his place was taken by McDougall, " the second fiddler." He might get McDougall's job. The editor's interest in Hicks might just be eyewash. Hicks would not give up reviewing in *The Athenaeum* unless he was well paid to do so. And he himself would take a fiver a thousand. Hicks would not do

that. Still, a fiver was a fiver, and if one got the job, one might make quite as much with four articles a month as the *Morgenblatt* paid for twelve. And he would appear in the *Examiner*.

As he waded his way up Whitefriars Street into Fleet Street (the carburettor needed cleaning) he reflected that the offer, or at least the chance of an offer from the *Examiner*, was a godsend in more than one respect. It kept him busy during these days when circumstances made him feel impatient. There was the depressing news on the political front and there was Veronica. The affair still filled him with the anger of his hurt vanity and the feeling of loneliness. He had no desire to see her any more, true, but the "remedy against love" did not work as well as he thought it would. For the first two days it was quite easy; when the memory of the past came up with all its attractive details, all he had to do was to think of their last meeting, her words, the painful clichés and that bloody conversation on the telephone last Monday. Quite easy in the first two days, but yesterday the remedy didn't work half as well and last night he couldn't sleep. Then there was Jerviss. It was maddening that he had no chance to see him since he returned because of his training and wouldn't see him till after the fight. There were hundreds of queries about boxing which Les ought to have answered. Lines were all right, but facts had to be checked. And he must go and see a gym. The night after Veronica went home he re-wrote practically the whole first act. He walked straight into his study, took out the file and started work as if nothing had happened. Nothing.

The first act was really exciting. He was reading it again. . . . Then he reached for the three novels for the *Examiner*. As he read the blurbs, he realised again there would be no time to go and see the fight. He had a lot to do. Thursday today, the fight next Wednesday. Impossible. He was certain Les would send a ticket as usual. Still the fight wasn't an important thing for him. He remembered his agony during the Jerviss-Menzel match, trembling lest Jerviss'd lose the fight and the first article wouldn't be printed in the *Post*. What childish fears. Three years ago. A little over. He began reading one of the novels.

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-FIRST

It was in the sixth round that Jerviss began to show signs of weakness. His movements became less springy, his stance less easy.

When an invisible hand crossed out the figure three on the large board of the indicator above the hall and wrote number two, meaning that there were still two minutes of the round left, it happened that Orvieto in an unguarded moment hit Jerviss on the eye. Jerviss looked as if he were blinded for a second, but only for a second. In the next he jumped at Orvieto with a splendid left which received thunders of approval. Yet all Orvieto's subsequent moves made it clear that he was aiming at Jerviss' eye, again and again. When Jerviss forced him near the ropes, Orvieto, instead of side-stepping, grew, on the contrary, firmer on his feet and began to slug away. It was clear that he was a fighting machine, a machine, however, that had a sense of tactics. There it was, he hit Jerviss on the left eye again.

There was an ugly roar, as if a battle had broken loose in the audience.

"*Avanti, Orvieto, Buttalo giu,*" shouted a hoarse voice from the gallery.

"Knock 'im out."

Jerviss leapt away from Orvieto, which provoked more booing and shrill whistling.

Then it was that Veronica's neighbour, the young buck: suddenly raised his voice and barked twice towards Jerviss;

"Author, author. . . ."

His companion laughed.

The blood rushed to Veronica's face. She turned and stared at him so hard that he was forced to take his eyes from the ring. Their eyes met. Hers full of anger and the young man's full of stupid surprise. A smile, or even an indication of a smile on the self-satisfied face, and Veronica would have slapped it.

"Swine," she said in disgust, and the next moment she was

already on her feet; she would leave the place. It was dreadful; it was murder; it was agony . . . and that animal next to her. . . .

Her exit, however, was not so easy. She had to pass four people in her row to reach the gap. By the time she reached the curtained door, through a crowd of people standing, watching, along with the ticket collectors, and a few others waiting for the gong before taking their seats, she had lost some of her agony, fear and desire to cry.

In the deserted lobby it was cool. From beyond the dark curtain there came the muffled roar of the crowd. She looked for her cigarette case in her handbag.

"Pardon me, is this the eighth round?"

She turned and saw a woman, almost as tall as herself, very plump, with a stupid, good-natured smile on her face. She wore a tweed overcoat that fitted her like a bursting glove.

"I think so," she answered nervously. She smiled. So good to find someone to talk to.

Inside, the gong went, there was a roar, and a young man darted out and ran towards the bar in the corner. He was followed by the barman, who had been watching the fight from the end of the gangway.

"Twenty Players, quick." A shilling clanged on the counter.

He ran back. The gong went again.

"How long will it last? . . ." Veronica said.

"Don't know, I'm sure," the woman said. "Fifteen rounds, isn't it? I'm waiting for the end meself. . . ." she smiled; she showed a gold tooth.

"It's dreadful . . . dreadful," she said. She felt she was gaining confidence from the animal-like placidity of the woman. "I couldn't stand it, you know. I had to come out. He is bleeding from the mouth . . . so dreadful. We are going back to the Strand Palace, after the fight. . . ."

"With Mr. Jerviss, you mean?" the woman said.

"Yes."

"Aw," the woman said; she looked at Veronica with a little sincere curiosity, then with a sudden relief. "Then

you could tell 'im there was a fire in 'is house this afternoon."

"In Jerviss' house, you mean. . . ?" Veronica said.

"That's right," she laughed, "but it was put out. . . . In the garage," she explained with another little laugh. "The small car got burnt, the Austin . . . ha-ha . . . but it's insured, fire and theft . . . he-he. You better tell 'im if you're seein' him, after the fight."

"But . . . what shall I say?"

"Oh, just say Doris, he'll know . . . I'm his wife, Mrs. Jerviss," she smiled. "All right then. I must be goin' before the rush. Thanks ever so. . . . Goo' night. . . ."

"And now you're going to bed," Veronica said. Jerviss stood in the bathroom doorway.

"I made it for you," Veronica said.

"But I'm not tired, kid." He smiled. "And what about the celebration?"

"Not tonight, darling. Tomorrow, if you like. Now you must go to bed."

"But what about you?"

"I'll go home and come and see you tomorrow."

"But I'm not tired. Not really. Had a good bath and a massage. I'm feeling tops."

"Youre eye must hurt. . . . Look at me. . . . No, this way. . . . Come under the lamp."

"It's nothing," Jerviss said. "Okay, tomorrow."

The telephone rang.

"I'll take it," Veronica said. "Hullo. . . . He's gone to bed. Yes . . . yes . . . you may say he's going to retire from boxing. Yes . . . and devote himself entirely to literature."

She put down the receiver. He smiled.

"It was the *Clarion*," Veronica said. "I'll tell the operator not to put anybody through. And you're going to bed."

"All right. I'll go to bed, if you sit with me for a while. Okay?"

"All right."

He took his jacket off.

" Could you . . . could you sort of go into the bathroom, while I undress ? Won't be long."

The second time he had said that. How beautiful. Still shy, still bashful. How beautiful. The tap was dripping. There was a camel-hair dressing-gown on the hook. Jim used to have one like it. When he was at school.

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-SECOND

It was like resurrection, a new world. It was warm, soft, still and dark. It took him some time to sort things out, where he was and why and the rest. He looked at the luminous dial of his clock by the bed. Ten minutes past five, it said.

In the afternoon, surely.

As he made a movement to get up, he felt a little pain in his right shoulder, in his ribs, but the pain was numb, it almost felt good, it did, honest. He walked to the window and pulled the curtains apart. A cold, dark afternoon over the back street, a high wall opposite, no windows in it, busy with yellow newspaper vans, a horse cart turning the corner towards Covent Garden. He switched on the light and went up to the mirror. His upper lip was still swollen, but it didn't hurt. He pressed the spot over his left eye, carefully at first, pressed it again not so carefully. It did hurt, but only when you pressed it hard, like.

He stretched himself. Must have slept sixteen hours. Still a little barmy, but he was feeling well all over. A little cold. Comes from sleep, that does. A cold bath, he thought, he would cool it down bit by bit, like, that was the ticket. He ran the water in the bathroom, threw in a handful of salts, then another.

As he sat in the water, a good smell it was, violets, he remembered that she said she would be coming at six. He had almost forgotten all about her, all about everything, he was still barmy, that's what it was. It was all over. All finished. A sudden feeling of relief came over him. He never thought it could be as nice, the end. Always had fears,

and funk, what you call "misgivings." He didn't like to think about it, but he did all the same when he was alone, when it rained, at night, in winter. That it would hurt and make one dizzy, like a blow. And punch-drunk after. But it worked out nice. He was feeling tops.

Funny thing, come to think of it, he never enjoyed loneliness as much before. It was good, left alone in the warm bath and good smell and all, he never did. Never tried before. No.

As he was pulling his socks on he thought that these occasions were mostly the same. On his own in the Strand Palace, in the same apartment he was now in, but in those days he couldn't call his time his own, hardly. They knocked on the door, mostly at midday and in no time the place was full of people. The gang. Dan came, and some journalists, supporters, Blondie, her husband, there was drinking and they played the gramophone (funny thing, he brought it with him just as in the old days), fooling about, all wanting to be taken out to dinner.

It was a time like that he met Paul first. In this room it was. Where's Paul now? He didn't come to the match. Sent him a ticket as usual. Still in the South of France? Course not, he was still barmy, he was. Paul had come back long ago; must be a fortnight by now. He even wrote a letter, Doris sent it on to the training camp. Just the day before the week-end. . . .

No, he did not miss all that. Back-slapping, drinking, thick smoke all over the place, fooling and loose talk, he didn't. It was good to be on his own. . . . And how ever so kind it was of her to tell the porter not to put anybody through, or letters and telegrams either. Not till he rang. Never thought of that before.

He looked at his watch.

" *Les Jerviss, who gave hints of retiring after yesterday's fight, contemplates devoting himself entirely to literature. His two books* ' *Heroes of the Ring* ' *and* ' *Number Engaged* ' *as well as his short stories, have earned for him praise from serious literary quarters—and a steadily growing popularity from wider ranges of the public. . . .*"

" What do you think ? " Veronica asked, after Jerviss had read the paragraph.

" It was you who told the reporter yesterday," said Jerviss. He kissed her.

" And how do you feel ? " Veronica said.

" Me ? I feel grand."

" Just like that ? "

" Woke up at five. Must have slept sixteen hours at least. It was the goods. Had a bath and a shave. . . . Would you like a drink ? I rather want to have one myself."

" Love to."

" What ? "

" Oh, gin and lime."

He took up the receiver.

" Feeling tired ? " he turned towards her with the receiver stuck to one ear.

" A bit. Didn't sleep much last night," she said.

" Poor kid."

" Don't feel sorry for me. It wasn't I who fought last night . . . except. . . ."

" Except that it was dreadful, but still. . . . It's finished now. Aren't you glad ? "

" I s'pose I am."

" . . . How is your eye ? "

" Grand. Doesn't hurt any more."

" And your ribs ? "

" O.K."

" Feeling tired ? "

" A little . . . drunk, that's all . . . I reckon because I slept so much."

" You will be all right. I wish you could go away for a few days. . . ."

" Yes, but before that, shall we have some food some

place and then go to a play or to the pictures. . . . What would you like to see?"

"You are a darling . . . but are you sure you'd like to go out tonight? . . . Let's have some dinner here. I am not very hungry. Are you?"

"Haven't eaten anything for twenty-four hours. . . . Come in."

The drinks arrived.

"You must order some food now," Veronica said. Jerviss did.

"Well, chin-chin," Jerviss said.

"Chin-chin," Veronica said.

"What's in that parcel?" Jerviss said.

"I brought you two gramophone records. The Fifth Symphony. The loveliest music on earth. I have been playing it for hours. You'll love it after you've heard it a few times. . ."

"How many?"

"Oh, two or three times I suppose . . ." Veronica said. Her face was serious.

"You are a sweet kid. But what made you think of bringing 'em to me?"

"I saw you had a gramophone here . . . and only one record. . ."

They remained silent; Jerviss was reading the labels on the records. He lighted a cigarette.

"Have you seen any other papers?" he said looking up. I must order them . . ." he made a movement towards the telephone.

"Don't," said Veronica and gently, very gently took him by the arm. "Why should you bother reading them. . . It's all finished with."

"Maybe you are right." He said a little confused. He smiled.

"Not worth it," she said in a hurry. "You said your goodbye. You mustn't think about it any more. You have more interesting and finer things to do. . . You have your whole career in front of you. . ."

"What do you mean?"

" You are still punch drunk, Les. What do I mean? You must naturally go on writing. You are free now. You mustn't say, 'I don't know' . . . You would do great things, greater things you ever did before. . . I mean everybody thinks you are a great writer. Everybody who reads your stories. The papers say so . . . and Les . . . I say, are you listening to me at all . . . I say so. . ."

Jerviss gave a painful little smile. . . . " Oh," he said.

" Sorry . . . you are tired, dreadfully tired and hungry . . . and I'm nagging you. . . . We won't talk about it now. . . ."

He got up and took her in his arms.

With a loud crescendo the music died. Now they only heard the needle going round with a faint scratching noise.

Jerviss closed his eyes.

" It is lovely, very sad and very lovely," Jerviss said.

" Have you ever been in love? " Jerviss said.

" No. Not before. Have you? "

" Never before. But I am now. Are you, darling? "

" Of course, I am."

" It's grand, isn't it? "

" Yes. It's grand. One didn't sort of know what it was like before. One was a little afraid of it," she smiled.

" I did know, you know."

" Did you? How? Intuition? "

" I s'pose so. I don't quite know. But I . . . " he shook his head. " Oh, it's the loveliest thing about it. . . . I always prayed I'd meet a girl like you. Just like you. I knew I would fall in love with her and that it would be lovely. . . . Head over heels. Honest, I thought. . . ."

" Really? "

" Really. Why? "

" I don't know. You are very sweet, but I am a very ordinary person. . . ."

" No. You aren't. That's just it. You got everything. Positively everything. I just can't say it. You are such a lady, you got so much style about you . . ." he smiled it seemed, to himself. " And full of life. . . ."

" Darling, have you never loved anyone before ? "

" How could I ? I never met anyone so far. . . . Not one. . . ."

" But I always thought women were rather after boxers all the time. . . ."

" Oh yes," his face became serious ; he made an impatient movement with his hand. " If you knew the type. . . . But you wouldn't. You would never meet them. . . . They are awful. They sit in the ringside, made up like . . . like . . . bad women and furs and all and excited like. No. They are awful. . . . And the ones that hang round boxers. . . . Not a decent one among them. And so stupid too. All they can talk is dirt. . . ."

" You don't like boxing. . . ." Jerviss said later on.

" No." She swallowed loudly. " And to tell you frankly, I don't like to see you fighting. . . . It was beautiful when you came in, you looked beautiful and very young . . . but later. . . ." She took her eyes off Jerviss's. " It was so awful, darling. . . ."

" Would you hate me if I went back ? "

" But you are not going back . . . darling, you . . . you. . . ."

" No " he smiled. " I only ask. Would you ? "

" Don't talk about it. . . ."

" I want to ask you something."

" What is it ? "

" Could you go on loving me if you found out I did something . . . something that isn't nice . . . something bad . . .? "

" Depends on what you call bad." She smiled.

" Something very bad." He tried to smile too.

" Murder ? "

" No, no," he laughed.

" Robbery with violence ? "

" No, I don't mean those. Something different. Something for which they don't put you in jail, but you are a crook all the same. . . . I mean, s'posing you found out that I was a liar, that I am not the person you'd think I am. . . . But I'm serious. S'posing you found out I was a liar, that I pretend. . . ."

She took his hand.

" Pretend what ? "

" Pretend to be a different person than I am."

" But that's impossible. You are not the sort. You wouldn't lie to me, would you . . .? " Veronica said.

" No. But s'posing I lie all the time. . . ."

" Well. It would hurt me very much. . . . But. . . . You haven't got any other woman. . . ."

" 'Course not. . . ."

" Because that would hurt me. It would be awful. You see, that's just why I love you. Because you are so straight, so honest, all through. No pretence about you. Just because you don't pretend. Because you are not ashamed to tell me all about yourself. Because it is so rare to find someone who is so very genuine and so very modest. . . ."

" Oh, darling why d'you say this. . . . It makes me feel so funny."

" Because it's true. Because I think you are going to be a great artist. A great writer. You already are. You don't realise how wonderful you are. That is so wonderful. . . . So very wonderful. . . . Oh, darling, does that hurt so much still ? I am so sorry. . . . It doesn't look swollen. Let me look at it again. Stand up. . . . No, there. . . . We must put something on it."

It was long past eleven, he was playing the gramophone. The air in the room still contained a little of Veronica's

scent. *Arpège*, she said. It was sweet, it went into one's head, yet it was somehow . . . yes, *elegant* it was. Elegant. But why didn't she let him see her home? "You must rest" she said, "and go to bed early." She was afraid that her people might see him. That's it. Her father's a colonel.

Would they ever say yes, if he wanted to marry her? If he got a divorce, that is? . . . That oughtn't to be difficult. Settle some money on Doris. . . . But that was beside the point. Beside the point. . . . What a fix he was in. What a fix. No use trying to laugh, to think it was a great joke that a lovely tart was in love with him because she thought he was a writer. There was no funny side to it. Because she wasn't a tart. She was a lady. A perfect lady every way. Serious. She talked about books and music. Not so fluent as Paul did, but Paul was a man. That was different. And she took a great interest in him. She was in love with him. And because he, himself. . . . No, it was maddening. It was more maddening and frightening than the night before the match, really more. He knew he would crack. Knew it for a cert. During training he felt he would. That night at the roadhouse. That didn't make any real difference. He'd done that before. Often. He was all the better for it. No. During training he felt he didn't want to beat Orvieto. He wanted to retire. Only the money. That's why he didn't put it off. They talked it over that night. Retiring. . . .

But there was no retiring, no getting away from her. It would be hell, absolute hell and much worse than before. Much worse. One had already tasted what Heaven was like.

The wind instruments repeated the same deep sad note four times in succession, there came a short pause then the four notes came back on the wings of the violins louder, much louder, higher and with variations. "The Fingers of Fate knocking on the door," she'd said; how ever so serious her face was when she said that. He felt her hand in his. He felt he would do anything for her. . . .

The crescendo came. The four notes dissolved into a

phrase of nervous agitation. It was fast, fast, fast running, like a train at night boring itself into a dark landscape. . . ,

She loved the artist in him. The artist. That was the bloody side of it. That was the lie. He couldn't bear to tell her. He asked her. He was very near telling her, but he hadn't. And she said she could not bear him lying to her. Perhaps, if he had told her there and then. . . . But no. He couldn't have done it. She honestly believed him.

He lighted a fresh cigarette. It was certain that he could not possibly tell her all about it. No, because she would despise him for it. But what would happen if she found out? If everybody knew? All those people who admired him, those who wrote letters. The gang would know, yes. They always thought—he felt—that he was a stick. They always laughed about him, he knew. They thought he was funny. He didn't mind. But what would happen, God, what would happen if it came out? It got into the papers all of them—all the people he despised would have the laugh of their lives. It would be even more bloody than "Bible Jack," the manager, who looked after Kid Ferguson and used to be a lay-preacher in Highgate. Hymn-singing methodist, then it came out that two tarts were suing him, both at the same time and both got affiliation orders.

It was hell, no matter which way one looked at it.

He must give her up, he thought suddenly. Oh, but that would be dreadful . . . what would she think? And what would happen to him? He could do it—he felt he could but he knew he would be sorry for it all his life. Veronica was. . . . No he couldn't. Besides. . . .

Ending in a loud crescendo the music died. The needle went round once or twice, a faint scratching noise, in a dying effort. Then the automatic brake clicked.

As it stopped it became worse. What would happen if Paul suddenly died, or gave it up? What'd happen then? But even if he didn't. Even if he went on, he couldn't go on with the lie. He saw her again, lovely, sweet, clever, so clever, such a lady. He desired her, not only with his body, but with everything, body and soul. Her company . . . he thought—her company in which he felt removed

from this world and found himself in a fresh one, a world a thousand times more lovely than the one in which he lived so far. No. He couldn't give her up. Never. To be with her always, always. . . . It was maddening.

He must see Paul. Tell him. It was late in the night. What about it. . . . He would understand, he would relieve him. . . .

He reflected as he heard the ringing tone at the other end that he would tell him everything. Paul would understand. . . .

"Fitzhardinge Court," a voice said; deep and a little impatient.

"Mr. Noley, please," Jerviss said.

"He is away in the country. . . . No, he won't be back till tomorrow afternoon. . . . Any message?"

Just his luck. Now what the hell could he do? He wouldn't be able to sleep. He would go out.

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-THIRD

It was past midnight and the Strand was nearly empty; coloured lights reflecting on the wet pavement. Lingering for a moment on the stairs Jerviss looked in the direction of Trafalgar Square, then he thought he would go the other way. Then he turned back. Take the car from the garage. Might as well.

He stopped on Waterloo Bridge to open the roof. The night was very still and mild, warm for November. He shivered as he saw the river. Uncanny it looked with all those coloured lights. The tide was in.

He passed Waterloo Station, but he was no longer conscious of this. Instinctively he kept to the main road, just driving on, driving on, faster first, then slowing down. "No aim in life." It was warm, the night still, he wouldn't sleep. "No directions." He wouldn't sleep. Some people took tablets to make them sleep. It was warm and still . . .

he had come off the main road. There was a sour smell as he stopped the car, a sour smell. Now where had one smelt that before, because one had. Not a bad smell, sour but not bad ; what was it? There was a great big house in front ; tenement, brick and dark with only one window lit near the top on the right, ever such a faint light from behind some curtain. Where was he? There was the smell, that old smell. He got out. He walked past the tenement, there was a street corner, he looked round. A large open space in front and tall railings. Spikes, he was thinking all of a sudden, spikes . . . rusty, some painted light blue, funny, light blue, flaking off. . . That was the old vicar's idea, he went in for that sort of things, quite a lot, and candles in church, and people said he wanted holy water too, proper Papist he was . . Father Redfern. Jerviss smiled. Course it was that tenement thing that put him off. It wasn't built then. It's new. The smell came from the tanneries round the corner. Three of them. Ellis and Pickerill and the United and Johnson Brothers. Johnsons used to pay badly, it was there they had that strike. On the left must be the corner of Long Lane and Bermondsey Street. And forty-two must be just round the bend. Did the people who lived in the basement ever repair that window? It was broken the last time he passed it. Three years ago.

That was the cork factory and next to it the Midnight Bell. It was that tenement thing that put him off. Wasn't there three years ago, he would have noticed it. But it was the old place all right, not changed much, leastways it didn't looked different at night. From here it looked the same as it did twenty years ago. More ! He wasn't more than fourteen when he used to walk back all the way from the club and the gym, because he couldn't afford the tram fare, couldn't have been. Must be twenty-two.

The Midnight Bell still looked the way it did, shiny red tiles, he remembered when they were new, it wasn't built long ago. Five windows ; with frosted glass, he remembered, he counted them again. Five. The old lamp-post in front of the Bell. Still hasn't got a lamp to it. Just the stand. That was where Mr. Crankshaw died that night.

He walked up to the lamp-post. This was the spot all right, he was just a kid then, thirteen, still used to go to school, it was a winter evening but warm like tonight, about nine o'clock it was. Saturday.

. . . The red tiles of the Midnight Bell were shiny, sawdust on the floor, some on the pavement, two women were screaming, one was old Peg, she was drunk half of the time, Irish. A great big crowd, boys running up from Tabard Street. from Neal Street, Long Lane, all the lads, the big fat police sergeant wading through them, then they were quiet all of a sudden, they let him pass, you could hear a pin drop it was that quiet, and then, he remembered, he laughed. It was all quiet like and serious then Ernie the barman said to someone, angry like. " He's dead. That's wha's wrong with 'im. See . . ." They all laughed, 'cause it was funny the angry way Ernie said that when they were all quiet. They shut up again, they saw Mrs. Crankshaw coming. She wasn't old, no but she looked old all right and ugly. Used to live just off Jamaica Road. Bob Crankshaw used to come to the club, but didn't use to box, he was older, about seventeen, got into the United Tanneries. She didn't say nothing, not like other old women shrieking and crying, the whole hullabaloo, she just stood there, Mrs. Crankshaw did, like beautiful women in the pictures. She just looked at her hubby dead, not a word.

This was the spot all right, the Bell had gaslight then, very bright. And it got into the papers too, only they didn't have the whole story like and they said Mr. Crankshaw won five hundred quid on the sweepstake, and that's when all the trouble started. It was four hundred. Four hundred quid it was, but that made no difference ; it made a hell of his life the same.

Funny how he remembered the whole thing. How well. Just as if it happened yesterday. Sitting in the pictures, reading it in a book. But it was more alive, funny though, twenty-two years ago, he was seeing it clear as daylight. Clear as daylight. " Direct experience," that was it. Direct experience. He never read anything like it in books or stories, Paul's stories. An unwritten. . . .

. . . Story, life . . . memory, direct experience, matter, spirit . . . unwritten story . . . but how . . . why . . . ?

He looked round quickly, he was sure there was somebody behind him, talking in a quiet voice, murmuring like. . . . But there was absolutely nothing nor nobody behind no front nor anywhere. But . . .

A minute later he moved off in such a hurry as if an unseen hand had given him a push. Almost ran to the car, he did. Must get back to the Strand Palace, quick, quick ; must do it, doesn't matter how. Must write the story of old Crankshaw as he knew it, *direct experience*, that's what it was, just as he remembered it, as he saw it. . . .

. . . But would it do, I mean, could one do it? He had to stop and close the roof, it began to rain again, proper miserable after the fine night it was. Could he? It was so bloody awful, trying it, the way he did, so often. Had the idea before, full of it, then when he tried to put it on paper it just went to hell. 'Twasn't there, couldn't write it. Sometimes he could, but it came to a halt, just couldn't go on with it, and when he read it the next day it was very bad, like a kid's writing. Had to tear it up, throw it away. Could have cried, he could. And it can never be learnt, no use Paul saying it could, one had to learn the *elements*, the tricks, develop the style. . . . No used if one hadn't had the . . . *makings* of the writer ; *makings* it was.

No-no, no-no, the windscreen wiper said, no-no, no-no. He got proper angry, the roof was closed, angry-like he put his left foot on the clutch and banged it into second gear no-no, no-no. Damn well yes-yes, yes-yes he said aloud, yes-yes, Veronica had a nice frock on tonight ; black. Ever so smart. He would try tonight, course he would, didn't matter how, and he would do it at once, damn sleep, he didn't need any, couldn't sleep anyhow.

A curtain of mist descended all of a sudden. But he knew the way so well, could drive back to the Strand blindfolded. Be back in no time ; ten minutes. But he must hurry. Nothing must interfere. Inspiration . . . *You cannot entirely disregard inspiration.* No traffic in the streets, that was good . . . And Paul would help, sure he would. Good thing.

Didn't think of it before. Course he would help. Put the English right, all the rest. He was feeling warm all over. He would do it. Main thing was to hurry, back now, every minute was worth gold, mustn't interfere with inspiration.

Thank God there wasn't no blinking traffic lights at Bridge Street. He swerved into Bridge Street, stepped on the gas again. He would do it. Now or never, BERMONDSEY —A SHORT STORY BY LES JERVISS. . . . Lovely that would be. Do it without Paul's help, would be even better that would. But Paul was there for sure. That's all right now, Newington Causeway, straight road, no traffic lights, forty is a mug's game anyway. The engine roared, the wind blew, fifty . . . *interviewed yesterday, after the presentation, Sir Leslie Jerviss as usual said he could not make a statement on literature. Please believe me, Sir Leslie added . . . and cannot talk about literary technique. Associated Press.* The engine roared, the wind blew, fifty-five. BERMONDSEY BY LES JERVISS. . . . Course he could do it. . . . The first time I saw you I knew at a glance you would be mine alone . . . that was too high, funny thing his voice was so husky . . . what was the rest of the words . . . a pretty tune. . . . The first time I saw you I knew. . . . Oh Christ what the, what the f————ing, God, the noise, the lamp, the pain, that f————ing pain. . . .

" Here it is. . . .You c'n look at it. It's clean. I had a clean licence all these fifteen years, fifteen years. . . . Never seen such a thing in my life, my word, mister, 'e must have been doin' seventy, or eighty, 'e must. I hadn't half a chance. I tried everything, tried to swerve, jammed on the brake an' all, but it's slippery, it is rainin'. But even than, I had no chance. Proper suicide it was. Did it on purpose, he did. But why pick on my lorry? I ask you. A brand new lorry. Now look at it."

" Which way was you comin' from? " the younger policeman asked.

" New Kent Road. It was like this. We was comin' back empty. . . ."

"New Kent Road . . . proceedin' towards. . . ."

"That's right."

"Where was you goin'?"

"Lambeth Bridge. It was like this . . ."

"Hold on a tick. Lambeth Bridge. . . ."

"Any idea what speed you was doin'?" the younger policeman said.

"Couldn't be more than twenty-five. If that . . . No," he shook his head, "it couldn't. I'll ask my mate. . . ."

"No. Go on. I'll deal with you first. . . ."

The ambulance arrived with much bellringing.

"Just hang on a minit," the younger policeman said. He went up to the ambulance. He shook his head.

"Too late, I'm afraid, Sir. We didn't realise when we had you called. He went straight through the steering wheel and windscreen. . . . The lorry driver says he was still alive when he spoke to him. Not likely, though. . . ."

"Christ, what a mess." The driver of the ambulance blew his nose. "Never seen such a mess in my life. Coo. Lucky he was alone. . . . And a sharp corner too. . . . Never seen such a mess. You all right, driver?"

"Yes. Just good luck it was. I thought honest I'd be killed too the way he came through. If I'd been nearer the cabin door, 'e would have caught me. . . . Just look at it . . . . A brand new lorry too. . . ."

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-FOURTH

There was a gale blowing first from Bayswater, then from Park Lane, then it seemed from all directions, and when he turned back from the Serpentine, Paul decided he would go back to the flat. He was feeling the cold, he walked faster. As he came to the Orators' Corner, which was deserted save for a Seventh Day Adventist addressing an audience of four, he suddenly realised he was wrong about the process. The shock was not continuous, as he had first thought. Nor had it a delayed effect. Two seconds or three seconds

after he heard it from Honor Vereker, he was already sufficiently clear-headed to invent a lie; in a split of a second; that he was in bed. . . Yes, but wasn't that really instinctive self-defence? It was a fact; he was in bed, it was nine o'clock and he had wakened up just two minutes before the telephone rang. He said "I'm in bed," then just added "with 'flu." He couldn't possibly have done an article for the *Examiner* on Jerviss, this morning or afternoon. He *had* to say he was in bed with 'flu, because Honor was trying him out, to see whether he could do as well as Hicks . . . . . on *union minimum*. Well she'd have to find somebody else.

What came afterwards? He replaced the receiver, jumped out of bed, ran to the hall and picked up the papers. It was front page news only in the *Herald*, a double banner heading towards the bottom . . . but by the time he had read it in the papers, there was, of course, no novelty; he knew it already. Except the details.

What had really happened? He reached the Cumberland. It was in a way, implications or no implications, a unique opportunity to work out an account of the mental processes that had taken place in his mind at nine fifteen that morning when he heard of the sudden tragic death of. . . . Yes, here it was, the correct line . . . the death of . . . . what? What was Jerviss' relation to him? Friend, intimate friend, business partner. . . . That was the clear line. Now the important thing was that Jerviss meant more in his life than anybody else so far; yes, the fact of Jerviss? or Jerviss the man? Well, both. In any case he had never had anybody so important in his life. . . . Don't get confused, not "love," not that affection one feels towards parents, brother, sister, mistress. They may or may not be "important." Jerviss was important. Yes, he had thought of their relation before, certainly, and he wasn't seeing it in a new light. He certainly knew the correct proportion of the relationship before. Business came first, the economic factor was important, lately more important than before, but money wasn't the only consideration. He would walk up Seymour Place, it wasn't so windy now, up to Marylebone Station and

back. He must try to work it out, because this was actual experience and rare actual experience. He must work it out and put it down in his notebook as documentary evidence as it seemed at the time. Then look at the notes a few months later. Still better : write it up again a few months later without looking at the notes he would write today, just to see what he would leave out then, what he would forget, what would stand out as " more important." Such an actual experience is rare for a writer, rare for anybody. Such a thing had never happened in his life before. He had never lost anybody dear to him or near to him all through his life. Was it because he was still young and had few relations and had never had a friend, or just accident? Suddenly he thought of his father. It was very significant that he was only thinking of him now. That the analogy wasn't absolutely obvious at once. . . . Yes, of course, he remembered, he was eleven, then. Eighteen years ago. Fishy Mavor took him out of the classroom, it was a geography lesson, a new map on the blackboard, Rogers on the dais, the smell of chalk, the smell of ink, the open window. . . . Fishy took him out of the classroom and told him in the corridor that his father was dead. The only thing that stood out of the scene in the corridor was Fishy's voice. He could now describe it as " sepulchral and kindly " and he knew now for a certainty that the voice and the facial expression were faked. Well, what could Fishy do? It was his duty to tell Paul that his father was dead. The tone was " sepulchral and kindly " decidedly, but the immediate effect eighteen years ago, was the very opposite of what Fishy might have been expecting. He remembered he was near laughing at Fishy's tone. Then what? No, he didn't cry, that was just the significant point. He cried two years later. That was in Vienna. One afternoon he was reading *The Old Curiosity Shop*. It was during the holidays—an August evening—and he suddenly realised that his father was dead and began to cry. Yes, that was delayed action, an escapement ; easy to explain. Or was it? In those years he was often near tears.

He left Bryanston Square and turned into Wyndham

Place. It was four o'clock. He would have to be at the Foreign Office by five, but all the same he must work out an account of what had really happened inside him. It was direct experience and a very rare and unusual one. Besides, it concerned death: one of the two or three greatest facts of life. But as he turned back, it seemed, there was nothing in his mind beyond what he already found there. Pain? he reflected. Yes, but only in relation to the business side of it. Let us be frankly brutal, the emotional side was not very prominent really, Jerviss meant much more as a business proposition. . . . Which is quite natural. Paul shrugged a mental shoulder. In any case if one analysed pain caused by loss there was always the lost advantage at the bottom in the final analysis, even if there was no business side to it. Even friendship had value, economic value. Emotional outlet, "talking things over" had economic value.

It was then that he began to feel a slight pain, because he was thinking of the loss of opportunity . . . yes, yes, very typical but what is the quality of pain? Because a second earlier he felt it as if it were physical pain? But there was no pain, physical or mental. He was walking a little slowly and he was alone in Bryanston Square. He tried to provoke the pain again. "Jerviss' death means the end of my publishing stories," he reflected deliberately, watching anxiously with a mental pencil and notebook in hand. There was no pain. . . .

There was no statement available at the Foreign Office and because the afternoon was mild and they had little to do he walked with Emmerling through St. James's Park.

"After all," Paul said, "you are an ex-historian, you can tell me if I am wrong. . . ."

"I think you're right. History as such doesn't repeat itself, but there is a marked similarity between historical periods, you might say variations on an old theme, and what you said about the seventeenth century is true. It certainly is true, that ours is the most unhappy, the most sad century since the seventeenth. It's the same thing, *die monumentale*

Unförmigkeit, the same chaos. Our activities are getting too big for us, we are losing control over them, in fact we have lost control already. . . . Public events are driving individual life underground. . . ."

"I wish Benedeque wasn't such a masochist," Paul said. "You heard his raving about war being imminent."

"I've been hearing him twice a week for the past five years. War, of course, is coming, but war wouldn't matter so much, the real trouble is that war won't solve the problem. . . . In any case England has won the war already, or will be on the winning side. . . ."

"You mean those articles in the *New York Daily News*."

"Well, they put it very crudely, but it's the truth. War is coming in a few years' time. Possibly in a few months' time, and since America is bound to be involved on the English side, Germany will lose it. The English will pile up a few of their usual blunders, burn up all their foreign investments, have another million men slaughtered in record time, but they will be on the winning side, but that's not the important thing, at least not for those who survive : the important thing is that war won't settle much. Revenge will go on, Imperialism will go on, America is already the greatest world power, the result of the war will be dotting the i's and crossing the t's, but the chaos will go on just the same. *Peace* is the continuation of war by other means, that's what Clausewitz ought to have said, *not* war is the continuation. . . . We are," he blew his nose, "we are living in the most unfortunate, most unhappy period of history. The war won't be the worst of it, it will be awful of course, a short but unpleasant war : with old horrors in new forms : more efficient poison gas, more efficient air raids, faster machine-guns." He put his handkerchief back in his pocket. They passed St. James's Palace.

"What else are you doing now?", Emmerling asked.

"Working on a play," Paul said.

"Hope it will be amusing."

"It will be," Paul said, "it will be amusing all right."

It would certainly be amusing and entertaining. Paul

was reading the draft of the second act again. One isn't becoming mercenary, one is merely coming to one's senses. One must establish one's position first, with the things the public wants, then when the name or the money is made one can afford to be unconventional, to tell the truth, to take risks. All one would need then would be courage, to risk failure, to risk unpopularity after one had succeeded, and that's not a difficult thing to do when one has money piled up. The order is really unimportant. To begin with unpopular good stuff and suffer and then inevitably compromise and write tripe for money, or to begin with tripe and then when one is strong enough try to write good stuff. All one needs is courage. The English call it " character," God bless them. It's damn difficult to have " character " under five hundred a year, but over five hundred a year it is a different proposition.

As he got up he saw the calendar on the desk. November the sixteenth. Tomorrow is mother's birthday. He would send her a wire.

BOOK THE SIXTH

CHAPTER THE THIRTY--FIFTH

It was November again with the mists turning to murk over Soho. A dozen long-forgotten little streams under their tombs of fashionable streets, shabby streets, busy highways, melancholy squares, dark and dank passages, once again claimed possession of the town that was built over them. The fog lay green and purple and gold over Shaftesbury Avenue.

"Did you say you knew the chap who wrote it? . . . Noley . . .?"

"Paul Noley. . . . We were at prep school together. . . . At this stage I'd better introduce myself. My name is Hoover. . . ."

"And mine is Flann. How d'you do?" They both smiled.

"I'll tell you all about him," Hoover said. "Look, what are you doing tonight? It's rather late for a drink anywhere. . . Would you like to drop in on me . . .?"

"Very kind of you. . . . You sure it won't be too much bother? For you, I mean. . . ."

"No bother at all. Taxi . . ."

"I must say I like your friend's play," Flann said in the taxi. "That's the sort of play I like. I agree it's commercial, but it's very well done," he smiled, "my C.O. told us about it in Portsmouth. . . ."

"Are you in the Navy?" Hoover said. He looked at Flann. He must look grand in dark blue. . . .

"Yes. I'm on week-end leave," Flann laughed. "The old boy said he liked it, so I thought I'd see it. . . . You probably won't agree with me, but we have so little free

time and life is so dull on a destroyer, specially now that all the hullaballo's boiled down to nothing. Peace in Our Time is Boredom In Our Time. . . . Good old Neville. . . . Anyhow, one wants something refreshing. . . . I'm a low-brow," he added, he smiled again.

" It isn't that," Hoover said " Don't misunderstand me. It's a disappointment only in terms of what I knew about Noley. I'd seen him a couple of times . . . two or three years ago . . . and he then seemed to be a very serious *littérateur*. I read his stories. They were remarkably good. I thought one day he would do something important. Then I . . . er . . . lost sight of him. London is too big. And now the first thing I see is this play. Quite entertaining, but there isn't an ounce of originality in it. The sort of play any old stage hand would knock together. One epigram for every other minute, one original epigram in every act. He wrote a very good part for Ariel Bryant and there was one good trick in the beginning of the third act when the young boxer thinks he is going blind, but that's all. It's all careful planning and timing. . . ."

" What is he like ? " Flann said.

" Rather awful. Saw him the other evening dining by himself at the Savoy Grill. Hardly recognised him. He wears glasses now and he's on the *Examiner*. Never been good looking, but now he looks positively old. He's only twenty-eight. Noley is half Viennese, you know, and the trouble with Austrians is that they are so frightfully mercenary ; hard as nails. Anything for money. I've been to Vienna. Hitler will have a time with them now that he has them. . . ."

Flann offered Hoover a cigarette. Hoover took one then automatically he pulled out his lighter. As he lighted Flann's cigarette, he wondered with anxiety if Flann had noticed he had a lighter in his pocket. They had got into conversation when he asked Flann for a light during the interval.

But Flann didn't seem to notice it.

THE END

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