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# **GAY LIFE**

**MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED**

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**THE MACMILLAN COMPANY**  
**OF CANADA, LIMITED**  
**TORONTO**

# **GAY LIFE**

**A NOVEL**

**BY**

**E. M. DELAFIELD**

**MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON  
1933**

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**To**

**FRANCIS ILES**

**from his obliged and affectionate friend  
The Author**

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# CHAPTER I

## (1)

"Maman, j'ai raté l'autobus!"

The shimmering heat-haze of the afternoon seemed to quiver as the shrill, lamentable announcement of this disaster broke into the silence that lay over the deserted terrace of the Hotel.

"Ma-man!"

It was as though a slight shudder pervaded the Hotel—a preliminary to complete awakening.

"Maman, j'ai raté l'autobus!"

The announcement, at its third repetition, resembled a shriek of defiance rather than an admission of defeat.

The young son of the Hotel proprietor, wearing a pale-blue *maillot* and a large straw hat, ascended the very last of the numerous steps leading from the dusty red drive to the terrace, and wiped the sweat out of his eyes with the back of his hand.

"Maman—dites donc—j'ai raté l'autobus!"

The smooth, black head of Madame appeared from a ground-floor window, and she made imperative signs to her son that he should come in and be quiet.

But it was too late.

Mr. Bolham, in No. 16, had indignantly closed his window with a bang. The Morgans' youngest child, who had presumably been asleep, had awakened and was to be heard singing. The French family next door, perhaps in order to drown the sound, immediately started their eternal gramophone. On the top storey, above Mr. Bolham, a window was flung open with an impetuosity that caused the bathing-dress and cloak that lay on the sill to fall below on to Mr. Bolham's little balcony, from whence they could only be retrieved by an appeal to Mr. Bolham, who would resent it.

In the open doorway of the Hotel on the top of the white steps, there suddenly appeared—like a conjuring trick—a number of figures. The *chasseur*, who had been dozing in a chair behind the little desk of the *concierge*, sprang into a state of resentful animation, the *concierge* himself—who had not been visible at all a moment earlier—snapped his fingers and imperatively said *psst* in the direction of the waiter from whom tea and iced drinks would shortly be ordered—and madame—frowning at her son Edouard, and simultaneously smiling at the wealthy American gentleman in the blue singlet who was passing through the hall—resumed her endless labours on the big ledger in the bureau.

Edouard—Dou-dou—said *Pardon, mademoiselle*, and *Bonjour, madame*, and made his way through the group of Hotel guests to his mother's little office. Now that it was too late, he carefully lowered his voice as he hung over the desk and related to her the history of his misfortunes with the *autobus*.

The visitors, for the most part still rather limp from the afternoon's siesta, dispersed themselves, in small groups, amongst the little tables that stood all along the terrace, each one sheltered by a huge red-and-white striped umbrella.

The young Moons, who had only arrived on the Blue Train the day before, and whose first visit to the Côte d'Azur it was, looked as self-conscious as they felt, Angie in brand-new beach pyjamas and Hilary in a black-and-green swimming-suit and bath-robe, and both of them shamefully pink-and-white, except where the sun had already made a small scarlet patch on the back of Hilary's neck.

The Moons sat together in silence. The little that they had ever had to say to one another had been said in the course of an electrically-charged fortnight, two years earlier, when they had fallen desperately in love. The rest had been an affair of dancing, drinking, kissing and violent love-making, marriage, and rapid and complete satiety.

They bore one another no malice for their present state of mutual boredom, but took it philosophically for granted. Hilary Moon, who was held to be clever by himself and his friends, was already thinking out the aspect of his marriage that he

would present to the next woman with whom he fell in love.

Angie, with even less subtlety, was merely looking carefully at every man within range in the hope of seeing a certain expression, that she knew well, leap into his eyes at the sight of her beauty.

Angie was, indeed, as beautiful as she could well be. To a lovely slimness she added that length of shapely leg that is usually the prerogative of American women. But her sea-blue eyes, her thick fair hair and peach-blossom complexion, were all English.

She had everything: even to eyelashes that curled up and curled down, and a dimple at the corner of her lovely mouth. Several people had already looked at her rather intently, but Angie knew, without stopping to think about it, that all these people were entirely negligible. Either they were women, or servants, or elderly men whom she, at twenty-four, never took into serious consideration at all.

Presently, however, two young men appeared. One of them, indeed, was so young that he might be called a boy—perhaps even a schoolboy. Angie's experienced eye dismissed him, and passed on to his companion. This was a dark, rather thick-set young man of seven-or eight-and-twenty, with brown, bold eyes and remarkably beautiful teeth. There was something faintly unusual in the animation of his face and manner, and the frequency of his smile.

Angie instantly perceived that he had noticed her the moment he came on to the terrace, and that the ease and sprightliness with which he was now talking to his companion was entirely directed towards herself. With a tiny little sigh of relief, she settled back in her chair, relaxing completely.

"What are you going to have?" Hilary asked.

"Orangeade. Iced. Ask if they've got any biscuits."

Hilary gave the order, frowning slightly. His French was better than Angie's, but it was not good, and he disliked doing anything that he did not do well. By a natural transition, his thoughts immediately turned to something that he did do well.

"Shall we go down to bathe, afterwards?"

"Yes. I wish we had a car."

"We might be able to hire one while we're here."

"Oh, could we?"

"I expect so," said Hilary negligently.

There was no reason why the Moons should not hire a car, except that they had no money. They were, however, accustomed to having no money, and they did not allow the lack of it to stand in their way when they wanted cars, or clothes, or drinks, or restaurant meals, or trips to the South of France. They were, of course, in debt, but so were their friends and contemporaries, and still all of them went on spending money that wasn't there, and somehow, miraculously, evading the continually threatening crash.

"There's a garage at the bottom of the drive—quite a big one."

"That's no good. One would have to go to Cannes, or Nice, or somewhere like that, for a decent car," said Hilary. "I'll ask the *concierge*."

"We might go in to-morrow morning. I want to get some things," Angie said eagerly. "Cannes would be better than St. Raphael for shopping, wouldn't it?"

She had decided, within the last two seconds, that she needed a large straw hat, of shiny red-and-blue straw, and a wide pair of white silk trousers, and one of those triangular coloured handkerchiefs that went over one's head, and tied at the back.

Hilary had decided with equal promptitude that he must get hold of a car somehow—a swift, high-powered car with chromium-plated fittings.

They sipped through straws at the orangeade in their tall glasses, absorbed in these agreeable fancies.

Angie, however, did not cease to be aware of the dark young man at the next table, and presently she saw him half-stand up, as a woman in rose-coloured tussore pyjamas came and sat down between him and his companion.

The sight was faintly disagreeable to Angie, and became more actively so when she discerned that the woman, although not young, was good-looking in very much her own style—fair, and slim, and big-eyed—and with that indefinable air of self-assurance peculiar to a woman who has always been attractive to men. Angie directed Hilary's attention to the next table by a slight movement of the head.

"What do you think they are? Mother and sons?"

"Sons? She's much too young to be the dark one's mother," said Hilary tactlessly. "She might be his wife."

"He couldn't possibly be the boy's father."

"Well—no. Perhaps he's her second husband."

"She wouldn't be making eyes at him like that, if he was."

They gazed at the trio. The boy was silent, and looked faintly bewildered, but the other two were talking and laughing noisily with an air of great intimacy.

"They aren't interesting—particularly," at last said Hilary—meaning that the woman was not the type that attracted him. He looked up and down the terrace and then said, with a shudder:

"My God—children. You'd think English people would have the sense not to bring children to the South of France in August."

Hilary, however, had overrated the sense of his compatriots. They had with them three children, of the fatal ages of eight, ten, and fourteen years old.

It was nothing to Hilary, or to his wife either, that the three children were good-looking, in a clear-cut, distinguished way, with beautifully bronzed skins and heads of golden hair that gleamed in the sun.

The Moons knew that all children were undesirable. They cost money, they interfered with every adult form of enjoyment, they attracted attention that should have been bestowed elsewhere, and they not infrequently gave rise to the type of conversation most disliked by the Moons, since it was neither flippant, suggestive, amorous, nor scandalous.

"I hope to God," said Hilary disconsolately, "that a few amusing people are going to turn up in this hole. Otherwise it won't have been worth coming."

"There are the people in the villa," suggested Angie—but languidly, for she knew that the people in the villa, one of them a friend of a friend of Hilary's, were unescorted women and therefore uninteresting to herself.

"We might look them up after dinner."

"Or before dinner."

"Too obvious, a bit. They'll have to ask us to a meal, anyway, and there's no sense in rushing things."

"Well——"

Angie's eye roved away once more, as a noisy group of French people came up the steps, talking and laughing. The women were young, fat, dark, and wore very smart bathing-dresses and sandals. The men were dark and fat, too, and full of animation. They all looked hard at Angie, and, having passed, looked back again. The impression that she had obviously created pleased her faintly, but the group was too evidently a family one. There was little satisfaction to be got out of the admiration of a middle-class Frenchman taking a holiday with his wife and—probably—sisters-in-law.

Angie's thoughts, followed by her glance, slid round again to the dark young man, and she saw that he—or more probably his companions—had been joined by two other men, one of them of some age between forty-five and fifty, an obvious

American, and the other one fair and undersized, and very much younger.

The place, Angie decided, wasn't going to be hopeless at all.

"I'm going to have another orangeade," said Hilary. "What about you?"

"All right."

She didn't want the orangeade, but drinking it would be something to do, and it was worth while sitting on for a bit, letting all these men watch her, more or less surreptitiously, and giving them the chance of realising that she and Hilary were staying at the Hôtel d'Azur, and that they could get to know her without any difficulty at all.

## (2)

Mr. Bolham, having been roused from some extremely serious reading that was his form of relaxation, looked with slight, habitual distaste at his elderly form and bald head reflected in the mirror, approved at the same time his beautiful white flannels, and went downstairs.

He walked, in preference to using the lift which had, three days earlier, stuck half-way down, imprisoning Mr. Bolham *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Romaine, the lady now sitting, in pale pink pyjamas, on the terrace below. This misadventure, although it had only lasted for the space of seven minutes, had led to Mrs. Romaine's assuming an intimate and proprietary air towards Mr. Bolham ever since, and this, in its turn, had occasioned in Mr. Bolham a complex in regard to the use of the lift. He walked down the shallow white marble stairs.

At the Hotel entrance, he stood on the top step of another flight that led on to the terrace, and looked down on the red-and-white umbrellas, the little tables, the palm trees, and the several groups of Hotel guests sitting either in the shade or in the blaze of brilliant sunlight that still poured down steadily.

It was the misfortune of Mr. Bolham to dislike, temperately but quite genuinely, the majority of his fellow-creatures. He felt rather more conscious than usual of this idiosyncrasy, as he stood, unobserved, in the entrance-way of the Hotel.

He saw at once that some new people—the Moons—had arrived, and that the girl was strikingly pretty. The beauty of her face left him perfectly cold, for he desried in it neither intelligence, kindness, nor sensitiveness—but he was faintly moved by the beautiful lines of her body.

(Though by the time they've been here twenty-four hours, and she's got properly acclimatised, thought Mr. Bolham, I shall have seen practically all there is to see. She's the kind that comes down to dinner in shorts and a handkerchief.)

Hilary Moon he dismissed at once as being exactly like every other unemployed young man living in London and wearing round, horn-rimmed spectacles. He had certainly never done any hard manual work in his life, and Mr. Bolham surmised that his mental labours had gone no further than an occasional conversation, amongst drinks, with somebody who was in touch with somebody who had to do with the films, and perhaps a faintly fishy transaction or two in motor-cars.

Averting his gaze from the Moons, Mr. Bolham permitted it to seek and find Mrs. Romaine, in order that he might avoid sitting anywhere within reach of her conversation.

She was, as usual, surrounded by men. Her boy, Patrick, was there, looking faintly anxious and unhappy, as always, and her boy's tutor, Mr. Buckland—on such much franker and happier terms with Mrs. Romaine, conversationally, than Patrick ever seemed to be. Sitting with them were the dark, silent American financier, Muller, and a narrow young man of sallow colouring, at whom Mr. Bolham glanced with acute dislike. The young man was his temporary secretary, Denis Waller, and had only been engaged by Mr. Bolham a month earlier—and then mainly because Mr. Bolham had felt—mistakenly, as he now knew—that it would be too much trouble to interview the many other applicants for the post.

At the next table were Mrs. Morgan and her three children. Mr. Bolham resembled the Moons in disliking the society of children, although for other reasons. Quite simply, they made him feel inferior. Of their mother, he was inclined to think well. She was at once the least smart, and the only distinguished-looking, woman at the Hotel. Moreover, she always took the trouble to talk to her husband at meals.

If it had not been for the three children, Mr. Bolham felt that he might have taken a chair next to Mary Morgan's and talked to her. But she was listening to the earnest prattle of Olwen and David and Gwennie, and when presently they went down to the *plage* to bathe, she would probably go with them.

"Mr. Bolham, Mr. Bolham!"

Reluctantly turning round, Mr. Bolham found himself faced—as he had known, from the moment of hearing himself called, that he would be—by Dulcie Courteney. She was the thin, shrill, blonde daughter of the Hotel's Mr. Courteney, whose duties lay midway between those of a social entertainer and a courier. His horrible child, as Mr. Bolham invariably designated her in his own mind—and sometimes, indeed, in his conversation—was permanently installed in the Hotel, and it was understood that she was always ready to make friends with any English or American children, in order to improve their French, and to perform the like service for the English of any French children. Her command of both languages was undeniable, but Mr. Bolham considered that her accent, in either, was totally lacking in distinction.

The same thing could be said of her appearance. She was prettyish in a thin, green-eyed, fair-haired style, but her teeth, even at sixteen, were brittle-looking and discoloured, her figure under-developed and angular, and she had a habit of grimacing slightly whenever she spoke.

"Mr. Bolham, *is* your bedroom door locked?"

"Why should my bedroom door be locked?" said Mr. Bolham. "I've nothing to hide."

Dulcie gave a thin shriek of nervous laughter.

"You *are* funny, Mr. Bolham. I shall die. I suppose it did sound funny, me putting it like that. What I meant was, really, could I possibly pop in there, just for one second, to get something—well, it's a bathing-cloak really—that's fallen on to your balcony."

"Again?"

Dulcie giggled uncertainly.

"It's not my fault, Mr. Bolham," she said at last, putting her head on one side.

"I know. It's the Duvals."

"It just dropped off their window-ledge, you know."

"Did madame Duval send you to get it?"

Dulcie nodded.

"I expect she thought you might be a tiny bit cross, as it's happened so often," she suggested. Mr. Bolham felt her eyeing him anxiously, to see if this would get a laugh. He maintained, without any difficulty, a brassy irresponsiveness, and Dulcie immediately changed her methods.

"I like to do anything I'm asked, always—my Pops says that's one of the ways a little girl makes nice friends," she observed in a sudden falsetto. "And Marcelle—she lets me call her Marcelle, you know—she's always terribly sweet to me. So naturally, I like to run about and do errands for her, Mr. Bolham."

"Well, I hope you've enjoyed doing this one," said Mr. Bolham sceptically. "I'll send the towel, or whatever it is, up by the chambermaid."

"Oh, but Mr. Bolham," wailed Dulcie, "Marcelle wants it *now*. She's going down to bathe. Do let me just run in and get it. I won't look at anything—truly I won't."

"There isn't anything for you to look at—or not look at. Tell your friend that the next time she throws her clothes down into my balcony I shall complain to the management. No, don't. Tell her that she ought to send her husband to retrieve them, or come herself—not send you."

Dulcie stood on one leg, evidently uncertain how to take a remark that had, actually, been prompted by a slight feeling of

compassion.

"But I like it, Mr. Bolham," she said at last, feebly. "I always like to do as I'm asked. Pops says I'm ever such a helpful little girlie now that I'm growing older."

Mr. Bolham, every frail vestige of compassion destroyed on the instant, walked away on to the terrace.

In his determination to avoid the society of Dulcie, he moved quickly, and rather carelessly, into Mrs. Romaine's line of vision.

She called to him immediately.

"Come and sit here, Mr. Bolham. We're just going to order drinks."

At the sight of his employer, Waller stood up in an uncertain way, bowed, and sat down again with a slightly apologetic smile. He wore shorts and a singlet, and revealed a bony expanse of hairy chest and shoulders burnt to an ochrish brown.

"Of course you know Mr. Muller?" said Mrs. Romaine.

Mr. Bolham exchanged with Mr. Muller the briefest of nods. They had spoken to one another, shortly but quite amicably, about three times already, and Mr. Bolham approved of the great financier because he had never sought to carry the intercourse any further. He did not wonder why Mr. Muller should waste his time listening to Mrs. Romaine, because he knew only too well that people were very often allowed no choice in the matter.

Mrs. Romaine and her son's tutor, Buckland, were chaffing one another, with shrieks of laughter, and a free exchange of personal remarks.

"I've had my hair shampoo'd at the place in the village here," declared Mrs. Romaine. "Wasn't it brave of me? Of course I couldn't have had it properly set, but then I don't need to. The wave is natural."

She ran her fingers through the corrugated thatch of lustreless fair hair that fell on either side of her face and hung in unconvincing curls behind her ears.

"The wave's natural," she repeated firmly, "but I must say I don't think they've washed it half badly."

Buckland burst out laughing.

"They sprayed it all over with scent, or something. It's stinking like a street-walker's."

"You *would* know that, wouldn't you?" retorted Mrs. Romaine.

Mr. Bolham, to whom the conversation appeared offensive in the extreme, sought to distract his own attention from it, and averted his look from the speakers. It fell instead upon Patrick Romaine.

The white, puzzled dismay on the boy's face, his pitiful attempts to seem amused, filled Mr. Bolham with a sudden horror. What on earth was going on beneath that surface of immaturity, that young inarticulateness? The mind of Mr. Bolham, at all times distrustful of personal relations, violently protested against any consideration of such a question. He had no wish to become involved with any emotional situation, least of all one that concerned the affairs of Mrs. Romaine, her insufferable young bounder of a tutor, and her sixteen-year-old son.

The waiter arrived with drinks, for which Muller signed the bill.

"Have you seen the new couple? They only arrived yesterday," Mrs. Romaine said, without troubling to lower her voice.

Muller—habitually a silent man—said "Yeah" and Buckland exclaimed, with his usual familiarity:

"The girl's marvellous. Quite extraordinarily pretty."

"Have you succeeded in speaking to her yet?" enquired his employer derisively.

"Not yet, but I'm hoping to, on the rocks or somewhere. They're going bathing, presently—I heard them say so."

"If you get off with her, I suppose I must see what I can do with him. He looks as though he might be able to dive."

"What's the good of that, when you can't?"

"He can save my life," pointed out Mrs. Romaine.

She finished her Martini and stood up. She was tall and well made, astonishingly slim for a woman who was certainly over forty, and with definite good looks, and even charm. She was common, reflected Mr. Bolham, but she at least avoided the supreme commonness of affectation.

"Who's coming? Mr. Muller?"

"I don't think so, thanks." Muller politely rose to his feet. Waller, who had not spoken at all, nervously followed his example, looked round and saw that Buckland had not stirred, and sat down again.

"Coming?" said Mrs. Romaine carelessly. "Hell, I believe I've forgotten my bathing-shoes. I must have them, if we're going to that beastly *plage* down here. Or shall we get the car and run up to the rocks?"

"Yes," said Buckland. "I'll give you another diving lesson."

"Not sure if I want one."

"Yes, you do."

She made a face at him.

"Patrick, d'you want to bring the car round for your mother?" Buckland enquired, still without moving.

The boy looked at his mother.

"He isn't allowed to drive," she said, her eyes on her son's tutor all the time.

"Yes he is, if I say so. Cut along, Patrick."

"May I, mother?" said Patrick doggedly.

"I suppose so, if Buck says so."

The boy walked away, acute self-consciousness in every movement of his tall, overgrown figure. The laughter of his mother and the tutor—the pointless, spontaneous laughter of people who are exhilarated by one another's companionship, rather than amused—rang across the terrace.

"Well——" said Muller vaguely.

He moved towards the Hotel again.

"Can I fetch your shoes for you, Mrs. Romaine?" the sallow Waller enquired.

"Oh, don't bother. I mean, why should you?"

"No bother at all," said Waller eagerly. "A pleasure, I assure you."

He sped into the Hotel.

"God, anybody would think he came from behind a counter," ungratefully remarked Mrs. Romaine. "Come on, Buck. What a slack creature you are!"

She pulled the tutor out of his chair, and then stood, still holding his hands, laughing.

"Come down with us, Mr. Bolham."

"Thank you very much, I'm not going to bathe again just yet."

From the corner of his eye he saw the Morgan family gather up their bathing gear and prepare to start.

"We could give those kids a lift," said Mrs. Romaine. "They've no car."

She turned and shouted to the Morgan children.

"D'you want to go to the rocks? We're going, and you can come along with us. Plenty of room."

The mother of the children was with them. She came up.

"Thank you so much. It's very kind of you."

How strange, thought Mr. Bolham, to hear the accents of a well-bred English woman on the Côte d'Azur—or, for that matter, anywhere at all, in these days.

He looked at Mrs. Morgan. She was tall and slight, with a delicate, intelligent, colourless face, very beautiful deep blue eyes, and fair hair, coiled over her ears in shells. It was now of a neutral tint, but he felt sure that it had once been as golden as that of her children. Although she looked tired, she was not devitalised. Her eyes and mouth were expressive and mobile, and she carried herself well.

When her eyes met those of Mr. Bolham, she smiled frankly. They had already exchanged a good deal of conversation, and Mr. Bolham knew that his more malicious sallies at the expense of their fellow-guests were not unappreciated by Mrs. Morgan.

Mrs. Romaine, in her pale pink pyjamas, and still holding hands with her son's tutor, looked through, rather than at, the other woman, although with complete amiability, and repeated her offer of driving them all up to the rocks, where there was better bathing to be had than from the *plage*. David and Gwennie, the two younger children, were already hopping about eagerly.

"Please, mummie, may we?"

"Certainly."

Olwen, the eldest, said: "We *said* Dulcie might come and bathe with us this evening."

"My God," said Mrs. Romaine. "Well, I suppose one more doesn't make any difference. Only hurry up, if you want to go and fetch her. Here's the car."

The car, an enormous Buick, was coming round the corner from the Hotel garage.

Waller returned with Mrs. Romaine's shoes. When she thanked him, he replied: "Don't mention it, please."

The children climbed into the car, Dulcie effusively and tiresomely grateful, and Buckland said to Patrick Romaine:

"Out you get, my lad, I'm driving."

"Why can't I?"

"Because we value our lives, even if you don't," retorted the tutor smartly, and looked round for approval. Waller, Mrs. Romaine, and Dulcie Courteney all laughed, and the boy at the wheel turned rather white.

"Climb out, Pat," directed his mother. "Get in at the back. Buck, I'm coming next you."

She took her place next to the driver.

"Here—you—" her look indicated Denis Waller. "Why don't you come along too? Heaps of room."

Waller, looking at Mr. Bolham, protested insincerely.

"If I'm not wanted elsewhere——"

"Go, by all means," said Mr. Bolham sourly.

"If you're sure—but really—if I'm not trespassing on Mrs. Romaine's kindness ... I could quite well walk——"

"Get *in!*" shouted the hearty tutor, Buckland.

At last they were off.

Mary Morgan and Mr. Bolham remained together on the terrace, watching the car, diminishing swiftly, rush down the S-like curves of the long drive.

"Why do you allow your charming children to go anywhere with that vulgar woman and her appendages?" enquired Mr. Bolham, although aware that the question was quite unjustifiable, if judged by the extent of his acquaintance with Mrs. Morgan.

She replied to it, however, readily and without any trace of resentment.

"Partly because I'm sorry for the boy, Patrick. The children say he's nice. And partly on principle."

"What principle?"

Mrs. Morgan's blue eyes rested on him thoughtfully, as though wondering if he were really interested. Mr. Bolham, who was, endeavoured to look as intelligent as he felt.

"If we're going to discuss principles," said Mary Morgan at last, "don't you think we might sit down?"

Mr. Bolham, desiring nothing better than a conversation with her, brought forward two deck-chairs, and they sat down, by mutual consent finding a place in the now diminishing heat of the sun.

"Well—what principle impels you to expose your children to the contamination of a third-rate adventuress?" said Mr. Bolham pleasantly.

"I don't believe in tying children to their mother's apron-strings. They'll have to meet all kinds of people in the end. They can only learn to discriminate by experience."

"They're too young."

"No," said Mary kindly, but with decision. "I assure you they're not. I think so many mothers make that mistake. Of course, really, they want to go on believing that the children are babies—not individuals—because they're afraid of losing them."

"And how do you get over that—the fear of losing them, I mean?"

"I suppose by facing it. By letting them"—she smiled at him—"associate with third-rate adventuresses. Though really, you know, I do think you're rather hard on Mrs. Romayne. She's very good-natured."

"I wonder if Waller intends to enter into competition with that outrageous tutor?"

"I shouldn't think so. Yes—that *is* bad. I'm so sorry for the poor boy, Patrick. I suppose she thinks that he doesn't notice."

"Far more likely she never thinks about him at all."

"He's a nice boy—terribly pathetic. Olwen has made friends with him, I think."

"I wonder you let them— However, I've said that before."

"Well," said Mary Morgan, "I will admit that I mightn't have sent them all off just now, if I hadn't known that my husband was already at the rocks. They'll join up with him."

"He's a fine swimmer. Does he like this place? Do you?"

Mrs. Morgan appeared to consider. One of the things he liked about her was that she never seemed to be surprised by anything he asked, and she always gave consideration to her reply.

"Pretty well," she said at last. "I like the sun, of course, and the swimming, and seeing the children turn brown. I don't like the Hotel, much, or many of the people in it."

Her eyes, perhaps unconsciously, wandered to where the new couple, the young Moons, were rising from their table and preparing to go indoors.

"That girl is lovely," she added irrelevantly.

"No," said Mr. Bolham. "Prettyish, if you like, and good legs. But a vicious fool. So's he."

"How irresponsible you are in your statements," observed Mrs. Morgan.

Mr. Bolham, who had a not inconsiderable reputation as a *savant* in his own circles—which were London Library circles—received this in surprised silence.

The young man, Moon, approached them.

"I wonder if I might bother you for a light, sir," he said, with an accent of nonchalance that completely neutralised his use of the respectful monosyllable. "One hasn't yet learnt to realise that one isn't wearing pockets."

The slighting gesture with which he indicated his smart new beach-wear was directed towards Mrs. Morgan, who smiled in reply.

Mr. Bolham, not smiling, produced matches.

"Thanks. My wife remembered to bring down her cigarette-case, but forgot the matches. Here you are, Angie." His wife had joined them.

He lit her cigarette.

"Thanks a lot," said the girl, not looking at any of them.

There was a moment's pause.

"Well—I think we'll go and have a dip," said Mr. Moon. "It's a bore not having brought a car. We didn't know this Hotel was so far from the sea."

"It's a disadvantage," Mary Morgan agreed.

Mr. Bolham, whose large Sunbeam was in the Hotel garage, said no word, and the Moons, swaying slightly from the hips as they walked, went away.

### (3)

"Pretty bloody, weren't they?" observed Hilary.

"Oh, quite. Still, one's got to begin somewhere, and the *concierge* says the Morgans have been here longer than anyone. They're sure to know everybody in the Hotel."

"Well, I shall go round to those villa people this evening. I suppose it might be as well to try and remember their name first."

Angie made no reply. The Moons seldom held sustained conversations with one another.

She cursed the heat, and the uneven surface of the winding road, and decided within her own mind that the old stick-in-the-mud—this was Mr. Bolham—was worse than useless, though Hilary might stand a possible chance with him, provided he didn't swank. She knew this by instinct, as she also knew by instinct that Mr. Bolham was a rich man whose wealth had been inherited rather than earned.

Mrs. Morgan was not rich, and she clearly belonged to a world about which the Moons practically knew nothing whatever, and which knew nothing whatever about them.

Angie dismissed her.

The pink-pyjama'd woman was the person to cultivate—Mrs. Romaine. She obviously shared Angie's own predilections

for free drinks, the society of men, and an atmosphere of talk and laughter, and noise, and general looseness.

The French people were no use.

Buckland and Waller were both young, more or less unattached, and each had certainly remarked Angie. They would be easy.

The American, Muller, was obviously most worth while, but he would also be far more impervious to her attractions than the younger and less experienced men. Angie had no illusions, and she knew very well that a rich and travelled American would have met her type over and over again.

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## CHAPTER II

### (1)

The rocks, to which Mrs. Romaine's new and superb Buick conveyed the party at break-neck speed, formed a small bay where a section of the Mediterranean splashed gently and tidelessly.

Buckland pulled the car up by the side of the road, and everyone got out and began the descent, which was steep and necessitated climbing.

The children, already in bathing-suits, negotiated it easily. Patrick Romaine hung back, and put out his hand doubtfully to help his mother.

"Don't touch me," she screamed. "I shall overbalance if you do."

"I'll go first," volunteered Denis Waller, clinging in a most uncertain fashion to a ledge of red rock, and inwardly terrified lest he might be going to make a fool of himself by slipping, and breaking the glass of his wrist-watch. It was a new wrist-watch, set in a broad gold band, and it helped to bolster up his deficient self-assurance, because he secretly felt that it lent him individuality.

Mrs. Romaine screamed again, this time with derisive laughter.

"There wouldn't be much left of you, if *I* fell on you," she said crudely but accurately.

Waller privately winced. He was sensitive about himself in every possible aspect, but perhaps most of all where his small and skinny physical appearance was concerned.

Buckland, big and strong and hairy, thrust himself forward.

"Come on," he ordered masterfully. "I've got you."

He grasped Mrs. Romaine by the arm—the shoulder—the ankle—anywhere—half pushing and half lifting her down.

Denis Waller gritted his teeth.

He disliked Buckland intensely, and thought him a cad; nevertheless he envied him.

Why couldn't he have some of Buckland's self-confidence, his loud efficiency, and his easy success?

Denis slipped a little further down the rock, glanced round surreptitiously to see if anyone had noticed it and was despising him, and continued to slither, slowly and carefully—for he was rather frightened—in the rear of the party.

As he went, he comforted himself with a series of phantasies that had sustained him, varying hardly at all through the years, ever since his little boyhood.

The assumption on which most of these phantasies rested was to the effect that Denis Hannaford Waller had, in a past existence, been one of the world's Great Teachers—(which of them, he hardly liked to formulate even to himself, although he had his own secret convictions on the subject). Deliberately, on returning once more to earth, he had elected to embrace humiliation, an insignificant position, a frail and unimposing physique. Through the medium of these disadvantages, he would not only attain to a higher spirituality, but would continue his mission to humanity.

It was a large, indefinite mission, that embraced general understanding, and helpfulness, and service, and soon after attaining his seventeenth year, Denis had found that all these could be offered to, and welcomed by, girls of his own age or rather younger, of an intelligence slightly inferior to his own. Often and often these alliances of the spirit had landed him in difficulties, but he sincerely believed, on each occasion, that the difficulties had only been occasioned by the unworthiness, fickleness, or weakness, of the people whom he had tried to help. His own integrity he felt to be intact, and indeed morally—in the common acceptance of the term—he had remained impeccable, for he was both undersexed and inclined to a physical fastidiousness that he mistook for spirituality.

Mrs. Romaine, coarse-tongued and flamboyant, repelled rather than attracted him, but it was so essential to Denis

Waller to be approved, and if possible liked, by all those with whom he was thrown into contact, that he always behaved exactly as if he admired and respected her very much. Dimly, he excused this insincerity to himself whenever he realised it—which occasionally happened if he woke up suddenly in the middle of the night—on the grounds that Mrs. Romaine might one day be influenced by him.

Denis had a pathetic belief in the power of Influence, especially his own. He had often dreamed of obtaining a post as tutor in a private family, where he would have profited by his opportunities in a manner very different from that of Buckland—but the dream had remained a dream, in spite of tentative visits to various scholastic agencies, for his educational attainments were not very much more distinguished than were his athletic capabilities. Nevertheless, he continued to think of himself as an Influence, and it was, in fact, true that he had several times occasioned a temporary psychic disturbance in the lives of various young women with whom he had held long and personal conversations—in the course of which he had made frequent, and usually inaccurate, use of the word "psychological."

It would have required much less intelligence than Denis possessed, to suppose for one instant that he would ever be permitted to influence his employer. Denis did not fall into this error. But he still hoped, though ever more faintly, that one day Mr. Bolham—if he did not sack him first—might come to like him. Unfortunately, he had obtained the post of temporary secretary to Mr. Bolham partly by inducing a woman friend to write a glowing testimonial to his abilities, based almost entirely on what he had himself told her about them, and partly by undertaking, with an air of modest efficiency, to do a great many things of which he was, actually, more or less incapable. This incapacity had become obvious, almost at once, to his employer, and Denis lived in daily terror of being sent back to England, jobless and without a reference.

It was partly from a panic-stricken desire to have a possible second string to his bow that he took pains to ingratiate himself with the other visitors in the Hotel. One never knew when, and in what way, social contacts might become of practical use.

On a more exalted plane was his perfectly genuine wish to fulfil his own vision of himself as helping and influencing less evolved souls.

Lowering himself cautiously to the rocky *plateau* from which they were all to bathe, Denis reflected how terribly the boy Patrick Romaine needed help.

Perhaps he could win his confidence....

"So you've got here at last," observed Buckland, not very kindly.

He was changing into his bathing things without any particular regard for privacy.

Denis, more modestly, sought a pinnacle of rock and went behind it, when he instantly found himself face-to-face with Mrs. Romaine, half-in and half-out of a backless, and nearly frontless, emerald green swimming-suit.

"You can't come here," she shrieked.

"I'm most frightfully sorry—I beg your pardon."

Denis in reality was hardly more shocked or disturbed by the sight of a semi-naked woman than a child might have been, but he mistook his terror of having offended Mrs. Romaine for outraged masculine susceptibility, and retired in great discomposure to another projection of rock, where he undressed as quickly as possible.

The children were already in the water.

He watched the two younger Morgans, Gwennie and David, with some envy and admiration. They were only eight and ten years old, and swam well and fearlessly in water in which they were nowhere within their depths. He could see them moving steadily forward, shouting to one another in a conversational manner, and guessed that they were making for a rocky islet some sixty yards away, where a man's figure—that of their father—could be seen.

The eldest Morgan was not visible, neither was Patrick Romaine. As Denis emerged from behind his shelter, in a pair of blue bathing-pants without any top—for his desire to acquire a virile bronze was intense—he met Dulcie Courteney, whom he had forgotten all about, for she had not much personality and would certainly never rank as a social asset to

anybody.

But he was at his best with children, whom he genuinely liked, so he smiled at her and said: "Hallo."

"Hallo, Mr. Waller. Are you going in immediately?"

"No, I don't think so," replied Denis, guessing that this was what she wanted him to say.

"Oh, good. Will you sit on the rocks with me, and sun-bathe, Mr. Waller? I don't mean *really* sun-bathe, of course."

"I quite understand. This would be rather a good place, wouldn't it? I'm afraid I've forgotten to bring any oil."

Denis had carefully forgotten to bring any oil ever since his first, rather expensive, bottle had come to an end. Other people were always sure to have plenty.

"I'll lend you my bottle," Dulcie volunteered eagerly. "You see, I don't really need it, do I? I've been here all the summer, so of course I'm brown. Though I don't think very fair people like me ever go quite as dark as if they weren't so fair, do you? Though of course, you're very fair yourself, Mr. Waller."

She gazed at him critically, and Denis threw back his shoulders, then felt that this was a very cheap and obvious gesture, so pretended that he had only meant to lie down flat on the rock, and did so, at the expense of some pain to his shoulder-blades and the back of his head.

Dulcie continued to prattle. It was evidently her idea of good manners, to permit no interval of silence.

"It was sweet of Mrs. Romaine to bring me down in her car, don't you think, Mr. Waller? She's always awfully sweet to me. So's everybody in the Hotel, really. My Pops says I'm ever such a lucky girl to have such heaps of friends. Of course, I do what I can to help people—like talking French, or anything like that—I've taught the Morgans ever such a lot of French."

"They've been here a long time, haven't they?"

"A whole month, and they're staying on for ten days more. I think they must be quite well off, really, you know. Oh"—she clapped her hands over her mouth—"oh, I forgot! Pops says I'm *never* to talk over other-people-in-the-Hotel's business. You *won't* say anything, will you?"

"No, of course not. I'm a particularly safe person, as it happens. I get a great many secrets confided to me, and it's just as if they were dropped into a great well."

The rock seemed to be growing harder and harder, and moreover the glare of the sun was still strong enough to necessitate closed eyes, which might look rather silly—besides, he had been lying on his back long enough to preclude any suspicion of not having chosen the position on purpose—so Denis rolled over on to his front, and felt far more comfortable.

"Oh, look, Mr. Waller! Gwennie and David have got right out to that rock where their daddy is. They're waving."

Dulcie agitated a bathing-cloak, and Denis, under pretext of waving his hand, was enabled to sit up again.

"Gwennie swims awfully well, I think, for a little child of eight; don't you, Mr. Waller? Look, she's going to dive. I wish I could dive as well as she can. I dive awfully badly. Pops always says he's going to give me some lessons, but he never has time."

She looked wistfully at Denis, and his immediate impulse was to say that he would give her diving lessons. Only a caution born of experience restrained him. There was at least one serious impediment in the way of teaching Dulcie to dive.

At last he said:

"I think I could give you a few hints myself."

"Oh, Mr. Waller, would you really? I do think it's sweet of you. I can do it in a sort of a way, you know—only not well

—and if only you'd show me—I'm sure you dive marvellously yourself."

"No, indeed I don't."

"People always say that."

"I shall teach you the theory," Denis explained earnestly. "It's much the soundest way of learning—far more use than just watching somebody else doing it. As a matter of fact, my doctor's advised me not to do any diving this summer."

"Oh, Mr. Waller, *what* a shame, just when you've come to the South of France!"

"It is, isn't it?" said Denis with a melancholy smile, and at once began to feel that it was.

"Are you delicate, Mr. Waller?"

"Not in the least. I'm rather exceptionally strong, as it happens. Muscularly, that is. But ever since a fall I had, out hunting last year, I find that diving or—anything of that kind—is apt to give me a violent headache."

"What a shame."

"Please don't say anything about it to anyone, will you?"

Denis was frequently impelled to end his conversations in this manner. It made him feel safer. On this occasion, however, he really did not know whether or not he hoped that Dulcie would take him at his word. He had only been at the Hôtel d'Azur a week, but he had seen almost at once that it would be necessary to find a convincing and creditable reason for his great disinclination to practise diving—a disinclination due far less to physical cowardice than to his terror of looking foolish over his first attempts.

"Are you very keen on hunting, Mr. Waller?"

"Yes—that is, I haven't done a great deal," hastily said Denis, wishing that he had chosen the Row as *mise en scène* for his catastrophe.

"I say, Dulcie, don't you think it's time we went in?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Waller," cried Dulcie, who always agreed, with every sign of eagerness, to suggestions made by Hotel visitors.

They moved to the edge of the rock and slid, in postures of safety rather than of elegance, into the warm blue water.

## (2)

On quite another rock, separated from the main *plateau* by a narrow channel of mildly surging sea, sat Olwen, the eldest Morgan, with Patrick Romaine.

She was a child of grave-eyed, slender beauty, with blue, deep, intelligent eyes like her mother's, and bright, thick hair, cut into a square gold frame for her small sun-browned face.

She wore a very faded and scanty blue bathing-suit that exposed her soft, childish neck, and long slim legs and arms, all uniformly tanned to a smooth, polished bronze.

Patrick, much fairer than she was, had only achieved an uncomfortable scarlet that made his light hair and eyelashes look almost white.

"Shall I oil you?" Olwen enquired.

"Yes, please. Only go frightfully carefully where it's blistered, if you don't mind."

"All right."

She tipped some coconut-oil out of the bottle that lay beside Patrick and applied it carefully to his shoulders and back.

"Thanks awfully. Sure you don't want to go in and swim with David and Gwennie?"

"Quite sure, thanks."

There was a silence. Then Patrick said:

"Where's that Dulcie person?"

"Oh, somewhere or other. She's all right, I expect."

"Why did you ask her to come?"

"Mummie made us. She's sorry for her or something."

"Well, I'm much sorrier for the people who've got to be with her," said Patrick.

"Yes, so'm I."

"I expect the wretched kid has a pretty mouldy existence, on the whole. Isn't she the child of a sort of Polytechnic agent or something?"

"Yes. At least, I don't know what he is exactly, but he speaks marvellous French and German and English, and when he's here he arranges dances and excursions and things, in the Hotel, but part of the time he's dashing about between here and Paris, or Paris and London. I think he brings people over who don't want to travel by themselves—old ladies and things. Dulcie just stays here all the time."

"Even in the winter? I say, I saw a fish then."

"They do show up sometimes. There are masses of them in the Réserve, just in front of the Hotel where they give you bouillabaisse. No, in the winter they go to the Winter Sports places."

"Rather fun."

"Dulcie doesn't have much fun. She isn't allowed to do any of the sports and things unless some of the Hotel visitors offer to take her out with them."

"Why not? Expense or something?"

"I suppose so. Patrick, d'you like bouillabaisse?"

"I haven't tasted it yet. We're going to the Réserve to-morrow. That'll do for my back, I think. Thanks awfully, Olwen."

Olwen put the cork back into the bottle, but they continued to sit side by side, clasping their knees, on the warm surface of the rock.

After a perceptible hesitation, Patrick said, frowning at the water:

"I say, couldn't you all come too, and have lunch at that bouillabaisse place to-morrow? You often do go, don't you?"

"Oh yes. Daddy adores it, and so does Gwennie. At least, she probably only pretends to, because she thinks it's grown-up. David simply loathes it. They usually give him an omelette instead. Mummie and I like it just moderately."

"Well, couldn't you manage to go there to-morrow? You see," said Patrick drearily, "it's so much more fun if there are a lot of people."

"Do you think so?" asked Olwen, surprised. "I don't mean that it wouldn't be fun to go with your party, of course—but as a *general* rule, I like it better when it's only just a few people, who all know one another awfully well."

"Well, it wouldn't be that, anyway, because of that beast Buckland."

"He's terribly foul, isn't he?" said Olwen sympathetically. "We all simply loathe him. Why do you have to have him?"

Patrick drew a long breath.

"Well, you see, my father and mother, rather unfortunately, are separated, and mother got me—I was about eleven at the time it all happened, and I suppose father thought a kid of that age might be rather a bore to look after—and then she went to Egypt, and I spent my holidays with aunts and people, which was extraordinarily beastly, most of the time, and then when she came home again I was sent to Sherborne—where I am now, you know—and at first she had a flat in London and I used to go there for the holidays; then my father rather chipped in and said he'd like to have a go at me, so I went to him for a time or two, and that was all right. He lives in Scotland, and he taught me to fish. But this year, I spent the Easter hols. with mother and she was rather worried about expense and things, and said she was going to sell the furniture and get rid of the flat, and she seemed to think it would be rather fun to wander about for a bit, and a friend of hers called Mrs. Wolverton-Gush told her about this place, and said she'd be out here in August. As a matter of fact, she's just arrived at some villa or other, quite near."

Patrick stopped abruptly and seemed to find it difficult to go on. So Olwen said:

"Yes, I see. And where does the poisonous Buckland come in?"

"This ass of a woman, the Wolverton-Gush one—well, she's frightfully nice really, I expect, but you know what I mean— It was her idea. She introduced him to mother, and sort of put it into her head that it would be a frightfully good idea to take him on as holiday tutor for me. If you ask me, Buckland was out of a job—and no wonder—and being more or less at a loose end, he worked it for all it was worth. Mother's the most frightfully generous person, and I expect she gives him a jolly good screw."

"I don't see what he does to earn it."

"Absolutely nothing. And he eats like a hog."

"Yes, doesn't he? Gwennie noticed that. She's rather greedy herself, so of course she notices it in other people."

"One expects a kid of eight to be greedy. Buckland lets mother pay for his drinks, too, and anything extra—like if we go in to St. Raphael and have ices. Nowadays I always say I don't want an ice, if they suggest it, so as to do him down."

"I don't wonder. Does it succeed?"

"Not always. Once they went without me. Of course, mother didn't twig at all. She just thought I *really* didn't want an ice."

"Of course."

"I don't think she even realises how much I hate the fellow."

"Probably she doesn't, or she'd get rid of him," said Olwen, trying to make it sound like an assertion and not a question. "But you'll tell her, won't you, Patrick?"

"Oh, I expect so, sooner or later." His voice was unconvincing. "I don't suppose she really *likes* him herself, you know. It's just that she's so frightfully kind-hearted."

"P'raps she doesn't want to disappoint her friend—that Mrs. Thingamy-Gush who's out here—and after you've gone home, it won't matter."

Patrick turned and looked at her, for the first time in the conversation, and the faint expression of strain that habitually lay round his eyes and mouth was lightened for a moment.

"D'you know, I never thought of that. Of course, that's what it is. She'd hate to disappoint Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, I know. And mother's so awfully sort of—confiding, and liking everyone to be jolly and all that—that she simply doesn't realise how frightfully the brute needs kicking."

"Hallo, Olwen!"

Dulcie, swimming with quick, feeble little strokes, appeared round the point.

"Hallo," Olwen responded unenthusiastically.

Patrick stood up.

"Well——"

He dived head first into the water.

"Good one!" squeaked Dulcie. "Mr. Waller, wasn't that a splendid dive?"

"Very good style indeed," critically replied Denis, who had come round the point too late to see it.

He perceived Olwen still on the rock, and pulled himself out of the water to join her. He was bored with Dulcie, although he had tried to be nice to her, and he was attracted by Olwen's beauty and by her air of good-breeding—two qualities to which he was peculiarly susceptible.

"Haven't you been in the water yet?"

"Not yet. Did you see David and Gwennie? They've gone right over to the island."

"We saw them. They're climbing about there, with your father."

"I think I'll go too," said Olwen, getting up.

Denis was disappointed. Probably she wanted to get away from him. Well, she was only a child—what did it matter whether she liked him or not? He stood up politely as Olwen in her turn dived.

"Hallo, Mrs. Romyne," said Dulcie from the sea. "Oh, hallo, Mr. Buckland."

Her greetings remained unanswered, and doubtless unheard, in the lively noise made by Mrs. Romyne's screams of laughter and Buckland's derisive return-shouts.

They were splashing one another merrily, disputing the possession of a scarlet rubber ball.

Denis stood laughing quietly from the rock, in order to look and feel as if he were taking part in whatever was going on. One of his many fears was that of being ignored, or left out of things, because he was in a dependent position.

"Buck, I simply hate you!"

The ball, unsteadily flung by Mrs. Romyne, went wide of the mark, and it was her son, Patrick, who went after it and threw it back at her.

She flung it at the tutor again, and this time it caught him on the head.

"All right, I'm going to duck you for that!"

"You brute—you're not to!"

"Mother, catch!"

Patrick had the ball again, and was coming towards her, but she ignored him, her whole attention given to the horse-play with Buckland, as he caught hold of her by the shoulders and she struggled with him, her bathing-dress coming half off in the process.

"Look at you, you're not even decent!"

"Whose fault is that?"

Denis Waller's smile had become a very fixed and unnatural one. He was not in the least amused, but rather disgusted, and the look on Patrick Romyne's face hurt him.

But almost at once the boy turned and swam away. Only Denis noticed that he had gone.

Coral Romaine—she had long ago decided that her name should be Coral instead of the baptismal Amy—shuffled off her wet bathing-dress under the shelter of a very smart bathing-cloak with green-and-white stripes. Pulling on her pale-rose pyjama-trousers, she reflected, as she did many times in the course of every day, that her figure was simply marvellous.

It was.

Coral was forty-four, and as straight and slim as a well-built girl of twenty. Nothing had spread, anywhere. Automatically, her hands passed down the firm, flat outline of her hips and waist, and she smiled a little, with satisfaction, and then slipped over her head the pyjama-top.

On the rock beside her was an elaborate beach-bag, on green glass rings. Coral sat down and extracted from it everything that she wanted for the lengthy and complicated process of making up her face.

If only her face had remained as young as her figure!

She gazed into her little looking-glass, carefully not frowning because frowning made lines.

The white bathing-helmet was unbecoming, and she hastily took it off, and shook her hair loose. Every day it hurt her afresh that her hair, which once had been ash-blonde in colour and soft in texture, should by imperceptible degrees have become stiff and brittle and lifeless.

It was permanent waving that had done it. No head of hair could stand up against it, year after year. And that time she'd dyed it had been disastrous, too. There was still a faint greenish tinge to be seen on one side of her head.

Coral ran a comb through her hair, sighing.

Then she gently patted the tiny little lines round her eyes. They were very nearly imperceptible—and her eyes were, and always would be, a lovely grey-blue between their darkened lashes. She smeared a very little rouge into her cheeks, and powdered her nose, chin, and forehead with an ochrish powder.

Before applying her lipstick, Coral scrutinised her front teeth very earnestly in the mirror. They were all right—still. And the few that weren't her own were at the back, thank Heaven, and no one could possibly guess.

She reddened her mouth thoroughly. It was a very pretty and alluring mouth still, and there was as yet no sign of a double chin beneath it.

Coral's terror of advancing years was by far the most real thing in her life. She lived only for the excitement of her succession of affairs with men, and it was to her almost unendurable to envisage an existence in which she would cease to be sexually attractive.

So far, there were no signs that she had lost any of her power, and indeed since her separation from Patrick's father, and resultant freedom, it seemed to have increased. There was always someone.

Romaine was a rich man, and he gave her a generous allowance, for herself and for the boy. He knew—and Coral knew that he knew—that he could easily have divorced her—but Romaine was a man of religious scruples.

Coral did not mind. She had no particular wish to marry again. All that she wanted was to go on receiving the allowance, and to be free to go where she liked and do as she liked. She was extravagant, and never out of debt, but she had a natural light-heartedness that enabled her to throw off every impression except the ones of the moment.

She had come to the South of France partly to get away from her creditors in London, and partly at the instigation of a new friend recently met at a suburban Bridge Club—a Mrs. Wolverton-Gush.

"Gushie'll expect me to go and look her up to-night, I suppose," thought Coral, lacing up her bathing-shoes. "I *can't* imagine Gushie out here, wearing a bathing-dress."

She giggled at the thought, for Mrs. Wolverton-Gush was large, and Coral had never seen her dressed in anything except tight, black, pseudo-smart London garments, with touches of white, or of jade-green. She was the widow, she said, of a civil engineer, and had no children. A dishonest trustee, who had eventually committed suicide, was held by Mrs.

Wolverton-Gush responsible for the fact that she was obliged to work for her living. She had, at various times, run a Tea-shop, a Registry Office, a Nursing Home, and a Hostel for Professional Women. Once or twice Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, in a stately way, had borrowed five or ten pounds from Carol, who was open-handed and liked to boast of it. The money had always been paid back again.

It was Mrs. Wolverton-Gush who had introduced Buckland to Mrs. Romaine, at a party given by Coral in London. She had suggested, almost immediately afterwards, that "a great boy like Patrick" ought to have a holiday-tutor, who would be able to drive the car, and swim, and play games with him. A tutor would be invaluable, if they went to the South of France.

"Your friend, Buck, is looking for a job. He's done things of that kind heaps of times," said Coral.

"I dare say he'd take it on. He admires you tremendously. Not that I'd advise you to engage him unless you really feel it would be the best thing for Patrick," had replied Mrs. Wolverton-Gush.

Coral was amused. She knew very well that the whole thing had been arranged beforehand, and that if an engagement for Buckland resulted, Mrs. Wolverton-Gush would claim a commission from him.

Coral cared not at all. Her quarter's allowance had just been paid, she was feeling rich, and the idea of having a big, good-looking young man at her beck and call in a smart Hotel on the Côte d'Azur, appealed to her. And to be *tête-à-tête* with Patrick, whom she found inarticulate and distressingly innocent, often bored her very much.

Buckland treated her with exactly the sort of familiarity that most flattered her, and Coral assured herself that the fact of his being nearly sixteen years younger than herself—whether he knew it or not—would prevent either of them from taking a possible affair too seriously.

Her interpretation of the word "affair" was, however, elastic. In a haze of good-humour, occasioned by recently taken exercise, the consciousness of Buckland's proximity, and the prospect of drinks and noise and people as soon as they should get back to the Hotel, Mrs. Romaine sang to herself as she tied the last shoelace.

Buckland, swinging round a corner, almost ran into her.

"Give me a cigarette," she commanded.

"I was just bringing them along. Here—keep still. I'll light it for you."

He was holding her arm when Patrick pulled himself up from the water and came across the rock, dripping.

"Had a good swim, Patrick? Where are the others?" called out Buckland.

"I don't know."

The boy vanished behind a rock.

"What a surly young beggar it is!" muttered Buckland. "Did you hear the way he spoke to me?"

"What's upset him?"

"How should I know?"

"Well, it's your job to find out, isn't it?" observed Mrs. Romaine without rancour. "You're his tutor, aren't you?"

"If you say so," grinned Buckland, looking straight into her eyes. "Personally, I should have thought there were lots of things I could do better than chasing about after a schoolboy who hasn't got the manners of a Hottentot."

Coral laughed. She was not paying much attention to his words, but her pulses were beating faster than usual as his warm grasp tightened strongly on her arm.

#### (4)

Mervyn Morgan did not go into the water to meet his two younger children. He watched them, swimming well and

steadily, the boy David keeping slightly ahead of his sister.

"Daddy!"

"Hallo."

David climbed up beside his father. He was a silent little boy, very sturdy and freckled. Mervyn liked him the best of his children, because he was a boy, and also because he was the least critical of the three.

"Is mummy here?" Mervyn asked.

"No, she didn't come. Patrick's mother brought us down in the Buick."

After that they sat in silence, except for occasional monosyllabic replies shouted to Gwennie, who was haranguing them from the sea.

She was a moon-faced, gregarious child, of indomitable vitality and considerable intelligence.

When she, also, landed, Mervyn said, "Well done!" because Gwennie was a girl, and he felt that girls needed encouragement, especially when they performed feats of physical strength or endurance.

Gwennie threw herself flat on the rock and went on talking. She was fat, but firm—delightfully brown and sturdy, with eyes like big blue jewels set in apricot-bloom.

"Me and David are the only people who've done any real swimming this afternoon. Olwen and Patrick are just sitting talking, and Dulcie hadn't even begun undressing when we started. She came down in her beach pyjamas. Dulcie says her daddy says, little ladies don't wear shorts. So I said I s'pose he wouldn't think Olwen a lady, or me, or anybody."

Gwennie emitted a short, scornful laugh.

Mervyn smiled, but paid no attention whatever. It seldom occurred to him to listen to the conversation of his children, unless one of them was seriously seeking information about sport, or machinery, or natural history. He left it to his wife, Mary, to enlighten them on other topics, although he was reluctantly aware that Mary's opinions and his own differed in many directions. Nevertheless, it was his optimistic conviction that Olwen and David and Gwennie would all eventually grow up into orthodox Christians, and good Conservatives, with only a very cautious and modified adherence to the principles of the League of Nations.

"... And Mr. Waller never seems to go into the water *at all*. He just sits about, getting himself sunburnt. Him and me are having a competition in brownness."

"Which is winning?" David enquired.

"I am," said Gwennie firmly.

Why hadn't Mary come down, Mervyn wondered. It was a mistake to let the children go about with people like Mrs. Romyne, and that common fellow calling himself a tutor. Mary should have known better.

It was Captain Morgan's custom to pass judgment, usually silently, on his wife's management of their children. He was very fond of her, but he thought her unpractical, and with ideas of which his mother would never have approved. His mother, actually, had been a censorious and narrow-minded Welshwoman, of the type that seeks to secure her children's affection, rather than their development as independent beings, but of this Mervyn Morgan was not at all aware. He had been brought up to believe that whatever the mothers of other people might be, his own was sacred, and to that belief—as to most of those in which he had been brought up—he still adhered, at forty-eight years old.

Mervyn Morgan had been to Eton and Oxford, he had joined the Army in 1914, had been in France and Flanders almost continuously throughout the War, and had been awarded the D.S.O. He had married a charming girl whom he had known ever since she had first ridden to hounds, and whose father's property joined that of the Morgans in South Wales; and he had gallantly, and not too unsuccessfully, farmed his own land ever since his father's death, two months after the Armistice. In person, he was tall and young-looking for his years, fair like his children, and a fine horseman. Nothing could be further removed from him than the whimsical, the mischievous, the subtle. Nevertheless, an analogy might be

held to exist between Captain Morgan and the character of Peter Pan, for he was essentially of those who never grow up.

"Why don't we *do* something?" enquired Gwennie vigorously. "Let's swim back to the others. Or would you rather stay here, David?"

"Which would daddy rather?"

"I suppose time's getting on. Is Mrs. Romaine going to drive you back?"

"I'll walk with you, daddy," said David.

"So'll I."

"Then we'd better get a move on, or we shall be late for dinner."

"Isn't it marvellous having late dinner *every night*?" said Gwennie in an awed voice. "I don't see how we're ever going to be able to settle down at home again, after this. Look, I'm going to dive."

She dived very well. Her father had taught her.

This place, he thought, has brought their swimming on, if it's done nothing else.

It had been Mary's idea to come to the South of France in August. She had an extraordinary passion for the sun, and real, blazing heat. (She'd certainly got it, with the temperature at one-hundred-and-one degrees Fahrenheit by the Hotel thermometer.) An unexpected legacy had come to her the year before, and she had deliberately decided to spend one-third of it on taking them all to this place.

Mervyn had not approved, but he was a fair-minded man—it was Mary's money, and they had no debts to speak of—and one might reasonably argue that it would improve the children's French, and their swimming, and perhaps help Mary to catch fewer bronchial colds next winter.

They went—but Mervyn, on principle, continued to remind his wife that it was an extravagance, and that he, personally, would have enjoyed Scotland a great deal more. Besides, look at the Exchange!

There was a second splash, as David jumped into the water after Gwennie.

"Well——" said Mervyn.

He executed a beautiful swallow-dive, since there was no one to see him except his children, who were not looking.

He had really gone to the distant island-rock all by himself in order to have the fun of trick-diving, at which he was an adept.

It would have seemed out of the question, to Morgan, to display this accomplishment in front of casual acquaintances or strangers.

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## CHAPTER III

### (1)

Cocktails in the hall before dinner had worked their accustomed miracle. Under their magical influence, a discovery had been made.

The villa—Les Mimosas—a mile or two from the Hôtel d'Azur in the direction of St. Raphael, to which the young Moons proposed to carry their letter of introduction, was none other than the villa where Mrs. Romaine's friend, Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, had arrived three days earlier.

"How marvellous!" ejaculated Angie Moon, absent-mindedly.

"Quite marvellous!" Hilary added. "The only thing is, the name wasn't Wolverton-Gush. I mean, one would know so well if it had been, wouldn't one?"

"Perhaps she's leading a double life," suggested Buckland facetiously.

"How perfectly marvellous!"

"Let's go down and see after dinner, shall we?"

"Let's all go," said Mrs. Romaine. "I could do with another drink, personally. Buck, call that *garçon*."

"I don't know his name."

"Idiot! Besides, it's Emile."

"Talking about names, Hilary, can you possibly remember *who* it was, at the Mimosas? We think we've lost the letter," explained Angie.

"It was Chrissie Something."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Romaine. "That's it, then. What's everyone going to have? Mine's a Bronx."

The Moons, perceiving that they were to be included in a distribution of free drinks, temporarily emerged from their languor.

Buckland gave the order, and included in it a dry Martini for his own consumption, and Mrs. Romaine signed the bill.

"I can tell you about Chrissie, more or less. Her name's Chrissie Challoner, and she's one of these creatures who write—don't ask me what, because I don't know."

"One's heard of her," said Hilary, with a slight readjustment of his horn-rimmed spectacles—a gesture that he unconsciously used whenever he was showing off his familiarity with the life of the intellect. (It was a peculiarity that had already been observed and condemned by Mr. Bolham.)

"One's heard of her. One or two novels. One hasn't read them, of course."

"Well, I must say I'd never heard of her. But it seems that someone or other lent her this villa, and she felt she couldn't cope with running it, and servants, and all that, and this friend of mine, Ruth Wolverton-Gush, is doing all that part of it for her."

"People who write always pretend they can't do anything else. It's a pose, I expect," said Buckland, looking at Angie Moon.

"I expect so," she agreed. "I loathe affectation, don't you?"

"Absolutely."

"Anyhow, Gushie scores," declared Mrs. Romaine. "She's on a soft job, from all accounts. The girl's got lots of money,

and doesn't care what happens so long as she isn't bothered. She sits scribbling all the morning, I believe, and Gushie sees the cook, and does a bit of typing, and then in the afternoon and evening they just amuse themselves. Gushie's been with her before, in London. Come on, let's go and have dinner."

The Hotel dining-room was built out on a high terrace, overlooking the sea. Three sides of it were glass-enclosed. The best tables in the room had been allocated in accordance with some secret, and entirely arbitrary, standard of the proprietor's. They stood near the windows, and had been given to Mr. Bolham, the Morgan family, the three noisy Frenchmen travelling *en famille* with their wives and a couple of fat, swarthy children, and Mr. Muller, who was by himself, but was said to be expecting his wife and family.

Down the middle of the room were the other, less favoured, tables—to which not a breath of air could ever penetrate in the middle of the day—and at the far end of it, close up against the screen that concealed the swing-door into the kitchen, was the altogether inferior station allotted to Dulcie Courteney and her father. Usually Dulcie sat there all by herself, and was served last—and sometimes with a strangely curtailed meal, if Henri, the waiter, was in a spiteful mood. A feud subsisted between the Hotel servants and Courteney, whom they regarded as being no better than one of themselves.

Far down the room—but not as far down as Dulcie—sat the young French couple, the Duvals. She was a plump, brown-skinned, brown-eyed creature, vividly painted, and oddly resembling her equally plump and brown-eyed husband.

They ate and drank voraciously, and their conversation consisted principally of an interminable discussion on the merits and demerits of the food. Sometimes they argued.

"*Mais voyons, Marcelle, tu déraisonnes ...*"

"*Au contraire, c'est toi n'as pas le sens commun ...*"

"*Allons, fais l'entêtée, maintenant!*"

"*Espèce d'idiot!*"

"*Petite sottise que tu es ...*"

Usually their quarrels ended in a sound smack on Marcelle's bare arm or shoulder from her husband. Then she would very often burst out laughing, and sometimes they would kiss one another openly across the table.

"My God, they make me sick," said Angie Moon, watching them.

"Restaurant-proprietors from Lyons or Marseilles, I should imagine," Hilary said haughtily.

"They've got money, though. I saw them in a huge car this evening, and they've ordered champagne—look."

"My God, what do people like that want with money?"

The *sommelier* came up to Hilary and asked what he would take to drink.

"I suppose the champagne's good here. Anyway it ought to be," said Hilary, and ordered a bottle.

Dinner was nearly over before the Moons spoke again. Then Hilary said:

"Is that woman taking her car to look up these Villa Mimosa people?"

"They didn't garage it, they left it outside."

"I suppose they're good for a lift."

"Yes, they are."

Angie knew that Buckland, at any rate, would suggest taking them in the car. Faintly, but unmistakably, she felt already vibrating between them the first magnetic thrillings of mutual attraction.

Hilary, less fortunate, looked gloomily round the room and decided that it did not contain a single woman who could possibly prove worth his while. He hoped, without seriously expecting the hope to be realised, that Chrissie Challoner

might appeal to him. It was in her favour—and Hilary fully realised how much he differed from ordinary men in feeling it to be so—that she was a writer of novels.

## (2)

A painful situation prevailed at the table to which Mr. Bolham, day by day, and almost meal by meal, arrived later and later to confront his secretary.

Conversation between them, since the decrees of civilisation forbade that it should be dispensed with altogether, was becoming increasingly difficult. It had always lacked spontaneity, even at the very beginning of their association, for Denis was too self-conscious, and Mr. Bolham too critical, for the successful manufacture of small-talk.

Each had made efforts, especially at first.

Denis had offered small and platitudinous observations on subjects that he held to be relevant to Mr. Bolham's work, until his intuition had warned him that he was losing ground rather than gaining it.

Mr. Bolham had—at the very beginning—mentioned books and authors, and Denis had followed his customary methods and had claimed, brightly and enthusiastically, to know something about almost all of them. Again, and very swiftly, an inner certainty gripped him unpleasantly somewhere in the midriff, and he knew that his employer had seen through his small pretences, and was probably despising him for them.

The most unsuccessful phase of all had been that in which Mr. Bolham had tried to show an interest in the life and circumstances of his secretary, to the terror and horror of Denis, whose private life was even more complicated than are most private lives, being hedged about by a number of small, sordid, makeshift arrangements, of which he was intensely ashamed, and punctuated by the jobs that he had obtained through personal interest, and lost through incompetence.

In addition, the varied aspects of himself that he was in the habit of presenting to the world would, Denis felt certain, lay him open to a charge of insincerity if any of his employers, friends, or acquaintances should ever meet and compare notes. He was therefore at continual pains to conceal the identity of these one from another. All these fears—added to his original fear of the penetrating and cynical eye of Mr. Bolham, which was increasing daily—combined to turn their *tête-à-tête* meals into an ordeal that Denis found little short of purgatorial, nor was it much more endurable to Mr. Bolham.

"I hope you have some work for me this evening, sir," Denis said uncertainly, after a protracted silence.

"Nothing this evening, thank you. Go out—go down to the Casino—swim by moonlight. Anything you like."

"I dare say I shall take a walk. I'm used to a great deal of exercise," replied Denis. He made such statements entirely at random, scarcely stopping to reflect whether they were true or untrue, driven only by his anxiety to impress, and—in this case—by a nagging suspicion that Mr. Bolham thought him deficient in manliness.

"Walk by all means," replied his employer. "Will you have coffee?"

"Thank you so much—if you're having some."

"*Un café*," said Mr. Bolham to the waiter.

He knew that Denis knew that he never took coffee, and Denis was aware that he knew it. Nevertheless, Denis was compelled to utter his little meaningless formula of conditional acceptance. He wanted coffee because he was naturally greedy, and because he had often been so poor that it was almost impossible to him to refuse anything that would be paid for by somebody else.

In the condition of inward conflict that was his usual state of mind, Denis followed Mr. Bolham from the dining-room.

As he went, he was alert to catch the eye of anyone who might possibly be looking at him. It gave him self-confidence to be recognised, and it also, subconsciously, made him feel safer. If he was looking at the people whom he passed, then they could not, themselves, be watching him unobserved.

"Waller, are you doing anything after dinner?" asked Buckland, as he went past.

"Nothing very special. Not in the early part of the evening, at any rate."

People might think that he wasn't any good at his job if he had too much free time. He had hinted once or twice before that much of his work was done in the silence of the night. And indeed, he would willingly have worked at so suitable and dramatic an hour had Mr. Bolham suggested it. But Mr. Bolham never did.

"Come along with us, and pay a call on a celebrated lady-novelist. We'll make a party of it, won't we?" Buckland appealed to Mrs. Romyne.

"That's right. The new people are coming along—their name's Moon. They've got a letter of introduction or something. We'll make a night of it. Can't you get Mr. Bolham to come too, Mr. Waller?"

"I think he has some reading he wants to do. But I should be very pleased indeed—that is to say, if it isn't an intrusion \_\_\_\_\_"

"We'll go in the car," said Mrs. Romyne, powdering her nose.

"Thank you so much. I should be delighted to come. Thank you."

With a little bow, he moved on.

"Ass!" said Mrs. Romyne, audibly.

Denis supposed that she was addressing Buckland. He thought her a dreadful woman, but he wanted to meet young Mrs. Moon, whose looks he had admired very much on the terrace that afternoon, and he was excited at the idea of going to see a celebrated novelist. He wished that he had ever read any of her books.

In the hall, Mr. Bolham was talking to Mrs. Morgan. He had taken a chair, and the coffee—Denis's coffee—was on a little table in front of him.

Denis nervously poured some out into the cup. Then he saw Gwennie Morgan, and instinctively he smiled at her, and for a moment forgot Denis Waller.

"I'm sorry to say I've got to go to bed," announced Gwennie resentfully. "I suppose you're going to have a marvellous time."

"Not specially, Gwennie. I'm going to be taken by Mrs. Romyne to call on a lady who writes books."

"That's much more exciting than just going to bed. Is Patrick Romyne going with you?"

"I don't know. I hope he is."

"Why?"

"Well, I think he's a very nice boy, don't you?" Denis enquired mildly.

He remembered with genuine compassion that Patrick was in need of help. Denis had meant—and still meant—to try and gain an influence over him. Service, thought Denis vaguely and splendidly .... Service and brotherhood....

"Oh, Mr. Waller," said the breathless voice of Dulcie Courteney. "Oh, I must tell you,—what do you think?—Pops is arriving to-morrow! Isn't it lovely?"

"How exciting," said Denis sympathetically. "You didn't think he'd be coming so soon, did you?"

"No, Mr. Waller, I didn't. It's lovely, isn't it? I must tell Mrs. Morgan."

She told Mrs. Morgan, who made suitable reply, and was backed up by an indeterminate murmur from Mr. Bolham, and then Dulcie looked all round the hall.

"I feel I simply must tell *everyone*," she announced in her lisping treble. "You see, it's so lovely for me. I do love my Pops. You see, I haven't got a mummie, like Gwennie and Olwen have, and so Pops means just everything to me."

She flitted off, and Denis, who was really rather touched, observed: "Poor little thing!"

"Poor little thing nothing," harshly and unexpectedly exclaimed Mrs. Romaine at his elbow. "That kid makes me perfectly sick, with her Pops this and Pops the other. No wonder she hasn't got a mother! *Any* woman would leave a child like that."

"If *you* had a child like that, would you leave her?" enquired Gwennie with assumed artlessness.

Her mother said: "Good-night, Gwennie. Go now," and Mrs. Romaine laughed.

"I like Gwennie," she said good-temperedly. "She's so downright. Well, boys and girls, what about it? The car's outside."

She swept out, with the air of one making an exit.

Denis, following with Buckland, heard Mrs. Morgan's low, clear voice addressing Mr. Bolham.

"I don't think I should exactly call Gwennie downright, myself. She's much too Welsh."

"Personally, I should say she was abominably and precociously subtle-minded," said Mr. Bolham, and they both laughed.

Denis was quite startled at the sound of a laugh from his employer.

The Buick was outside.

"Who's driving, Coral?" enquired Buckland, speaking rather too loudly. It was the first time he had called her Coral in public.

"I'll drive myself, for a change. Get in, everyone."

"Isn't Patrick coming?" asked Buckland uneasily.

"No, he says he's got a book he wants to finish. Get in, Mr. What-is-it—oh, hell, can't we all use Christian names and have done with it? I'm Coral."

"I'm Hilary, and she's Angie."

Denis said nothing. He was divided between his anxiety to please the people with whom he found himself, and prove himself at home in their group, and his nervous, middle-class anxiety as to the conventionalities. He felt sure that the Morgans, for instance, wouldn't exchange Christian names with hotel acquaintances. Mrs. Romaine, unaware of these conflicting points of view, settled the matter for him.

"You're Denis, I know. You're not Irish, are you?"

"No—no, I'm not. My grandfather, as a matter of fact, was Scotch—my mother's father. I believe I'm entitled to wear the plaid of the——"

"Hop in," said Buckland. "You can't wear kilts here, if that's what you're after."

The laughter that followed seemed to Denis unnecessary. He felt rather disappointed in Mrs. Moon, but she looked lovely in a pale moonlight-blue pyjama suit, cut very low, with her thick, fair curls of hair brushed back behind her ears.

Almost like Esther Ralston, or someone, thought Denis. He sat next to Buckland, who, with his accustomed lack of manners, had climbed first into the car and taken his place next to Angie Moon. The car was a wide one, but Denis could feel the hard, swelling thews and sinews of Buckland's substantial thigh, pressing against his own, and the contact displeased and offended him.

He was glad when the Buick, after flying dangerously round the steep curves of the road, presently drew up with grinding brakes at the entrance to a little white villa, standing in the midst of pines and olives, by the side of the coast.

"I spotted the name on the gate, just as I was going to pass it," said Mrs. Romaine.

They got out. Denis stood politely at the door of the car, extending a hand to assist Angie Moon, but she did not seem to see it, and again Denis felt snubbed.

It was the first time that he had been to a French house that was neither a shop nor a hotel, and he thought the tiny garden, with a small, romantic fountain splashing in a stone basin, very pretty.

A woman in a black dress and white apron came to the door, smiled at them and said:

*"Par ici, messieurs-dames. Sur la terrasse."*

They followed her in single file across a little circular room, evidently a living-room, and then through a side door, to a kind of pavilion, an oblong of white pavement set between white pillars, overlooking the sea and roofed in with thick, twisted vines. Wicker chairs with bright cretonne cushions stood about, and a round marble-topped table held a tray and coffee-cups. Sitting upright in front of it was a rather monumental lady in a black evening dress, talking to a small group of people. She broke off—well she might, thought Denis—at the sight of five visitors coming in, one after another, and there was a good deal of noise, some laughter from Mrs. Romaine, and a few—but not enough—introductions.

An acute attack of self-consciousness invaded Denis. He was amongst those—they were in the majority—who had neither been introduced themselves, nor had anyone else introduced to them, and the absence of these formalities left him uncertain, and afraid of doing the wrong thing.

Moreover there were not nearly enough chairs to go round. This was pointed out by the lady in black. She looked exactly as Denis had imagined that a successful lady-novelist—for so he designated her in his thoughts—would look—dark, and massive, and rather imperious. She might have been any age between forty-eight and sixty. Her voice was deep, and rather commanding.

"Some of you must take cushions, and sit on the edge of the cliff. Don't fall over."

Mrs. Romaine threw herself into one of the wicker armchairs. Denis hesitated, looked round for Angie Moon, and saw with disgust that she and Buckland, carrying cushions, had already disappeared into the shadow of the olive trees that fringed the little terrace on the cliffs.

"It's much nicer outside. Let's go," said, in a very soft voice, one of the girls who had stood up when first they came in, and had shaken hands rather indiscriminately.

She picked up some more coloured cushions.

"Allow me."

Denis became more at ease with the utterance of one of his favourite formulas. It made him feel chivalrous to take the cushions from the girl and carry them out, and she was so tiny that he unconsciously had the illusion of being himself tall, and strong, and protective.

He glanced at her once or twice, as they settled themselves in an angle of wall and tree-trunk, very close to the edge of the rocks, and she lit a cigarette.

She was so small and slight that she could almost have been mistaken for a child, and there was something childish also in her little round head, with the fine, straight dark hair, hanging in a fringe almost to her eyebrows. Her narrow little olive face was striking rather than pretty, but her eyes—enormous and brilliant—shone like dancing amber flames above the glow of her cigarette.

"Won't you smoke too?"

"Thank you, I think I will."

He took a cigarette from the black enamel case she held out to him, noting from force of habit, as the indigent do, that it, as well as the cigarettes inside it, was of an expensive variety.

He prepared himself to begin the conversation with the enquiry: "Do you know the South of France well?"

He thought this was a very good opening, and had made use of it several times already.

The girl, however, spoke just as he was going to do so.

"What's your name?"

Denis was startled.

"I beg your pardon—I'm so sorry. Of course, I ought to have introduced myself. My name is Waller. I came with Mrs. Romaine, from the Hôtel d'Azur. I—I happen to be staying there."

She ignored the last part of his speech.

"What else besides Waller?"

"What else?"

"What other name, I mean?"

"Oh. Denis. My full name is Denis Hannaford Waller."

"Mine's Chrissie Challoner."

"Are you——"

In the extremity of his astonishment, Denis faced round at her in the moonlight.

"You're not the—the lady who writes books?"

She nodded, looking oddly like a small child confessing to a misdeed.

"I'd no idea," said Denis confusedly. "I never thought you'd be so young, for one thing."

"I'm twenty-eight, but I know I look much younger than that. It's rather luck for me, isn't it? You see, I've been writing ever since I was nineteen."

"To tell you the truth, I thought the lady in black—the tall one—must be Miss Challoner."

"That's Mrs. Wolverton-Gush—Gushie. She's doing secretary for me for the time being—only it's mostly housekeeping."

"Are you—are you writing a book just now?" asked Denis reverently. He had a tremendous and indiscriminate admiration for any form of creative work.

"I'm correcting the proofs of my last one. It'll be out in October."

"May I—am I allowed to ask what it's called?"

She laughed.

"You may ask anything you like—I don't mind. But you're not obliged to pretend you're interested, you know. It's not as if I was a celebrity. I don't suppose you'd ever heard of me, before this evening."

"Indeed I had," said Denis quickly. "I know some of your work, in fact."

Instantly, he wished he had not said it. He didn't want to tell lies to Chrissie Challoner—he had only done so from habit.

"Do you *really*?" she said wistfully.

To Denis's incredulous astonishment, he heard himself replying: "No. That wasn't true. I haven't really read any of your books. I don't know why I said I had, just now, except, I suppose, that I wanted you to like me. But I can't say what isn't true, to you."

Almost as the words left his lips, he would have given anything to recall them. She'd think him mad—loathe and despise him. His whole body was invaded by a burning heat, and then an icy cold.

He had barely time to know it before she answered, in a quick, warm rush of words.

"I think it's wonderful of you to tell me that. The biggest compliment that anyone has ever paid me."

A gratitude so intense that it almost choked him, caught Denis by the throat. He had scarcely known, until then, that generosity could exist, for weaknesses such as his.

"I didn't know—I didn't think you'd understand," he stammered, the sense of exquisite relief bringing him perilously near to the tears that he always dreaded, because they came to him with such terrible readiness.

"But of course I do," she said softly. "I know why you wanted to—fib—it's so easy, isn't it?—and then how you wished you hadn't. Lots of people are like that. But not one in a thousand ever does what you did, afterwards."

"Oh—" said Denis, and to his horror, his voice broke slightly. "I didn't know there was anybody like you—anybody who'd understand."

"You poor boy!" she said under her breath, and without surprise, with only an upwelling sense of unspeakable comfort and reassurance, he felt her hand seeking for his, and clasping it.

"You're marvellous," said Denis, under his breath.

"Hasn't anyone ever given you any sort of understanding before?"

He shook his head dumbly.

"Have you been terribly lonely, always?"

"Always. My mother died when I was six. They sent me to a boarding-school where I wasn't happy—I was bullied, rather—" He shuddered, and hurried on quickly, warding off memories that he had avoided for years. "I wasn't ever very strong, physically, and I suppose I was sensitive. I was always unhappy, I know."

"Your father wasn't any good to you?"

"He married again. My stepmother didn't like me. She said I was deceitful, and told lies. I dare say it was true—in fact I know it was. You see, I was frightened."

"I know."

The passionate pity in her voice entranced him. He could scarcely believe it was really for him.

"You were frightened because you knew they wouldn't understand, and you thought they'd laugh at you, or despise you," she added softly. "And sometimes, those fears come to life again now, and make you say and do things you don't really mean—poor Denis!"

She called him by his name so naturally that it was not until afterwards that he realised she had done so.

"Hasn't there ever been anybody with whom you've dared to be really yourself?"

"No. Never really. Sometimes, for a little while, and in patches—but not always and about everything—oh no."

There was a sudden burst of noisy laughter from the group round the table, and a scuffle that overturned a wicker stool.... Denis, involuntarily, half stood up. Chrissie's small fingers, shifting to his wrist, gently forced him down again.

"It's all right, dear—don't go."

He sat down again, but the spell was broken. His terrible self-consciousness invaded him, he asked himself in an agony what all this meant—why he was giving himself away like this to a girl whom he didn't know, whom he had met for the first time half an hour ago?

"It's all right," repeated Chrissie urgently.

She seemed instantly to have sensed his change of mood.

"Denis, listen. I knew directly I saw you that we had something to do with one another. I can't tell you why, or what it

means exactly. I expect after you've gone away to-night, you'll be frightened again, and wonder how we could ever have talked like this—two people who've only just met. But I want you to trust me. Do you think you could?"

"Chrissie——"

He didn't know what to say, unable to believe in what had befallen him, and fearful of alienating her sympathy either by word or silence.

The other people—he thought of them in a sort of collective confusion—were moving about, talking and laughing, and making a lot of noise. Somebody started a gramophone, and the catchy refrain of a new dance-record blared out into the night.

The cheap appeal of it acted as a direct stimulus to Denis's already quivering emotionalism.

"Do you really mean it? Do you really want us to be friends?" he asked, still half incredulous.

"Really, really, Denis. I'm lonely, too—not like you've been, but quite enough. I'll tell you, some day. I know it sounds absurd, but I think you and I have been looking for one another, all this time."

"I used to think there must be someone like you in the world, and that some day we'd meet," he murmured. "But I'd given up any hope of it—even now, I don't feel it can really be true."

"Anyone want a drink?" shouted a man's voice.

"You don't, do you?" whispered Chrissie.

Denis shook his head, still dazed.

The gramophone record came to an end, and the sound of voices surged up again, interspersed with loud laughter and the chink of glass.

"Chrissie!" someone cried.

She gripped Denis's hand tighter, and did not stir.

"Where's Chrissie?"

"Fallen over the cliff, perhaps. I thought I heard a splash."

"No, she's had an idea and rushed away to put it on paper."

"Gone for a moonlight bathe."

"Who with?"

"Why not by herself? We're not all like you, Coral, trotting about with boy-friends all the time."

"Damn it, I think someone ought to find Chrissie," objected a voice—masculine, and not entirely sober. "She's our hostess, after all. Why, she may be drowned for all we know."

"She was here when we arrived. I saw her."

"I shall have to go in a minute," Chrissie said, speaking low and quickly. "Tell me—how long are you staying at the Hôtel d'Azur?"

"I don't know—about a fortnight or three weeks, I expect. I'm with a Mr. Bolham—" Denis gulped. "I—I'm his temporary secretary, you know."

He minded saying it. He would have liked to pretend that he was staying at the Hôtel d'Azur independently, for a holiday. But Chrissie did not seem to notice the admission of his subordinate position.

"Do you have a certain amount of free time—in the afternoons, for instance, or after dinner?"

"I can usually get off in the afternoons. He works in the mornings, and sometimes between tea and dinner. I could get most of my stuff done in the evenings, if I wanted to."

"If you don't mind the heat——"

"I love it," put in Denis eagerly.

"—Then come down here—no, you haven't got a car. I'll pick you up at the bottom of the Hôtel d'Azur drive, at two o'clock to-morrow. Bring your bathing-things. We'll go to a place I know along the coast. There's never anybody there. We can talk."

"Chrissie, how wonderful! Do you really mean that *you* want to talk to *me*?"

Her great dark eyes looking full at him, she answered softly and deliberately:

"Much more than I want anything else in the world."

His head was reeling. It couldn't really be true—presently he would wake up, and life would be what it had always been—a nerve-racking, anxious, unsatisfying affair, shot through with continual shafts of fear—the fear of poverty, of failure, of disgrace—above all, the continual fear of being found out in one way or another.

"Denis, are you happier than when you came here to-night?"

He drew a long breath.

"Oh, my dear. It's like being in another world altogether. Everything's changed."

They looked at one another with enchanted eyes. In hers Denis saw the reflection of his own newborn sincerity. A glowing exaltation seemed to envelop him, persisting all through the riotous hour that followed, when he and Chrissie Challoner were drawn into the vortex of noisy talk and laughter that raged up and down the little dark garden and the stone pavilion.

Angie Moon, dancing languorously with Buckland to the strains of the cheap and raucous gramophone, Coral Romaine screaming gynecological confidences at Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, Hilary withdrawn in sulky superiority behind the pages of a French novel, other people unknown to him, talking interminably to Chrissie about literary scandals and rumours of scandals—Denis saw and heard them through a haze.

For the first time in his life, he was utterly happy.

### (3)

It was one o'clock in the morning when the Buick stopped in front of the Hôtel d'Azur. A single light was burning in the hall, over the desk of the *concierge*. Madame, sallow-faced and with eyelids puffy from fatigue, sat there making entries in her ledgers. She raised her head and smiled at the noisy entry of Coral Romaine and the Moons, but there was a gleam of hatred in her black eyes.

"*Vous avez passé une bonne soirée, messieurs-dames?*" she said in an amiable voice, and glanced meaningfully up at the clock. "*Tout le monde est couché depuis longtemps.*"

No one answered. Angie said: "I don't know what she's talking about," and walked, with her swaying gait, to the lift.

Buckland was following her, but Mrs. Romaine called out sharply: "It won't take more than two people. It sticks. You can just walk up, Buck."

She went into the tiny lift and slammed the gate. It ascended weakly and jerkily, bearing her and Angie Moon out of sight.

"No hope of a drink, I suppose," grumbled Hilary. He had had a disappointing evening, no one had taken any particular notice of him, and Chrissie Challoner, after all, wasn't his type at all. He suspected her of being a Lesbian, as he did all intelligent women to whom his own masculinity obviously made no immediate appeal. Sulkily he went upstairs.

Denis found himself in his own room, on the third floor, without the slightest recollection of how he had got there. In a

trance, he undressed himself, and switched off the light. Then he knelt down by the bedside, as he did every night of his life, and hid his face in his hands. Happiness surged over him, until he felt as though his spirit must drown in bliss.

Chrissie ...

Incoherent words of thankfulness formed themselves on his lips—he was praying half aloud.

Denis's belief in a personal God had grown up with him. Often and often it had been his only defence against despair, and self-condemnation, and the overwhelming inward certainty of his own inability ever to rise above circumstances. He clung ardently to his conviction that God understood him, and would help him when things became unendurable, and not allow him to remain for ever unfriended, and lonely, and obscure. This faith in God was on a par with Denis's secret dramatisation of himself as a reincarnated soul, sent to help others less evolved. He had neither the mentality nor the temperament that analyses before accepting, and his passionate adherence to a God who cared profoundly and individually for Denis Hannaford Waller was in proportion to his supreme need of reassurance, his deadly and corroding fear of being somehow inferior to the rest of humanity.

It was still natural to Denis, as natural as it had been in childhood, to translate his emotions into terms of prayer. He knelt for a long time by the side of the bed, unconscious of the slightly absurd conjunction of this traditional attitude of supplication with his neat, blue-striped pyjama suit, his carefully brushed little narrow head clasped in his long, skinny fingers, and the upturned soles of his slipperless feet.

When at last he climbed into bed, it was heaven to lie in the stillness, the window wide open to the breathless, starlit night, and relive, over and over again, every instant of the evening spent with Chrissie Challoner. He could remember everything that she had said, and that he had answered, and every intonation of her softly spoken phrases. He could feel again the close, steady pressure of her small hand as they said good-night.

He did not allow himself fully to realise that he had fallen violently in love. He thought of the strong compulsion that had drawn Chrissie and himself towards one another as an irresistible spiritual affinity, a mutual recognition. And indeed it was true that physical desire, in Denis, was almost as undeveloped as in a young child, deeply inhibited as he was by obscure terrors, sham idealism, and the intense shyness of the eternally self-conscious. His day-dreams were still those of an unawakened adolescent.

Far too profoundly excited to sleep, he lay with open eyes until dawn flooded the sky with an exquisite, clear, pale green.

Denis turned over, placing one hand beneath his cheek like a child, and his eyelids closed. Imperceptibly he drifted, on a tide of radiant happiness, into sleep.

#### (4)

The rickety gate of the shaky little lift clanged on a shrill, uncertain note as Coral Romaine stepped out of it.

It clanged again as Angie Moon slammed it, and pressed the button that should take her up a floor higher.

Coral, yawning, and unfastening hooks with one hand, hung for a moment over the banisters. She could see Buckland and young Moon coming up the stairs, not talking, Hilary walking ahead.

"Good-night," she called.

They looked up.

"Good-night," said Hilary. He sounded rather surly.

Coral trailed very slowly along the passage towards the door of her own room at the far end of it. She heard Hilary's steps, on the marble, going up higher. Then Buckland's heavy tread, pausing on the top step. She did not turn round.

In another moment, she heard him following her down the long passage. Timing herself carefully, she allowed him to catch up with her just as she reached the bedroom door.

"Got all you want?" he asked casually.

"I expect so. Don't wait for me to-morrow morning. I shall have breakfast up here."

"All right."

She had opened her door, and he was half in and half out of the room.

"That yellow thing you've got on looks marvellous. It suits you too terribly well."

He fingered the filmy stuff that hung at her breast.

"Shut up, Buck—you'll wake the hotel, and make a scandal. Good-night."

"Good-night—Coral."

He took hold of her by the shoulders.

"What's up?"

"Nothing. Go to bed."

"Aren't you going to say good-night to me?"

"How much would you mind if I didn't?"

"A lot more than you think."

"Liar!"

Coral freed herself, and pushed him away with both hands. He resisted, and for a moment they swayed together in a laughing struggle. Then Coral abruptly stood still and said: "Hark! What was that?"

Somewhere a door had shut softly.

"I didn't hear anything," said Buckland, without much conviction.

"I did. Good-night."

She shut her door in his face, and after a second's hesitation he turned away and went upstairs.

## (5)

Patrick Romaine stood still, pressed closely against the door that he had so cautiously and quickly shut.

He heard Buckland's footsteps recede along the passage and die away in the distance. He could also hear his mother moving things about in the room next door. Once she dropped something, and he was almost sure that he caught the sound of a brief ejaculation. But perhaps that was imagination, because he knew that she always did swear, briefly and without real anger, whenever she dropped things.

There was a communicating door between the rooms, but she wouldn't open it. Probably she thought he'd gone to sleep long ago, and of course he was much too old now for her to come in and look at him asleep, as she'd sometimes done when he was little.

Most likely she wouldn't even notice that there was a light under his door, if he were to switch it on and read for a bit.

He fixed his mind on the detective story in the Tauchnitz volume lent him by Olwen Morgan.

It was a good yarn.

Patrick got into bed and read steadily, trying hard to keep his mind on the story.

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## CHAPTER IV

### (1)

Almost everyone had coffee and rolls in the morning on the terrace at the Hôtel d'Azur.

Only one waiter was on duty, and he went without much haste backwards and forwards between the little tables under the red-and-white umbrellas, up the steps, through the hall, and to the service-regions behind the dining-room.

So that almost everyone was kept waiting a long time for breakfast. This was resented most by Mr. Muller, the tall American. He had, however, discovered—more by intuition than anything else—that the Hotel actually contained someone else who was, like himself, a chess-player, in the person of Mr. Bolham.

At the singular hour of eight in the morning they met on the terrace, and silently played chess.

It was the coolest time in the day, and a breeze rustled the stiff leaves of the palms, and fluttered the red-and-white check tablecloths that were being laid on the tables by the waiter and Gwennie Morgan.

Gwennie was always friendly with hotel servants. They always made a fuss of her, and gave her things to eat, and told her interesting stories about other people. The fact that she knew hardly any French never appeared to interfere with these amenities. She ran briskly about, in her little blue bathing-suit, and was a success with everybody.

Dulcie Courteney, who had far more need of general goodwill than had Gwennie, watched her rather enviously from the steps where she was sitting in solitude, the sun already beating down on her uncovered fair head and thin bare arms clasping her knees.

She was sitting on the steps partly because she intended to remain there, ostentatiously, most of the morning "waiting for Pops," who was to arrive by the 'bus from St. Raphael, and partly because it was a good place in which to exchange greetings with people coming out for breakfast. Very often, in return for a bright good-morning, Dulcie received a good-natured invitation to join in the day's excursion, or even to come and have her coffee and rolls in company, instead of having to wait for them until after everybody else had been served.

Dulcie had been a hotel-child ever since she could remember, and there was nothing she did not know about the possibilities of exploiting hotel-guests, especially rich ones in holiday mood.

Marcelle Duval, who was always nice to her, never came downstairs until midday, and neither did her husband. One glance at the Moons had taught Dulcie all that it was necessary for her to know about them—which was to the effect that she had better keep out of their way as much as possible.

The Morgans were kind quite often, although she and the Morgan children didn't really like one another. Dulcie was jealous of Olwen's good looks, and of Gwennie's popularity, and of the fact that all three could swim much better than she could. She also, in her heart, feared and detested a quality common to all the Morgans, known to Dulcie as "high-up-ness." She was sure, however, that Pops would ask her at once if she had made friends with those nice children, and had been asked to go out bathing with them.

Mrs. Romaine, Mr. Bolham, Buckland, and Mr. Muller were all fitfully good-natured. Dulcie knew that none of them could be depended upon to remember her insignificant existence for a moment, unless it was actually going on beneath their very eyes. If she chanced to annoy any one of them, a snub, or even a complaint to the management, might be her immediate portion.

The big French family of *commerçants* ignored her completely. They were snobs, and could gauge her father's position to a nicety.

The person in the Hotel whom Dulcie liked by far the best was Denis Waller.

His manners seemed to her the perfection of chivalry, and his repertory of genteel little catch-words and phrases—"Allow me," "Pardon," "Just a very little more tea—so many thanks"—represented, she felt, a spirit of exquisite courtesy.

He usually spoke to her with a smile, and always gently. He made her feel that she was quite as important, interesting, and worth paying attention to, as if she had been a real hotel-visitor, like anybody else.

There was also at the back of her mind a fellow-feeling for Denis because he was only in the Hôtel on sufferance as the employee of Mr. Bolham. Any "extras," thought Dulcie, translating into terms of her own values, that Denis might desire would always have to be paid for by himself—but for his daily board and lodging he was dependent upon his power to satisfy the requirements of his employer.

She felt sure that Denis wasn't like Mr. Buckland, who took advantage of his position at every turn. Dulcie had heard the *concierge* comment upon the freedom with which *cette espèce de précepteur anglais* ordered drinks, and taxis for St. Raphael, and even postage-stamps, and had them all put down to the account of Mrs. Romaine.

No wonder Patrick hated him, and never spoke to him if he could help it. Mr. Buckland was always pretending that the expenses he incurred were all on Patrick's behalf.

"Morning, Dulcie," said the voice of Buckland himself behind her. He came down the steps, pulling up the zip fastener of his bright blue singlet, and looking strong and vigorous, grinning at her.

"Oh, good-morning, Mr. Buckland. D'you know my Pops is coming back to-day?"

"Good business," returned Buckland heartily.

"I'm ever so excited," Dulcie said girlishly, and putting her head on one side. "I simply don't know how I'm going to get through the time till he comes. I've been awake for ages and ages, simply. Though I haven't had breakfast yet," she added thoughtfully.

"Well, don't wait too long, or there won't be any *confitures* left," advised Mr. Buckland, and he went away.

Dulcie sighed a little. She hadn't expected very much from the tutor. He knew all the moves of the game, a good deal better than she did herself.

Presently the French family came down—Dulcie moved politely to let them go past, but they took no notice of her whatever—and then Gwennie's mother, with David and Olwen. They asked Dulcie if she would like to come with them and eat bouillabaisse for lunch at the Réserve. They were to join forces with Mrs. Romaine and Patrick.

Dulcie accepted joyfully. Pops would be delighted with her if he found her making friends with people, and being taken out for the day, like that. She decided to pick a little bunch of the hideous yellow flowers that grew behind the Hotel and offer them to Mrs. Morgan, humbly and touchingly.

Patrick Romaine came out of the Hotel, and stood on the steps, screwing up his eyes against the glare as he looked along the terrace.

"Good-morning," piped Dulcie. She wished she knew what to call him. If she said "Mr. Romaine" it sounded absurd, and yet he might think it cheek of her to call him Patrick. Though the Morgans did, even Gwennie.

"Good-morning. I say, have you had breakfast yet?"

"No," said Dulcie hopefully.

"Well, you sometimes have it in the hall, don't you? I mean, if there aren't enough tables and things outside. Well, would you mind if I had mine with you? My mother's not coming down this morning, and I simply hate sitting out on that beastly terrace. So if you wouldn't mind—say if you'd simply hate it, won't you?"

"But I'd love it," Dulcie said earnestly. "I'll tell Emile."

The waiter on duty, Emile, was the good-natured one. He was hardly ever rude to her.

Besides, after all, he wouldn't have to carry the things nearly so far, if they had it indoors.

She moved an ash-tray and a couple of very old illustrated papers off a table, and presently she and Patrick Romaine were sitting at it, and she was pouring out coffee and hot milk.

They did not talk a great deal, though Dulcie tried to make herself agreeable with some timid references to cricket and swimming. Patrick, who looked rather miserable, made indifferent answers, that led to nothing further.

Captain Morgan, on his way out, nodded to them without saying anything, but Denis Waller, who came down last of all, stopped and spoke.

He said to Dulcie: "What time are you expecting your father? He's coming to-day, isn't he?"

"Yes, Mr. Waller, I'm so awfully excited. You know, Pops is all I've got, so naturally we're simply everything to one another. I don't know exactly what time he'll be here, but some time in the morning, I expect. I'm going to sit out on the steps and watch for the 'bus."

"Good," said Denis sympathetically. He really looked as if he felt pleased about it—for her sake, thought Dulcie.

"I hope he comes early, Mr. Waller, because we're going over to the *Réserve* for lunch. Isn't it lovely? Mrs. Morgan's asked me to go with them, wasn't it sweet of her? Patrick's going too, and Mrs. Romaine, of course. I love going to the *Réserve*, don't you? They give you lunch in the garden, right on top of the sea, almost."

She prattled on, and Denis smiled dreamily at her, as if rejoicing in her pathetic raptures at being given a share in other people's outings.

"I've never tasted bouillabaisse," said Patrick suddenly.

"Haven't you, Patrick? Neither have I," said Denis. "I've always wanted to. You'll have to tell me what you think of it. I suppose you've been to the *Réserve* often, Dulcie?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Waller, lots of times. Pops takes me quite often, and people in the Hotel are always so kind to me. Why, I went with the Morgans the very first time they ever tasted bouillabaisse. Gwennie was so funny. I do think Gwennie's awfully sweet and quaint, don't you?"

"Very."

"She's clever, for a kid of her age," Patrick remarked unexpectedly. "I mean, she's sort of original, I mean."

"You're quite right," Denis said in a considering tone. "Gwennie always strikes me as being such a very Welsh type. Definitely precocious and—and subtle-minded. I've often thought so."

"You're an awfully good judge of character, Mr. Waller, aren't you?" said Dulcie admiringly.

Denis smiled, and said: "Psychology always interests me," and left them.

"He's awfully nice, isn't he?" said Dulcie.

"Yes, he is, rather. Though I can't understand why he never goes into the water, except off the *plage*, where it's shallow. I believe he's afraid of getting his hair wet."

Dulcie laughed discreetly. She always laughed at other people's jokes, but if they were at the expense of somebody else, she refrained from comment. One never knew when things might get repeated.

"Isn't he coming too, to the *Réserve*?" she suggested. "He said he'd never tasted bouillabaisse."

"He ought to come, then. I'll ask my mother to invite him. I suppose Mr. Bolham won't mind."

"Oh no. He's coming himself."

"How funny! He never goes for expeditions as a rule. We shall be quite a large party," said Patrick, pushing his chair back from the table.

He did not look as if he were pleased about the party to the *Réserve*. He looked dreary and listless.

Dulcie went back to her watch on the steps.

(2)

At a quarter-past nine the postman came. He trudged up the steps to the terrace in a huge straw hat and holland uniform, his brown face shiny and dripping with sweat, and emptied his heavy bag at the *concierge's* desk.

The *concierge*, with his permanently scornful expression slightly accentuated, sorted out the large, thin Continental envelopes, addressed in violet ink, the broader, thicker, and more expensive-looking ones that bore an English postmark, and the numerous picture-postcards. There were a few newspapers too, and an untidy parcel addressed to T. Buckland Esq., with a darned sock-heel protruding out of one corner. Numerically, the letters of Mr. Muller usually predominated over those of anybody else, but there was no American mail in this morning.

Mr. Bolham, as usual, had catalogues, and a parcel of books.

Mrs. Romaine, also as usual, had a pile of obvious bills. The *concierge* smiled cynically. He knew that he would see them again, later in the day, torn in half and left lying about anywhere.

There was nothing for the Morgans except a newspaper, nothing for the Moons, and a postcard for Dulcie Courteney. It was in French, and the *concierge* read it with mild interest, since it had been written by an American girl who had recently been staying at the Hôtel d'Azur. So she was at Toulon, was she? Then why had she said that she was going to Antibes? These modern young women, they lied automatically, with every breath they drew. The *concierge* shrugged his shoulders.

He sent the *chasseur* off immediately with all the letters and papers addressed to the *patron* and the *patron's* family. He would not have dared to delay them for a moment, or even to inspect them in more than the most cursory fashion.

He sorted out the remainder of the mail into little heaps that he put on the ledge of the desk. People would come and claim them. Sometimes Gwennie Morgan was sent in to fetch *le courrier* and distribute it.

*Le petit jeune homme* who was secretary to Mr. Bolham always came for his own letters, usually hanging about in a nervous way until nobody was near enough to overhear his feeble "*s'il vous plaît's*" and "*merci's*." He daily received one particular letter, addressed in a woman's hand, in a cheap coloured envelope, faintly scented. The *concierge*, who had once spent six months in England, knew that the postmark on this letter was a suburban one, and that Denis took particular pains to post his replies, as often as possible, elsewhere than in the box in the hall of the Hotel. He was continually writing and receiving letters, and his correspondents, the *concierge* had contemptuously noted, were almost all of them women with undistinguished handwritings, and of provincial or suburban addresses.

This morning the secretary of Mr. Bolham actually seemed to have forgotten about his precious letter. He did not come for it until much later than usual, and then took it without excitement. The *concierge* sensed the difference in a moment.

Well—no affair could go on by correspondence for ever, not even amongst the lower orders of the English. The *petit jeune homme* was now interested in somebody else, probably in the young and beautiful wife of Mr. Moon. The *concierge* himself was interested in her, so far as the limitations of his job permitted.

He smiled to himself satirically, inwardly rating Denis's chances of receiving the slightest attention from the exquisite Mrs. Moon even lower than his own.

(3)

The few and casual phrases habitually exchanged between Hilary and Angie, when alone together in their bedroom, were usually either grossly indecent, or spasmodically blasphemous. They knew of no other mode of self-expression, unless it was a violent quarrel.

This morning, between eleven and twelve o'clock, they were in the midst of a quarrel.

Angie lay naked on the bed, smoking, and Hilary, in an extremely expensive purple silk dressing-gown, his dark hair hanging dank and unbrushed across his forehead, lounged against the green venetian blind of the open window, also smoking.

"I'm not going to Cap Ferrat," said Angie. "Or anywhere else."

"You're not *at all* disobliging, are you?" asked Hilary ironically.

"Why should I be obliging? You never do anything for me, that I know of. You don't even make money."

"My little sweet, I was quite under the impression that we'd come here *with* my money. Or haven't we?"

"We've come here, to be exact, with money that belongs to the tradespeople at home," replied Angie coldly.

"How terribly accurate of you," Hilary returned, even more coldly.

There was a silence, full of hatred.

"This place, as it happens, is utterly poisonous, and extremely expensive, and not a soul with whom one has anything whatever in common."

"Cap Ferrat would be three times as expensive, and I don't suppose you'd like the crowd there any better. Unless there was a tart that happened to fall for you, like your Sonia creature at that filthy Bloomsbury party."

"Please leave Sonia out of it."

"Don't be chivalrous and high-up, darling, because it makes you sound simply too silly. It's not your line at all."

"I'm going to Cap Ferrat. Or Nice."

"And I'm not."

They were back at the beginning again.

"Look at that lousy gang we got mixed up with last night—Coral, or whatever she calls herself, and her quite ghastly boy-friend."

"They weren't any worse than the crowd we go round with in London."

"I think they were much worse. In fact, there's no comparison at all. Women have no discernment whatever."

"I thought," said Angie maddeningly, "that you prided yourself on never using *clichés*."

This made Hilary angrier than anything that she had yet said, and he swore viciously.

Angie, taking no notice, got off the bed and began to pull clothes out of a suitcase and throw them about.

Suddenly, having scored, she felt amiable again.

"Let's try this place a couple of days longer, anyhow. If we move now, it means finding the cash for the bill at once. What about the car you said you were going to get?"

"I might find something at Cannes. I thought I'd get that fellow they talk about—the interpreter or something, who's coming back to-day—to put me on to the right place. He'd be able to tell me what the chances are of selling it again, too."

"You're sure to be able to sell it again," said Angie. It was on this basic assumption that the young Moons conducted the whole of their existence.

She drew on a long pair of green linen trousers, and pulled a white crêpe-de-chine jumper over her head. It left her neck and arms bare, and was finished off with a huge bow of green ribbon and a green belt.

"That's rather good," Hilary admitted, looking at her.

"It is, isn't it?"

She began to make up her face.

"Look here, what about hiring a taxi and going over to Cannes this afternoon? One might run into somebody one knows, and anyhow one could have a look at cars."

"I want a hat," said Angie, "or a béret, or something."

"I suppose the Hotel can put us on to a taxi. I'll go down and talk to the *concierge*."

"Are we taking anyone with us?"

"Who on earth is there to take? I wouldn't be seen dead with any of them."

"It'll be frightfully boring, if you're going to take that line, Hilary. For both of us, I should think."

"Thanks, ever so," said Hilary sarcastically, as he went out.

#### (4)

Mr. Bolham, who would not, of his own free will, have joined any party in which Mrs. Romaine was included, had agreed to go to the Réserve with the Morgans partly because he was on friendly terms with them and liked them, and partly because he wished to diminish as far as possible the length of time spent by himself alone with his secretary.

If they remained at the Hotel, Mr. Bolham would feel obliged to do some work, which implied dictation, and this, in its turn, would necessitate the presence of Denis Waller.

More and more clearly, the unfortunate Mr. Bolham realised that his dislike of Denis was assuming almost pathological proportions. He felt that he would, actually, have liked to hit him, or to send him, with one vigorous kick, flying into the sea. He did not suppose himself capable of ever giving way to these primitive impulses, but it annoyed him that they should be there at all, and gravely interfered with his conception of himself as a highly civilised man of letters and a detached observer of human nature.

In order to make himself feel better, Mr. Bolham—whilst inwardly passing the most savage judgments on his secretary's obvious weakness, vanity, cowardice, and inability to speak the truth—forced himself to treat him with outward civility, and even generosity.

Learning from Dulcie Courteney that Denis had never tasted the famous bouillabaisse and had said that he would like to do so, Mr. Bolham immediately asked permission to include him in the party.

"If you're sure that you don't want him to be doing anything else for you," said Mrs. Morgan, "we shall be delighted, of course."

"Naturally, he'll be my guest," stipulated Mr. Bolham grandly.

He hoped that the cost of the lunch, which would be quite expensive, might somehow discount, amongst other things, the spirit of scornful disgust in which he had, on the previous evening, received Denis's meek pretence of intending to go for a walk after dinner.

"*The* one thing that I cannot stand," said Mr. Bolham to himself, "is humbug."

He was inaccurate. There were quite a large number of things that he could not stand, and only too many of them seemed to be concentrated in the personality of Denis.

It was only for the sake of his own self-respect, and because he was proposing to go back to England in a fortnight, that Mr. Bolham did not dismiss his secretary at a day's notice. But he felt that if he did so, prejudice would have won the day over reasonable humanity—(for Denis's work was not wholly bad)—and that such a victory would damage Mr. Bolham even more than it would Denis Waller.

"Twelve o'clock, on the *plage*?" said Mary Morgan. "We thought we'd go by boat. It takes about half an hour."

At ten minutes past eleven, Mr. Bolham informed his secretary, with a fair imitation of cordiality, of the expedition in store for them both.

He had already noticed, and mercilessly condemned, Denis Waller's indiscriminating eagerness to take advantage of every opportunity of making social contacts.

With surprise, he heard his secretary reply with great hesitation: "Thank you so much, sir. It's very kind of you indeed. May I ask when—about what time—you expect to be back?"

"I really don't know. Three or four o'clock, I suppose. No one wants to hurry in this heat."

Denis, looking suddenly wretched, muttered inarticulately and turned pale. Intuition told Mr. Bolham that, for some reason, his secretary did not want to go to the Réserve, and was afraid of saying so.

Mr. Bolham allowed him two seconds—short ones—in which to speak out like a man, and then said curtly:

"We shall go from the *plage*, at twelve o'clock. Find out if Captain and Mrs. Morgan, or their children, would like a lift down, and tell Anatole to bring the car round at ten minutes to twelve. I shan't want you till then."

"Oh, Mr. Bolham, you are kind. I'm *so* glad Mr. Waller's coming too," cried Dulcie, who was sitting on the steps.

Mr. Bolham received this tribute in silence. His kindness, although it was still there in the letter, had undergone a mysterious reversal in the spirit, and could no longer afford him a vestige of self-satisfaction.

He experienced a profound indignation that this should be so.

## (5)

Denis, in whom the secretiveness common to the over-sensitive was abnormally developed, was in despair.

How could he tell Mr. Bolham, to whom his very existence appeared to be cause for exasperation, that he already had an appointment for the afternoon? Imagination leapt wildly into the breach and enquired, in Mr. Bolham's most chilling accents: "With whom is this appointment?"

Denis's exaltation of the night before had been slowly ebbing all the morning, and the reaction was now complete. He knew that it would be impossible to answer that enquiry, or to endure the thought of the implications that the answer would carry. Once more, uncontrolled imagination had him in its grip. Mr. Bolham, in brief sardonic phrases, would tell the others.... Buckland would chaff him coarsely and publicly.... Mrs. Romaine would pass on the joke to her friend Mrs. Wolverton-Gush. ... Chrissie would think that he....

Denis writhed.

In spite of passionate endeavours to forestall disillusionment by telling himself that it would be different when they met again, by daylight, Denis had been more or less at high tension ever since awakening that morning, living only for the time of his next meeting with Chrissie Challoner.

He felt sick with dismay and disappointment.

And now how was he to let her know that he couldn't come?

He stood helplessly and wretchedly, in the middle of the hall, the revulsion of feeling seeming to have drained him of all initiative.

David Morgan, with a lemon-yellow bathing wrap carefully folded over his arm, came down the stairs.

"Are you ever sick in a boat?" he enquired abruptly.

"No, I don't think so."

"That's a good thing, because Dulcie says there's sometimes quite a rough bit between here and the Réserve. Mummie's a very bad sailor," said David hopefully. "I'm going round to the garage to help Anatole bring round Mr. Bolham's car. He's a very kind man, isn't he?"

"Anatole likes boys. He has one of his own."

"I meant Mr. Bolham," explained David. "Though Anatole is kind, too. But I meant Mr. Bolham. He's invited you to lunch too, hasn't he?"

"Yes, David, he has."

"Are you quite ready?" David enquired politely. "It's nearly twelve, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is. I shall have to get a hat to wear on the water, but I—I think I'd better telephone first——"

David nodded, and trotted out into the sunshine.

Denis, feeling desperate, approached the *concierge's* desk and tried to ignore the presence of Mr. Muller, earnestly examining a stand of postcards representing cobalt seas and vermillion rocks, and—still worse—that of young Mr. Moon, drinking whiskey at a small table near the door.

"*Téléphone, s'il vous plaît.*"

"*Vous désirez le téléphone?*"

"*Oui,*" said Denis, wondering if the French telephone system was different from the English one, and much more complicated.

Suddenly he realised that he had not the least idea of the number he required. He tried, incoherently, to explain that he wanted a telephone-book.

"Spik Ingliss," suggested the *concierge* wearily.

"I don't know the number. The book ..."

"*Vous ne savez pas le numéro? Quel nom, alors?*"

"Miss Challoner. C-H-A- Oh, wait a minute—I don't suppose it's under her name at all—Villa Mimosa—*vous savez?*"

The *concierge* shrugged his shoulders.

"*Oui, mais Villa Mimosa—voyons donc! Comment voulez-vous——*"

"*Je ne comprendre pas.* Could you speak more slowly?" Denis said, feeling the sweat break out on his forehead.

Far from speaking slowly, the *concierge*, with an air of ineffable insolence, spoke—or rather muttered—a long speech of which Denis understood the intention, although not the words. Furiously humiliated, he looked wildly round, afraid of witnesses to his discomfiture.

The Morgan family were assembling at the foot of the stairs, and Mrs. Romaine was emerging from the lift with Buckland, who was carrying her parasol. They were ready to start. In another moment the car would arrive....

"Can I help you at all, Mr. Waller?" said the compassionate voice of the American financier beside him, unexpectedly.

The *concierge* sprang to attention, simultaneously dropping his newspaper and his scornful expression.

He tendered to Mr. Muller a brief and respectfully-worded explanation of Denis's predicament, and added that it would no doubt be possible to obtain the required number by an enquiry to the Exchange.

Mr. Muller, like Jupiter, nodded.

The *concierge* leapt upon the telephone.

"Thank you so much," stammered Denis. "I'm so very grateful to you—it was so kind of you. Thank you so much."

"Why, Mr. Waller, don't say another word about it. That's nothing at all. It's too bad, that fellow not having a word of English. I guess you'll get put through in a minute now."

Mr. Muller moved away. Denis reflected bitterly that all servants were snobs. They didn't understand that a man might

be in a subordinate position, and yet *really* a gentleman ... they treated one like mud, because one was poor....

"*Voilà, m'sieur.*"

Suddenly beginning to tremble, Denis took the receiver.

"Allo-allo," said a strange voice violently.

"Miss Challoner?"

The voice said something rapidly in French and there was a sound as if the receiver at the other end were being hung up again. The heart of Denis sank still further within him. He did not know what to do.

Another voice, harsh, but English, spoke imperatively in his ear.

"Are you *there*? Who is it speaking, please?"

"Mr. Denis Waller. Is—could I have a word with Miss Challoner, if you please?"

"I'm afraid not. Kindly give me any message. Miss Challoner's secretary speaking."

"*On vous attend, là-bas,*" suddenly and coldly broke in the *concierge*, indicating the steps of the Hotel with his head.

Denis waved the telephone cord at him.

"Will you tell her, please, I'm very sorry, I shan't be able to meet her this afternoon as she so kindly suggested.... I—the fact is——"

He stopped.

"You won't be able to meet her this afternoon," repeated the voice cheerfully. "Anything else?"

"I'm most terribly disappointed—if you'd kindly tell her—I'm required for—for something else. By the gentleman I'm with."

"You won't be able to meet her this afternoon, and you're terribly disappointed, but the gentleman with whom you are," said the voice, very correctly, "requires you. I quite understand. Good-bye."

"*C'est fini?*" said the *concierge*. "*Eh bien, on vous attend.*"

He had the air of dismissing a thoroughly tiresome subordinate, and with exactly the air of a thoroughly tiresome subordinate being dismissed, Denis crawled away.

Quite a number of people were gathered on the steps. Mr. Bolham's French chauffeur sat at the wheel of the Sunbeam with David Morgan beaming beside him.

Morgan was already walking down the winding path with Olwen, Gwennie, Patrick, and Buckland.

Mr. Bolham, considerable reluctance in his manner, was assuring Mrs. Romaine that there was plenty of room for her in the car—which was indeed evident.

Dulcie Courteney, roaming wildly up and down the steps, was asking everyone's advice.

"I quite thought Pops would have arrived by now, from St. Raphael. The 'bus went ages ago. Only of course one can't ever tell with French trains, can one? I don't know *what* to do."

"You'd better come with us," said Mary Morgan.

"I suppose I had, hadn't I? But you see, I'm so afraid Pops will be disappointed not to find his little girlie to welcome him. He always says——"

"Well, don't keep Mr. Bolham waiting. Better get in, if you're coming."

"I think I'll just leave a message for Pops with the *concierge*. You see, I don't want him to think——"

Dulcie darted into the hall again.

Mr. Bolham assumed an expression of ostentatious resignation.

Mary got into the car beside Mrs. Romaine, who said, "Blast the silly kid! why can't she walk?"

"Shall I wait, and walk down with Dulcie, sir?" Denis enquired.

"That might be the best way——"

Dulcie rushed out, with her head on one side.

"It's all right!" she squeaked breathlessly. "I've left a message for Pops, explaining. You see, I know he'd hate me to miss your lovely party, Mrs. Morgan...."

From an upper window came a shriek:

"Dal-see! Dal-see!"

Everyone looked up.

Young madame Duval, clutching a thin flowered silk chemise across her figure, hung out of her bedroom window, shaking with laughter, and pointed to a small variegated heap of garments, fallen into Mr. Bolham's balcony below.

"*On peut envoyer chercher ...?*"

"Oh, Mr. Bolham, it's Marcelle—her bathing-dress. ..."

"Tell her to buy herself a hook and line," said Mr. Bolham bitterly.

"Oh, Mr. Bolham, you're such *fun*, always, you do make me laugh!"

"*Mes excuses ...*" screamed Marcelle.

Dulcie screamed back disclaimers, and the *concierge*, who had also come out on to the steps, said, with a brief and disagreeable glance upwards: "*On enverra.*"

"Aren't we going to start?" said David disappointedly. "The others will get there first."

At last they were off.

## (6)

"There's been a telephone message for you from the Hôtel d'Azur."

"What about?"

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush adjusted her lorgnette—she considered that a lorgnette added distinction to her style—and read aloud—with full attention to the teaching of certain classes in elocution that she had attended in Kensington many years ago—her own transcription of Denis Waller's message.

"Thanks," said Chrissie blankly.

She looked up with her enormous dark eyes at Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, evidently not seeing her at all.

There was a perfectly genuine remoteness—a sort of absent-mindedness—about Chrissie Challoner that often annoyed her temporary housekeeper. She would have disliked it much less if it had been an affectation. But Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, in the last fifty-eight years of a life that had already lasted a good deal longer than most people supposed, had thoroughly assimilated many harder lessons than elocution. Foremost amongst these was acceptance of the unyielding and invariable law that a woman, working for another woman, can never afford to let anything get on her nerves.

Owing to the exigencies of life, Ruth Wolverton-Gush was a violent woman who remained calm, a bad-tempered one who exercised unceasing self-control, a grasping one who restrained all manifestations of greed and envy, and had not, for years, permitted herself the luxury of voicing her bitter grudge against the fate that had never put within her reach the only things she craved—money, and a life of ease.

"Mr. Waller was very disappointed indeed. I could tell that, from the way he spoke."

"Didn't he make any suggestion—say when he *would* be free?" Chrissie asked impatiently.

"No, nothing. Only just what I wrote down."

"Please will you get through to the Hôtel d'Azur again, and I'll speak to him myself."

"Certainly, dear."

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush had been told, casually and with "for goodness' sake" tacked on to the unsuitable request, not to call her young employer Miss Challoner. No one ever did.

Unable to bring herself to say "Chrissie," Mrs. Wolverton-Gush compromised with a purely formal "dear."

Her numerous ventures into various fields of work had never until now happened to bring her into contact with the odd, informal, Chelsea-cum-Bloomsbury world to which Chrissie belonged. Its conventional unconventionalities did not shock her moral sense, which was tough—but often seriously disturbed her extremely sensitive gentilities.

She walked off to the telephone, head up, bust well forward, and waist tightly drawn in. Even on the Mediterranean coast in mid-August, Mrs. Wolverton-Gush wore, beneath a striped silk dress, a stiffly boned corselet, at least three sizes too small for comfort, a tight bust-bodice, and short, high-heeled shoes. Her greying hair was smartly waved and shingled, and she had wisdom enough not to dye it.

She was not without good looks, in spite of a coarse skin, and legs too short for her heavy torso.

In a few minutes she came back to the sitting-room where Chrissie lay on a small, uncomfortable-looking gilt sofa, creasing her blue cotton beach-pyjamas.

"Mr. Waller is out. They've gone—several of them—to lunch at the Réserve. I remember now that my friend Mrs. Romaine said last night they were making up a party."

"I suppose he had to go. I wanted him to come bathing with me, somewhere."

Chrissie looked wistful and discontented.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush saw that she wanted to talk.

"Let me see, it wasn't Mr. Waller who was sent by your friends in Hampstead? Really, there were so many of them here last night, I could hardly distinguish——"

"No, that was Moon. The one with the wife. I thought him an ass. Denis came with Mrs. Romaine and the other man—the noisy one."

"Mr. Buckland. He certainly is rather exuberant, but I assure you, dear, that he's very much the gentleman in all essentials. And I think a personable young man to look at, don't you?"

"Denis," said Chrissie unheeding, "came with them. I don't know why. Directly he came in, I noticed him."

She stretched her bare arms above her head.

"D'you mind if I talk?"

"Of course not, dear.... If you'll excuse me one moment, first, I'll just speak to the girl about luncheon. You'll have it on the *loggia*?"

Thus did Mrs. Wolverton-Gush elegantly designate the little stone porch at the back of the villa.

She went out and said a few words in atrocious French to the stout, black-haired young woman in the kitchen. Mrs. Wolverton-Gush never had the slightest difficulty in making servants understand what she expected of them. She would have been equally capable of making herself clear to Indian, Chinese, or Esquimaux servants. They understood, and they almost always obeyed.

She came back to the living-room.

The shutters were closed, and the room full of a soft green light. But it was the hottest hour of the day, and Mrs. Wolverton-Gush panted a little as she sat down, and hoped that there wasn't a stain under the arms of her dress. She felt the heat very much, and would have liked a cold drink, but she was afraid of indigestion, from which she suffered severely and often. Sometimes she felt that life might have been almost bearable if she could have been freed from that incessant, nagging, physical torment.

## (7)

To analyse every experience and discuss every emotion seemed entirely natural to Chrissie Challoner. Ever since she had run away from home at seventeen to live with a woman painter much older than herself, she had been one of a narrow circle of which the component parts were continually shifting, but never dispersing themselves. They sought self-expression, first in conversation, and secondly in various forms of art.

Reticence was unmodern, and not practised.

At twenty-eight Chrissie was still possessed of sensitiveness and sincerity, although both had been slightly blunted from the habit of translating everything into words—usually exaggerated ones.

She talked openly of intimate things because such talk had become habitual to her.

She said now:

"Denis was the fair one—very slight and rather small."

"Oh yes. I scarcely saw him all the evening. I presume," said Mrs. Wolverton-Gush meaningly, "that he was better occupied."

"He was sitting in the garden with me. Gushie, I think I've fallen for him—absolutely. It's extraordinary, isn't it?"

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, who did indeed think that it was extraordinary, made deprecating sounds.

"The moment I saw him—looking frightened, and rather pathetic, and everybody else making the usual frightful row, talking and screaming—felt as if I'd known him before, somehow. I can't explain. Do you believe in reincarnation?"

"Well, of course, there's something to be said——"

"I never have. I mean to say, one's never taken it in the least seriously. But somehow it came into my mind then... I believe I knew just what he was feeling. In fact, I'm sure that I know things about him now, that there simply hasn't been time to find out, in the ordinary way."

There was a pause.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush polished the nails of one hand briskly against the palm of the other, so as not to waste her time, but also kept her eyes fixed intelligently on Chrissie, so as to show that she was still giving her full attention.

"I know I can't expect you to understand—or anybody. In fact, I don't really understand myself. Of course, I've fallen in love before, hundreds of times, with men and with women. But this is different."

Chrissie stopped to laugh.

"One always says that, doesn't one? It doesn't mean anything, any more. But this—between me and Denis— It's not physical. That may come later—I don't know, and I don't much care, either. But I think it's partly that which makes it so extraordinary. It's on another plane to the ordinary sort of affair that one's known so often."

"Do you think that he——?"

"I think he felt like I did—but he's frightened," said Chrissie. "I don't know what his life has been, but I'm pretty sure he's always been afraid—and always most terribly lonely. I don't know that it'll be altogether easy to make him *not* afraid ... but my God, it's going to be worth trying."

"But surely you've not really— So short an acquaintance I mean..."

"Yes, really, Gushie. It's—it's like something I've been waiting for all my life, come true."

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, entirely unable to believe that Chrissie was not playing a game of make-believe peculiar to people who wrote novels, was quite at a loss what sort of answer to make, and finally cleared her throat.

Chrissie lay on the sofa, lost in dreams.

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# CHAPTER V

## (1)

"We thought you were never coming! Mr. Waller, you and Dulcie are the last of the Mohicans."

Gwennie's pronunciation of this word, that she ingenuously rendered as "*Moy-high-cans*," made everybody laugh.

Mary Morgan experienced a feeling of relief. She wanted the party to be a success. At forty, she still knew the incredulous sadness of childhood, whenever a party failed. In anticipation it still seemed to her that people, and sunshine, and an expedition somewhere, to see something, and interesting food eaten out-of-doors, must give pleasure, and promote kindness and gaiety.

Fifteen years of married life had taught her that men—for she thought of Mervyn as "men"—had not this capacity for enjoyment. She always shelved the thought, and felt that this time it would be different. She reminded herself now that Mervyn liked a boat. And she ascertained, by peculiar means that were intuitional rather than visual, that Mervyn was at any rate starting off in good spirits, talking about motor-boats to Mr. Bolham.

The children were happy, and the faint indication of the night before that David might be going to start a sty on his left eye had disappeared.

Relieved and light-hearted, Mary stepped into the boat, and immediately took off her big cretonne hat and laid it across her knees. Daily, she was consciously glad that she had never cut short her beautiful hair, that it was still thick and soft, with a strong natural curl. Almost every time that she looked at Mrs. Romaine, this passing satisfaction recurred to her with added strength.

Looking at Mrs. Romaine now, strident in black-and-orange stripes, displaying her long bare legs, Mary reflected what an odd assortment of people the boat contained and her optimism suffered a moment's check.

Could a party really be very successful that included Mrs. Romaine with Patrick and Buckland—the boy looked so worried—and Mr. Bolham with his detested, and evidently rather unnerved, secretary—and Mervyn and the children and herself?

She felt that she was leaving somebody out, and looked round again, then realised that—as usual—Dulcie Courteney was odd-man-out. Unfortunate and unattractive child, thought Mary, her eyes instinctively seeking out her Olwen, so undeniably beautiful.

Olwen sat in the bows with Patrick. They were not talking. Olwen was looking down into the water, her face grave. Mary felt that already she no longer held the clue to Olwen's thoughts. Her eldest child had passed from the transparent candour of infancy to the mysterious and incalculable reserves of adolescence.

She looked down at David sitting next her, and met his eyes fixed on her. Raising his eyebrows, he made a pantomime enquiry that Mary well understood. Smiling, she shook her head in energetic repudiation of even the slightest qualm of sea-sickness.

Gwennie sat opposite to her mother, and talked briskly and with determination to Denis Waller.

"Do you like horses?"

"Very much."

"So do I. They're my favourite animals. If you had to be an animal, what would you choose to be?"

"Well—I don't know, Gwennie. I think perhaps a dog."

"I see. I dare say you'd make quite a good dog. I'd be a pony. Do you like riding?"

"Doesn't your tongue ever get tired, Gwennie?" her mother enquired, from a sense of duty to other people.

"Never," said Gwennie brightly.

Mary, smiling a little, glanced apologetically at Denis, thinking how good-natured he was with children. He smiled back at her, rather nicely, and answered Gwennie in a way that struck Mary as being more natural than usual.

"I haven't done a lot of riding. You see, I've mostly lived in London."

"Have you? Then I suppose you've never hunted?"

"I'm afraid not, Gwennie."

"Oh, Mr. Waller!" cried Dulcie shrilly. "What about that time you had the accident? When you hurt your head, you know."

Denis crimsoned.

"That wasn't hunting, Dulcie. Just riding."

"What happened?" demanded Gwennie. "Did you fall off?"

"Something like that."

"That's why he doesn't dive," added Dulcie. "But I'm sure you told me it was when you were out hunting, because I remember."

"You must have misunderstood me, Dulcie. I'm sure I couldn't have said so. I've never been out hunting."

Mary felt vaguely sorry for the little secretary. He looked so completely discomposed, although she did not quite see why, and she was glad when an exclamation from Buckland, of no intrinsic worth whatever, gave a different turn to the conversation.

Buckland was in his customary high spirits.

No wonder, thought Mary, with a tart contempt that she would have applied to no one else. Buckland was having, she supposed, the time of his life—made free of motor-boats, motor-cars, expensive hotels, an unaccustomed excellence and variety of food and drink, and the society of his betters. (In the latter category, Mary did not really include Mrs. Romaine.)

"Shall we swim, after lunch, mummie?" David asked.

"No," said Mary firmly.

"Not after bouillabaisse; you'd probably have an apoplectic fit and sink to the bottom," Mervyn assured his son.

David smiled dutifully, then looked quickly up at his mother.

She nodded.

"It's all right. I'll order an omelette specially for you," she whispered, remembering.

David's little sensitive face flushed.

"Won't that look rather babyish?" he whispered.

"I don't think so. Besides, I shall be having one too," she whispered back, making up her mind on the instant.

"Oh. But are you sure you don't mind?"

"Quite sure."

"Really quite sure, mummie?"

"Absolutely," said Mary, with serious and immense conviction.

"*Voilà, messieurs-dames,*" said the boatman, waving as if to introduce them all.

The Hotel awaited them.

A long table had been laid, drawn up close to the low parapet-wall overlooking the sea.

"They won't bring the bouillabaisse immediately," Gwennie officiously explained to Denis Waller. "They only make it when the people actually arrive, so then they're sure it gets eaten. It's very expensive to make."

"I want to take some snaps," said Dulcie. "I can take them while we're waiting."

She produced a Brownie camera and looked into the viewfinder, although the party was scattered about the garden and it was evident that she was focussing no one in particular.

"I'd like a group. A group would be lovely, wouldn't it, Mrs. Morgan—wouldn't it, Olwen?"

"Better wait till we're all sitting down," Mary Morgan suggested. "You could take the whole table then, couldn't you?"

She moved away, and leaned against the wall, her back to the water. As usual, domestic preoccupations filled her mind.

Did Mervyn look as if he were enjoying himself? There wasn't anybody much to amuse him. He was smoking a cigarette, and seemed quite content. Her eyes rested on him for some time, and her mind registered automatically the fact of his entire unresponsiveness. It no longer hurt, but could still faintly surprise her. Temperamentally a romantic, Mary had been disillusioned by life, marriage, and motherhood, again and again. Yet still she remained a romantic at heart, continually awaiting something that never came. Mervyn remained unaware, as he always did, of her eyes and her thoughts fixed upon him, but when she turned her head away and looked at her children, Olwen glanced up quickly and gave her mother a lovely, flashing smile.

Mary's heart glowed, and she felt exquisitely happy. With a start of astonishment, she found herself recalled by the quiet, consciously-polite voice of Denis Waller, making conversation.

"Do you live in Wales, Mrs. Morgan?"

"In Monmouthshire," said Mary, wanting to laugh.

"It must be pretty there."

"Very."

She looked at Denis, and thought that he seemed more sallow and strained than usual. Probably Mr. Bolham was sarcastic and disagreeable with his unfortunate secretary, and Mary felt sure that Denis had all the touchiness of the underbred. She tried to speak as if she felt really interested.

"Where is your own home?"

"I—I'm a great deal in London. I haven't, as a matter of fact, got a home at all now. Our family is a good deal scattered. Originally, we came from East Anglia."

Mrs. Romaine came up to them.

"I say, do they always keep one waiting like this here?"

"I'm afraid they do. They don't make the bouillabaisse until the people who've ordered it——"

"Look, mummie!"

Gwennie had found a white cat, and had it in her arms.

"Oh, *do* all stay still," shrieked Dulcie. "I can get a snap of you now."

Mrs. Romaine swore—but quite briefly and amiably—and Denis hastily drew himself up and folded his arms across his chest in a manly attitude.

"That's lovely— Oh, Mr. Buckland, you're just in time. Do come and be photographed."

Buckland planted himself exactly in front of Denis, and struck a burlesque attitude.

Denis stepped out from behind him and resumed his pose rather defiantly.

"Olwen! David! Patrick! Do come and be photographed."

Patrick Romaine looked round, and did not stir.

Olwen came and stood beside her mother, and David hastily climbed into a tree well out of the camera's range.

"That's marvellous.... Oh, Mrs. Romaine, I'm afraid your hat will make a shadow over your face—could you *possibly* take it off, do you think?"

"Damn, I suppose so.... No, why should I?"

"Oh it doesn't matter a *bit*, Mrs. Romaine, really it doesn't."

"Hurry up," shouted Buckland.

"Mr. Waller, could you move a tiny, weeny bit nearer? I'm afraid you're too far out."

Denis moved back, and was again obscured by the substantial Buckland.

"Buckland, I'm awfully sorry—but if you'd——"

The tutor grinned, took Denis by the shoulders and pulled him forward and then pushed his hat down over his face just as Dulcie clicked the shutter.

Denis, snatching off the hat, turned white with fury.

"Don't move—I'll just get one more," screamed Dulcie.

"Oh!"

Gwennie made a dive after the cat, which had suddenly escaped from her arms, and Mrs. Romaine, who disliked cats, walked away.

The group broke up.

"I hope that'll come out," said Dulcie doubtfully.

"I'm sure it won't," Denis Waller assured her in a voice stifled with anger and humiliation. "We were all moving."

Mary Morgan felt sorry for him. Buckland had really been rather tiresome. But Denis was the kind of person who invariably provoked the merely latent brutality of other people into violent activity. There was a kind of trembling conceit about him ... something that cringed and challenged both at once.... And he looked so thoroughly miserable!

Mary compassionately engaged in platitudinous small-talk with him until lunch was ready.

## (2)

The others talked a great deal about the bouillabaisse. Patrick, after once assuring Gwennie that he did like it, remained silent.

He had purposely taken his place between the wall and Captain Morgan, because Captain Morgan never seemed to expect one to talk. Opposite sat Dulcie, whose chatter was mostly addressed to the table at large.

The beast Buckland was—as usual—beside Patrick's mother, eating like the pig that he was, and talking with his mouth full.

Little Lower-Fourth boys would be ashamed of having table-manners like Buckland's.

Patrick devised curious and elaborate tortures for Buckland, in his own mind. He often did this. He imagined the tutor

publicly stripped and beaten until he howled aloud and bellowed for mercy—he thought of seeing him forced under water and held there, drowning, or kicked mercilessly in the ribs and on the buttocks with heavy boots. He felt terribly ashamed of these thoughts, but did not always resist them.

"Did you get your fair share of lobster, Patrick? If not, send up your plate."

"It's quite all right, thank you," said the boy, flushing and smiling at Mrs. Morgan.

At the other end of the table, Gwennie was excitedly asking conundrums, new to no one excepting herself and David.

"Patrick, do you know Arthur?"

"Arthur who?" Patrick politely humoured her.

"*Our thermometer!*" shrieked Gwennie, and went into gales of laughter.

Nearly everyone laughed with her, and Patrick, as he did so, exchanged a look with Gwennie's father. That made him feel less cross and unhappy, somehow—more on a level with grown-up people.

People always said that sixteen was a difficult age, and probably it was. One wanted to do quite childish things very often, and yet one couldn't—and then, when one tried to be grown-up, that was an absolute failure too. In a year or two, probably everything would be much easier, and there wouldn't be this horrible sense of confusion and general perplexity that very often had to be expressed by the rudeness and sulkiness of which his mother complained.

Patrick glanced at her remorsefully. He hated to vex his mother, who was always so frightfully decent to him, and gave him practically everything he asked for, and never got angry for more than two minutes, even when his report was a thoroughly stinking one.

"I do want to try another snap presently, now that everyone's here. Couldn't I do one while we're waiting for the sweet?"

Dulcie sprang up and rushed away with her camera.

"All look this way!"

They obediently turned their heads.

"Mr. Bolham, Mr. Bolham. I can't see you! Your head is right in the shadow. Oh! Could you all sit a *tiny* bit closer? It's so difficult to get you all in."

Patrick saw Buckland lay his arm across the back of his mother's chair, hitching himself forward. Probably she didn't know he was doing it. She was powdering her nose, not thinking about the cad Buckland at all.

"Don't move. *Ow!* I've forgotten to wind the last one off!"

Dulcie wound frantically, and everyone moved.

Denis Waller, glancing across the narrow table and catching Patrick's eye, said with his gentle, rather melancholy little smile: "I always say that being photographed is like going to the dentist. In fact I think it's the worse evil of the two."

"D'you hate it?" Patrick asked, not caring to know, but ready to return the friendliness of the smile.

"I can't bear it," Denis replied with emphasis, at the same time carefully smoothing back his rather thin fair hair and slightly compressing his lips into an expression of firmness.

"Now!" called Dulcie, and at the same moment David Morgan cried out: "*Look* at the pudding!" and instinctively the heads of the whole party turned towards the waiter, carrying the two halves of a very large melon, hollowed out and filled with ice-cream.

"Failed again, I'm afraid," muttered David's father, and once more he and Patrick exchanged slightly amused glances.

Dulcie came back to the table still optimistic.

"I expect some of them'll be all right, anyway. I do hope so, because I've only got one film left. I'm going to get someone to do a snap of me, after lunch. It sounds funny to want one of myself, but it's for Pops. I know he'd love one, and I want it for a surprise for him."

She looked hopefully round, and everybody avoided meeting her eye.

At last Denis Waller said: "I dare say I could do that for you, Dulcie," and immediately looked quickly round, as if to see whether anybody was laughing at him. No one paid any attention, and Dulcie thanked him effusively.

The meal went on.

People talked about the ice-cream, and there were exchanges of small jokes and personalities.

Patrick joined in, with the Morgans especially, and suddenly felt cheered and amused. He thought how nice the Morgans were, all of them, and what a good-looking family—even Gwennie, who was too fat. But she was a thoroughly sporting kid, and marvellous in the water.

Cigarettes were being offered and accepted. Captain Morgan held out his case to Patrick, who shook his head. Theoretically, he was not allowed to smoke yet, although he very often did so alone with his mother, who didn't mind a bit. He liked having had a cigarette offered to him as a matter of course.

It was blazing hot, and one hadn't got to exert oneself, and people were being rather jolly and amusing all round—suddenly it was fun.

Patrick's mother had begun to talk to Mr. Bolham and Buckland had moved away altogether from the table and was throwing pieces of bread down to the fishes, with David and Gwennie and their mother.

Olwen Morgan said:

"Patrick, can you do the missionaries-and-cannibals trick with matches?"

"I can do one—I don't know if it's the same as yours."

She moved down beside him and they became absorbed in showing one another puzzles.

Denis Waller joined them. He knew several rather good tricks, and was appreciative of those of Patrick and Olwen.

Presently the grouping of the party broke up again, and Patrick was rather sorry.

He found himself leaning over the parapet with Denis Waller beside him, looking down on the fishes.

The heat was intense, and Patrick felt rather sleepy.

"What time are we going back, d'you know?" he enquired.

"I think the motor-launch was coming to fetch us at three o'clock. It's now"—Denis consulted his wrist-watch in its large, conspicuous gold band that Patrick privately thought quite awful—"it's now half-past two."

"If I hadn't eaten so much lunch, I'd try and swim back. One could."

"Oh yes. It's only about a mile. *You* could do it easily enough," said Denis, in a very friendly voice. "Do you get much swimming at school?"

"Quite a lot, in the baths."

"I thought you must. I wish I could swim half as well as you can."

"Oh well, it's just practice, isn't it?" Patrick said. He had often wondered whether Waller had a weak heart, or something, he seemed to spend so much more time on the rocks than in the water.

"I was brought up in London, you see, and one doesn't get the same opportunities there."

"What school were you at?" Patrick asked, not really interested, but with a feeling that Waller was trying to be nice to

him and that he ought to show some friendliness in return.

With faint surprise, he noticed that Denis avoided answering his very simple question.

"I had the bad luck to be a day-boy, as a matter of fact, which I think is rather a mistake. One misses so much. Not so much in the way of work—I didn't do so badly, scholastically, though I always say that my *real* education began when I left school."

Denis paused for a moment, and Patrick wondered if it would be rude to move away. He was getting bored.

"D'you know what was the very first thing I did when I became my own master, Patrick?"

"What?"

"I took a course in psychology," said Denis solemnly.

"How does one do that?"

"There are psychological colleges," Denis replied mysteriously. "It's a subject in which I'm intensely interested, and I was determined to master it thoroughly."

"And did you?" asked Patrick innocently.

"As far as one can. Of course, one learns more from life itself than anything else—and reading. I read a great deal of psychology."

"I shouldn't have thought you had much time," said the boy politely.

"I haven't. I make it. You see, I care more about human nature than anything else in the world—I'm more interested in that than in anything else. I want to be able to help people, and one can only do that by understanding them."

"Yes, I see. I say, look at that fish—it's huge. It's not the same kind as the others surely."

"I think so—only larger. Yes. Ever since I could think at all, I've always found people absorbingly interesting. I've always known that nothing about people could ever shock me, or make me condemn them, because I should know that there was always an explanation. Everything in human nature has an explanation."

"Only one doesn't know what it is, as a rule."

"Unless one happens to be a person who understands psychology," Denis said gently. "I don't mean to say, of course, that one understands everything, even then—but it does make a great many things clearer."

"Does it?" said Patrick.

He now wanted desperately to break off this embarrassing conversation, but a paralysis seemed to be invading him, and an obscure dread of what Denis might say if he saw that his listener was leaving him abruptly, with his words half-uttered.

The next moment his worst fears were realised.

"The reason I'd like to help you, Patrick," said Denis in his quiet little voice, "is partly because I'm naturally interested in young people, and partly because I myself have gone through something of what I think you're going through now."

"But I'm not——" Patrick began violently.

"My dear fellow, don't bother to talk like that to me. You're simply putting up a defence reaction because you don't want to face certain facts. It's absolutely natural—it's one of the most common symptoms in the whole of psychology. I come across it over and over again, and I may as well tell you at once that it doesn't cut any ice with me at all. I know exactly what it's worth, I assure you."

Patrick listened, bewildered and resentful, and yet half uncertain as to whether he had any right to be resentful. It was perfectly evident that Denis genuinely meant to be kind, and perhaps it was rotten to feel so angry....

"Look here——" Patrick began, and then stopped. He looked helplessly at Denis, who returned his gaze with one of deep and solemn benignity.

"I know exactly how you're feeling. I've been through it all myself. I dare say you're thinking now that you wish to goodness I'd shut up, and leave you alone, and I will in a minute, too"—Denis smiled, with an air of great shrewdness, but Patrick made no attempt to return the smile—"but I wanted—I've wanted for some time—to tell you that if you come to the stage—and I think you will, before so very long—of wanting to talk over your difficulties with a fellow rather older than yourself, and whom nothing—nothing whatever—could surprise or shock—well, I should be very much honoured by your confidence. And I think that I could help you."

"Thanks awfully," said Patrick. He was sweating violently, and he swung round from the low parapet and looked wildly round the garden without having the least idea as to what he was looking for.

"Your tutor, Buckland," said Denis in a peculiar tone, "isn't the slightest use to you, of course. He knows nothing whatever about you, to begin with."

"Oh, Buck's all right," said Patrick with a sudden loudness that astonished himself, and at the same moment he found the necessary force to walk away.

### (3)

Denis stood gazing after him reflectively.

Had he succeeded in making a real contact with the boy, or not? One discounted, of course, the quick, nervous denial of any trouble.... That, Denis told himself, was exactly what he had expected. Patrick simply hadn't the courage, as yet, to admit to himself what it was that he was afraid of, and so he pretended not to be afraid. But now the ice was broken, and he knew that one person, at any rate, had seen through his pretence, and had understood the reason for it. Next time they talked, it would be easier.

Denis resolved that the initiative, next time, should come from Patrick.

"Meanwhile," he thought, "I shall work at building up his confidence in me. Talk to him about ordinary things, and let him see that I take things for granted...."

The next moment, his game of make-believe crashed to the ground.

Patrick turned round, and came straight up to him. The sweat was shining on his upper lip.

"I hope you won't think I mean to be rude or anything," he said, "but I'm afraid I must have made a most frightful ass of myself, in some way or other, to make you think there was anything the matter. There isn't, absolutely. I'm having the most extraordinarily good holidays, as a matter of fact. Please don't think I mean to be ungrateful. It's awfully kind of you to bother about me at all, but I—I just thought I'd better tell you that everything's marvellous, so far as I'm concerned."

Without pausing, Patrick walked away again.

Denis tasted an agony of self-abasement and of rage against himself.

He had known all the time that he was only play-acting—trying to compensate himself for the disappointment of not spending the afternoon with Chrissie, and for the humiliation of having been despised by the *concierge*, and ordered about by Mr. Bolham.

He felt, as so often, that he hated himself.

### (4)

"There's the boat coming now. Where the hell's that parasol of mine got to?"

"It's here, mother." Patrick handed his mother the parasol.

"Thanks, darling."

He welcomed avidly the term of endearment from her, and the easy smile she gave him.

Far down into the back of his mind he thrust the thought that there must be, after all, something to fear most horribly, since Waller seemed so sorry for him.

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# CHAPTER VI

## (1)

Denis, very hot from the ascent of the steep and shadeless drive, came into the Hotel and glanced wistfully at the *concierge*. He had a faint hope that there might be a telephone message for him from Chrissie, or even a letter.

The *concierge*, however, looked through him as usual.

Denis went up to his room on the third floor, taking the lift. He seldom exerted himself to climb the stairs, for the heat, although he pretended to enjoy it, very often tired him out.

The moment that he opened the door he saw the small white oblong shape of a closed envelope lying on the table. He snatched it up, instantly forgetting the mortification of the afternoon. The handwriting was small and very legible. Trembling with excitement, he took out the letter. It consisted only of a few lines on a half-sheet of notepaper.

"DENIS DEAR,

I shall walk down towards the Hôtel d'Azur after dinner to-night. Will you meet me at the little wayside *café* on the sea side of the road, as near nine o'clock as you can. I'll wait there till ten.

Love,

CHRISSIE."

Immediately Denis's spirits soared wildly. He could hardly believe in his own incredible good fortune. She wanted to see him again, perhaps as much as he wanted to see her!

He read the note over and over again, especially the last words: "Love, Chrissie."

He wished that he could have sent an answer, for the sake of writing "Love, Denis" at the end of it. But he knew that he would never dare suggest to the haughty and alarming *concierge* that any note of his should be taken by hand to the Villa Mimosa. Besides, he was going to see her in less than five hours' time. They would be together again.

Like most romantics, Denis was stimulated by happiness to the highest pitch of which his faculties were capable. He accomplished such work as he had to do for Mr. Bolham quickly and easily, and felt a glow of joy in his own efficiency.

Dinner was less of a strain than usual. Mr. Muller had been invited by Mr. Bolham to dine at their table, and in a slow meditative way he talked of international finance. Denis, looking from one to the other of the two elder men with what he felt to be an expression of attentive and critical understanding, said little.

He had once, in very early days, given Mr. Bolham his views about the Five-Year Plan in Russia—which were to the effect that even the Russians themselves didn't really believe in it, that such an experiment would never be tolerated in England, that the misery of the peasants was far greater now than it had been in the old days of the Czar, and that a pair of boots, in Leningrad, cost several hundreds of roubles. A man whom Denis knew well had a friend who had done a six weeks' tour in Russia and seen everything.

The dead silence—followed by a polite request for the mustard—with which this had been received had effectually discouraged Denis from any further contributions to the elucidation of world-problems.

To-night, he cared not at all that nobody invited his views. He *had* views, derived mainly from an extremely conservative daily paper and from a smattering of such conversations as he heard in third-class railway carriages or at suburban tea-tables. But public questions did not, in reality, exist for Denis at all. He held his little conventional theories only because he found them useful conversationally. Such calamities as threats of war, increasing unemployment, and mounting taxation, only became important to him when their results made themselves felt in the private concerns of Denis Hannaford Waller.

Nevertheless he listened to Mr. Muller, almost unconsciously memorising phrases from the expert, here and there.

Eventually he would make use of these, as if they were his own, amongst people who would probably be impressed by them.

It was nearly half-past eight before they left the dining-room, and Muller suggested that they should join the Morgans for coffee.

Denis asked that he might be excused. It would be much more difficult to get away without explanations, if he was in a group of people. As for the coffee, he had already reflected that if he and Chrissie Challoner were to sit in a roadside restaurant together, they would have to order something to drink.

Mr. Bolham did not press his secretary to remain.

He said: "Good-night, Waller," in tones plainly indicating that, so far as he was concerned, they need not meet one another again until the next morning.

Passing through the hall Denis met Patrick Romaine, and a faint tremor of discomfort went through him at the recollection of the afternoon's failure. Patrick, however, smiled, as if wishing to conciliate him, and said shyly:

"Won't you come up to the Villa Mimosa, Mr. Waller? We're going to run up there in the car now. Mummie says Mrs. Wolverton-Gush told her to bring anyone she liked."

"No, thanks, Patrick," Denis answered gratefully, touched by the boy's evident desire to appear friendly. "It's awfully nice of you to ask me, but I think I won't, to-night."

"Won't you? There'll only be mother and me, then. I shall get her to let me drive."

Denis remembered that he had seen Buckland with the Moons, just before dinner. Probably he was going out somewhere with them.

"I hope you'll have a good evening," he said, really meaning it.

"Thanks awfully, I expect so. Sorry you can't come."

The boy looked more nearly happy than he had looked for days. Denis felt glad, but forgot Patrick's very existence at once, in his own overwhelming preoccupation.

Much too early, he set off down the road to keep his *rendezvous*. Already he could feel his heart beating almost to suffocation point with excitement.

But as he turned out of the Hotel grounds and into the highroad an unendurable suspense took possession of him. Chrissie couldn't be all that he'd thought her at their first meeting. And even if by some miracle she was, it was impossible that she should go on wanting to be friends with him. Sooner or later she would find him out.

Denis, driven by perpetually unsatisfied vanity into the strangest struttings and posturings, was deficient not only in the normal amount of self-assurance, but also in fundamental self-respect. He believed, in his inmost heart, that no one knowing all about him, and the circumstances of his life, could continue to experience the slightest regard for him. Yet he longed to show himself as he really was, to one human being at least.

Only he couldn't let it be Chrissie.

He wanted her friendship too much. She was the most wonderful person that he had ever met.

He trudged along the road, smooth after the untarred surface of the Hotel drive, keeping well to the side as cars flashed by in either direction, blinding him with huge, dazzling headlights.

Once or twice he passed a small shop, displaying piles of white or coloured *espadrilles* festooning an open doorway, and with a miscellany of rubber balls, picture-postcards, bathing-suits, and jars of sunburn-cream exposed in each tiny window. Large, oily men sat, panting and smoking, outside these establishments, and usually a collection of ragged children, and a verminous dog or two, played about shrilly in the dust.

Presently Denis crossed the road. He was now on the *plage* side.

Below the tangle of undergrowth, cactus-bushes, palm trees, and sandy slope, could be seen a white edge of sea-foam. Far along the coast, the lights of Cannes shone in clusters.

It was possible to forget the motor-cars, and the rich visitors, and the noise they made.

The raft, moored a hundred yards or so from the *plage*, with its slender flight of diving steps raised upwards like a two-dimensional tower, took on a quiet beauty as it lay deserted in the moonlight.

The café of which Denis was in search was the only one on that side of the road. The bar itself, in fact, with two rooms above it and another one behind, presumably constituting the dwelling of the proprietor and his family, stood on the far side. But opposite was a small arbour, very low and dark, open to the road, with a couple of trestle tables and two or three benches inside, and it was here that Denis thought Chrissie meant him to meet her.

He knew that it could not be nine o'clock yet, and began to wonder nervously whether, if he went in and sat down, he would be expected to order something to drink at once.

There was nobody to be seen in the arbour, but on the other side of the road, outside the bar, were a number of swarthy chattering men, drinking and playing cards, whilst others stood looking on. From inside the open doorway sounded the high voices and laughter of women, and presently an unseen mechanical instrument of an old-fashioned and noisy type blared forth, with jerky violence, a long out-of-date music-hall tune.

Denis walked irresolutely into the arbour, feeling sure that all the people on the far side of the road were looking at him and wondering what he wanted, and then decided to walk out again as though he had only looked inside from passing curiosity.

As he turned he saw Chrissie Challoner, slight and tiny in her white evening frock, coming towards him. Without any hesitation she gave him her hand, saying as she did so:

"Oh, Denis! I *am* glad!"

He had been afraid of feeling embarrassed with her, but she seemed so natural and at ease that he momentarily forgot his fears and clasped her hand warmly.

"Thank you for coming," he murmured.

"Let's go inside and sit down. Wasn't this a good idea? I knew we should be quiet here and have it all to ourselves."

"Have you been here before?" Denis asked, not because he wanted to know, but from an imperative need to avoid the significance of silence until the first turmoil of feeling at meeting her again should have subsided.

"Last year, once or twice. Gushie doesn't know about it—she wasn't with me then. I left her up at the Villa, with her horrible friend."

"I know. Mrs. Romaine."

The proprietor of the café, a big burly fellow with a short black moustache, came over to them, smiling.

"*Bonsoir, m'sieu et dame. Vous désirez—?*"

"What would you like?" Denis enquired of Chrissie.

He was surprised, almost shocked, when she asked for a small brandy. He wondered if she would expect him to have one too, and hesitated.

"Don't feel obliged to have one too," said Chrissie calmly. "I always do, but there's no reason why you should. Have coffee if you'd rather."

"I think perhaps I will." He gave the order in halting French and added, gratuitously, a characteristic small falsity.

"As a matter of fact, I had a liqueur brandy after dinner, so I don't think I'll indulge in another one now."

She made no reply, and they sat in silence until an elderly waiter shambled up and placed their drinks in front of them.

Then Denis said:

"I was dreadfully disappointed about this afternoon, Chrissie. I simply couldn't help it. I'm not altogether master of my own time, you know."

"I knew you couldn't help it. You went to the Réserve, didn't you?"

"Yes. Mr. Bolham seemed to want me to go."

"Was it fun?"

"Beastly."

She laughed a little.

"Poor Denis, what a shame!"

After a severe struggle with an overpowering feeling of shyness, Denis murmured, without looking at her: "You can't think how glad I was when I found your note. It was such a wonderful surprise, when I got in."

"I felt I had to see you somehow," she replied, her voice as low as his own. "This was the best plan I could think of. Coming here, I mean."

He made an inarticulate sound of assent.

He felt almost sick with excitement, suspense, and a growing terror lest the evening should be a failure after all. He was miserable, because so far they had not recaptured the spontaneous atmosphere of their first hour together in the dark garden of the Villa Mimosa.

He began to talk nervously and almost at random.

"Mr. Moon had a letter of introduction to you, hadn't he? Does he know friends of yours?"

"Yes—people in Hampstead—they're journalists—rather good."

"I suppose you know all kinds of writing people?"

"Some."

"Does Mr. Moon write too? I thought he looked as if he might," said Denis seriously.

"I shouldn't think so. If he does, I don't suppose he gets published. He's no good," said Chrissie confidently.

"Mrs. Moon is pretty, isn't she?"

"Very. Is she a friend of yours?"

"Oh no. I've hardly spoken to them. And I don't make friends very easily, I'm afraid."

Almost without knowing it, he had reverted to personal topics, timidly attempting to re-establish intimacy between them.

"I know you don't," Chrissie answered.

She finished her drink, and leant back against the wall behind her. He could distinguish the warmer tints of her bare neck and arms against her white dress, and the pale oval of her small face, and her dark, enormous eyes, looking straight up at him.

"I know quite a lot of things about you already," she was saying softly. "But there are lots more that I want to hear about. D'you think you'll be able to tell me, Denis?"

He thrilled at the new note in her voice, and at the sense that they were slipping back into the enchantment of the night before.

"I don't know—I want to. But I've never talked to anybody before—not really."

"Haven't you ever been in love?"

The question startled him. He did not know how to answer it.

"I've had—infatuations," he said at last.

"I suppose so. How old are you?"

"Twenty-seven."

"Haven't you *really* ever been in love?"

His confusion increased. In order to gain time, he said: "It depends what you mean by being in love."

He was hoping that she would give him a lead in her reply, so that he might return whatever kind of answer she wanted.

"Why are you so much afraid of committing yourself, Denis?" she said gently. "I don't think anything you told me could make any difference. And I don't want you to tell me anything at all, unless you'd like to yourself."

"Do you really mean that, Chrissie?"

"Yes, really. Look—I'll tell you about my life first. Shall I?"

"I wish you would," Denis said eagerly.

He wanted very much to hear and he wanted, also, to postpone the moment when he must decide how far he could afford to be honest with Chrissie Challoner.

## (2)

"I ran away from home when I was seventeen," she began abruptly. "My mother was dead—she died before I can remember—and my father sent us both, my sister and myself, to a cheap school where we didn't get enough to eat and had no education at all. Ida—my sister—ran away when she was eighteen, with a man she met staying with a school friend. She left him afterwards and went on the stage, but I don't think she did very well. I see her sometimes—not often.

"Well, father was furious about Ida, and said I'd better come home and live with him, in Wincanton. He was a solicitor there. I tried it for three months and I knew I couldn't stand it. I thought perhaps I could write—I'd always wanted to—and I asked father to make me an allowance and let me go to London. Of course he wouldn't. But there was a girl who'd been at the school I'd been at—before my time, but she used to come down on visits sometimes, and we'd made friends. She was painting, on her own, in London. I wrote to her, and she told me to come. It was terribly generous of her, really, because she hadn't any money either, and it meant letting me sleep on a sofa-bed in the studio and have meals with her and everything. It was supposed to be till I could find a job of sorts. She was an angel to me. I shall never forget it. And I hadn't been there a month when father suddenly died.

"Denis, it was awful. Going home, and finding my aunts and uncles there, and all of them saying that I'd probably killed him, and how heartless it was of me not to mind more. But how could I mind? I'd always hated him, and so had Ida. Ida came for the funeral, and then we heard about the will. We'd always thought he was poor—he never spent anything, and grumbled frightfully about expense—but he wasn't at all. And all his money came to me and Ida. He'd made a will, after my mother died, dividing everything between us.

"The relations were perfectly furious, of course, but they didn't say so to us. On the contrary. They became pleasanter and more civil than they'd ever been in their lives before. It was enough to make one sick.

"We sold up everything, and divided the money, and I went back to Alison and the studio. The best part of it all, then, was being able to make things better for her. We moved to a flat in Fitzroy Square, and had a housekeeper to do the work, and went abroad for holidays. I wrote my first novel then. Things were nearly perfect, for about two years. I thought Alison, and friendship, was all I wanted out of life—and my writing. Naturally, I thought about being in love, but it was in a babyish, romantic, idealistic kind of way. I think I was very young even for nineteen."

She stopped.

"Am I making you feel it at all? Can you see the kind of child I was then—a mixture of precocious imagination and complete unawakenedness? I knew all about love with my mind, of course—one couldn't live in that set and *not* know everything there was to know—but nothing at all with my body. And I wasn't specially curious, either. I wanted to get sex-experience some time or other—but I think it was really mostly because I thought it would be good for my work.

"I needn't tell you that when I did fall in love, I had it terribly badly. He was a Russian, a friend of Alison's. Not her lover. Though I don't suppose it would have made any difference if he had been."

Denis made a sudden movement beside her.

"Do you mind this?" she asked gently. "I won't go on if you do. But I'd much rather you knew about me."

"Yes. Tell me, please."

"I gave him everything he wanted, of course—almost immediately. He was perfectly marvellous—the most wonderful lover an inexperienced girl ever had, I should think. He taught me everything. In the end, he left me. Looking back, I know I ought to have expected it. How could a child of nineteen possibly hope to keep him? I suppose everyone has to go through hell sooner or later. That was mine. Whatever happens, nothing will ever hurt like that again."

"He didn't want to marry you?" said Denis, very low.

"Oh no. I've never—" she hesitated, wondering how to express herself so as not to shock him too greatly. "I don't belong to the sort of world where people marry one another just because they've fallen in love. If I'd stayed at home, in Wincanton, of course—but then I shouldn't have met anyone like Ivan in Wincanton. Marriage didn't enter into it at all.

"Of course I thought I shouldn't ever care for anyone again—and in a way that was true. Nobody else will ever have what Ivan had from me, and nobody else has ever wanted it. He knew a part of me that died after he went away."

"Do you still care for him?"

She shook her head.

"Not really. It's there, in a way—part of myself. These things don't finish, do they?—one somehow assimilates them. It's all in my writing, I suppose—what I got from Ivan, and what I gave him. But actually, I could meet him now without a tremor. He's probably grown fat by this time. I haven't seen him for years. He's a different person now and so am I. Do you understand what I mean?"

"I think I do. I can understand," said Denis solemnly, "that an—an emotional experience of that kind might very well make a woman turn bitter and cynical."

Startled, Chrissie nearly burst out laughing.

"My dear! You are sweet. I'm not like that a bit—not like a woman in a book. I'm still completely taken in, every time. I fall in love, and am quite ready to believe that it's the real thing at last."

"Then you're not in earnest?"

"Yes I am. Only I'm honest—so far as one can be. I do try to see myself as I am—very susceptible and rather fickle and—I'm afraid—terribly affectionate."

"I'm sure you're affectionate. And warmhearted, and generous."

The solemnity was still in his voice, tempered by relief, and Chrissie guessed that he had been deeply disturbed by the revelation of an outlook so widely divergent from any he had met before, and that he was fumbling mentally, on her behalf, amongst qualities that he could view as redeeming ones.

"It isn't really dreadful, you know," she said softly. "I've had lovers—but it's been because I've cared for them. There have only been two men, besides Ivan, and I was in love with each of them. It didn't hurt anybody, that we should be happy for a little while. And of course it's been terribly good for my writing. I sometimes wonder if one's really being

driven all the time, without knowing it, by something that wants whatever is best for one's work."

"That can't be right," said Denis, with a positiveness that astonished her, accustomed as she was to a circle in which almost everything was experimental, every opinion held tentatively, swinging upon the pivot of individual point-of-view.

"Chrissie, don't you believe in right and wrong?"

"Do you mean in some arbitrary overhead ruling? How can one? The moral standard changes with each generation in turn, surely?"

"Not really. People like to think so because it gives them an excuse," said Denis confusedly. "But there's such a thing as—as religion, isn't there?"

"Oh! But I'm not religious. Are you?"

"I don't necessarily go to church, or feel obliged to—to accept everything, but I do believe in—in the teaching of Christ, and try to follow it out."

Chrissie felt more discouraged at this than at anything that had yet passed between them.

She was, as she had truly said, susceptible, and something in Denis had appealed to her at first sight. The surface cleverness of the semi-intellectuals amongst whom she had spent the past ten years of her life had begun to weary her, and she was tired of the artificial emphasis laid by them on the physical values of love. Her approach to Denis had been spontaneous and sincere. She felt in him a certain tenuous charm, a pathetic weakness and loneliness that roused a protective affection in herself. She wanted to make him fall in love with her, and to fall in love with him in return. Chrissie was both too widely experienced in men and too intelligent to expect from Denis any real understanding. Her confidences—which indeed were no confidences at all, since she disliked, and seldom practised, any form of reserve towards anyone—had been made almost experimentally, in order to test his reactions to them and to evoke his own confidences in return.

His mention of religion—by which he evidently meant a series of dogmatic assertions put before him in childhood, uncritically accepted and adhered to by him ever since—gave Chrissie the measure of the distance that mentally separated them.

For an instant she felt: *It's no use going on with this.*

Then Denis spoke, haltingly and yet with eagerness.

"Chrissie—I can't tell you how much it means to me that you should have talked to me like this. I think it's wonderful of you. It's the greatest honour I've ever received. Don't think me a prig for saying what I did just now."

The anxiety in his voice touched her.

"I rather like you for being a prig," she murmured.

At the moment, it was true.

### (3)

"I think," Denis said wistfully and earnestly, "that perhaps I can help you."

He had said, and felt, the same thing before in regard to other girls. Sometimes he worded it slightly otherwise: I think I may have been sent to help you.

Always they had agreed with him. But none of them had been like Chrissie, older, cleverer, and far more sophisticated than himself. Much of Chrissie's charm for Denis sprang from his profound and uncomprehending admiration for her creative gift. For the rest, he had been deeply moved and flattered by her advances, and quick to reflect her conviction of a mutual attraction between them. Now, he was most desperately anxious that she should not find him disappointing or inadequate.

"You said yesterday that you'd been lonely—too. Could I make that any better, do you think? I'd like to, more than anything in the world, if it were possible."

"I think you could, Denis."

"It seems so incredible that you should want *me* for a friend. After all, you're clever—much cleverer than I am—and you know a great many people. You must have a lot of friends already."

"I've never found the friend I've always wanted," said Chrissie.

He could see her big, mournful eyes fixed upon him, and delicious tremors invaded him.

He wanted to take her hand, but dared not. A shuffling step sounded beside them, and the waiter appeared.

"*Consommations, m'sieu et dame ...?*"

Denis began to fumble in the breast-pocket of his dinner jacket, but with a quick gesture Chrissie handed him a little silver-coloured bag.

"There's some money in there ... take it, please."

"But mayn't I——?"

"Really," she said, speaking decisively.

Denis paid their modest bill.

He saw that there were three or four hundred-franc notes in the bag besides a number of small coins and some five-franc notes, and he remembered that Chrissie Challoner was probably, by comparison with himself, rich.

Without further protest he closed the bag and returned it to her. Their fingers touched. Denis closed his hand over hers. It was a very soft, small hand, and gave him an unwonted sensation of being himself strong and masculine—a potential protector.

"Tell me about *you*, Denis."

"It's not interesting, Chrissie dear. I'm a terribly ordinary sort of person, I'm afraid."

Her fingers squeezed his lightly and withdrew themselves, and even before she spoke he knew that he had struck a false note.

"We won't pretend with one another, will we? If you don't want to tell me anything, I'd rather you said so."

"Chrissie, it's not ... it isn't that.... I'd tell you anything in the world——"

"You see," she said in a reasonable voice, "I believe I should understand anything about you. Just because you're you, and I'm I. Do you feel that too, a little bit?"

"Yes."

"I know it's difficult for you, because you've never talked to anybody much. But wouldn't it be a relief if you *did*?"

"Yes," he said, thinking how little she knew the strength of the inhibitions that precluded him, he supposed for ever, from that relief. "I know already that when you were a little boy you had no mother—like me—and your stepmother wasn't kind, and you were miserable, and had no one. And you weren't happy at school. What happened after that?"

"I had to earn my own living. I'd never expected to have to, of course," said Denis hastily. "My father came of a very old family and he ought to have inherited a big estate, as a matter of fact. He was really treated very unjustly by an old cousin from whom he was led to expect a lot of money."

Denis had both heard and repeated this not very original legend so often that he had quite come to believe in it himself.

"If my father had had enough money he would have gone to law about the will, and everyone said he'd have won his

case, but he couldn't afford it. So he simply went on in harness until he died, five years ago. He worked in—in a Bank."

"Did you live at home?"

"No. There was a second family and not really room for me, and anyway my stepmother didn't want me."

"Poor Denis. What did you do?"

"I learnt shorthand-typing, and took a job with an Insurance Company in the City. Oh, Chrissie, I hated it so! The people I had to associate with were common, and I was in horrible lodgings and it was all so beastly."

Denis shuddered—without affectation, for it was true that he had suffered. He was not capable of dominating his surroundings.

"I couldn't stay on. It was mad to throw up a perfectly sound job, and I knew it—but I couldn't have gone on living like that. I thought I'd rather starve. I didn't know how near I was to come to it. There have been times, Chrissie, when I quite literally haven't known how I was going to get my next meal."

Denis paused, but she made no sign. He had failed to realise that complete penury, and approximate starvation, were far less uncommon occurrences in her world than in his.

"I tried being a travelling salesman—and once I did stop-gap at a boys' school—I rather liked that—and I've even had odd jobs in a newspaper office. And then I suddenly got what I'd always wanted—a post as private secretary."

"How did you get it?"

"Partly through answering an advertisement," Denis said evasively. "And a friend of mine gave me a letter that helped. I held the job nearly two years, and I think I should be in it still, but the man I was working for went to South America." He paused, and then added quickly: "He had to take someone with him who could speak Spanish."

"Denis, where were you living all that time? With the man you were working for?"

Denis hesitated again.

"What makes you ask? No—as a matter of fact, I wasn't. I lived in a—a small private hotel in the North of London. It was much better for me to have a complete change of atmosphere when my work was over."

"What happened next?"

"I took various secretarial posts—mostly temporary ones—but I wasn't very lucky. Twice I had to give up through illness. Last winter I had pneumonia and nearly died. That was really one reason why I accepted this post with Mr. Bolham, because I felt that a climate like this was exactly what I needed—real sun, and warmth."

"It was a piece of good luck getting it," said Chrissie.

"Oh yes, I know that," Denis agreed hastily—though there had been many times in the course of the past fortnight when he had viewed his association with the distinguished Mr. Bolham as being anything rather than a piece of good luck.

"Do you know," said Chrissie gently, "that you've only told me facts? Nothing whatever about your own inner life, or the people who've mattered to you—the women you've fallen in love with——"

"I haven't had much time for falling in love, have I? And besides, what would be the use?"

"Does one usually wait to have time, *or* for it to be of any use?"

They both laughed a little.

"I'll tell you—other things—some day, if you'd like me to, Chrissie. If I don't talk about other people much, it's partly because I owe a certain loyalty—I can't explain exactly—There are many things I might like to tell you about, but in loyalty to other people—I *can't*."

Denis had made use of this formula before, and it had always been received without question. He felt the palms of his

hands grow wet before Chrissie answered. Even when at last she did so, he was unable to feel certain that she had wholly accepted his suggestion of mysterious, unspecified obligations.

"You shan't tell me anything you'd rather not, Denis, and I won't ask. Only you'll be honest with me, won't you?"

"Always, Chrissie. Will you promise me the same thing?"

"Yes, I will. It's a bargain. And you know—you really needn't be afraid of telling me the truth about yourself. It couldn't make any difference."

"I think you're wonderful," said Denis.

He did indeed think that she was wonderful. But he knew that he could never be open with her, never willingly let her know the whole truth about himself, or those circumstances of his life that he viewed as derogatory to himself.

Together with Denis's increasing infatuation, a growing fear took possession of him, lest Chrissie's natural powers of penetration should sooner or later lead her to conclusions that were only too likely to be accurate ones.

The unquestioning bliss of the day before had vanished: bliss was still there, but it was shot with anxiety.

#### (4)

It was eleven o'clock when Chrissie rose, saying that she must go back to the Villa.

"Will they wonder where you've been?" asked Denis, rather fearfully.

"Oh, sure to. Gushie's easily the most inquisitive person on earth, I should think."

"What are you going to tell them?"

"That I went out for a walk and met you," said Chrissie promptly. "They're bound to know about us in a day or two, anyway, if we're to see anything of one another at all. And I'm not in the least ashamed of being friends with you, Denis."

He did not quite know what to answer, and walked beside her in silence.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked at last, humbly. "To-morrow?"

"Gushie and I are coming down to the rocks to bathe, with the Romaynes. About four o'clock. Could you manage that?"

"I'm not sure. I will if I possibly can."

"If you're not there, I shall come on to the Hotel. You'd better introduce your Mr. Bolham to me—it'll make things easier. For us to meet often, I mean."

"I can't imagine why you should care about me in the very least!" Denis exclaimed impulsively.

They had reached the gate of the Villa Mimosa, and stood facing one another in the moonlight.

"I don't quite know myself," Chrissie disconcertingly replied. "But—somehow I can't help it."

The sudden tenderness in her voice moved Denis almost to ecstasy.

"Oh, Chrissie!" he stammered, gazing helplessly down at her uplifted face.

"Good-night, dear," said Chrissie.

"*Must* you go in at once?"

"Yes, I must."

Raising herself on tiptoe, she put her arm round his neck, and kissed him on the cheek.

"That's just to show you," she murmured, and ran quickly through the little open gate and down the pathway.

Denis, dazed and incredulous, remained in the road staring after her.

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## CHAPTER VII

### (1)

In Cannes, Hilary Moon became the owner of a motor-boat. He and Angie walked along the principal streets slowly, staring into the shop-windows, but looking, also, at the people they met.

"Bloody lot they are," said Hilary.

"Yeah," said Angie.

Men in bérets, sitting outside cafés, stared at her, and she stared indifferently back at them. Her beautiful eyes only lighted up occasionally, when she passed some sleek-haired youth reclining at the wheel of a large motor-car, and met his gaze fixed full upon her. Then the swaying motion of her hips would become very slightly accentuated, her eyelids droop a little, and her mouth appear to take on fuller curves. If she had been alone, she would have been followed and accosted.

"It's too hot to go on walking," she said suddenly. "Besides, I'm going to try on hats. This is a good shop."

"Meet you at the English tea-rooms at five o'clock," said Hilary.

She nodded indifferently.

Hilary walked on, wishing that the back of his neck didn't hurt so confoundedly where it had been caught by the sun.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo!"

Hilary and his acquaintance looked at one another without great enthusiasm.

Where on earth, thought Hilary, had they met before? Some hotel, somewhere abroad. He could remember the face—fat and rather sinister, with a tiny smudge of moustache,—and the flat, uninflected voice. But not the name.

"You alone?"

"Practically," said Hilary languidly. He felt no need to explain about Angie.

"What about a drink?"

"Yeah, what about it?"

"There's a place quite near."

They went and drank.

Hilary explained that he wanted a car. He was not surprised when his companion, in his turn, explained that he had, as it happened, got a car to sell. Hilary himself had always got a car to sell the moment that he heard of anyone who wanted to buy one. So had everyone else, in his experience. That was part of the way in which one lived.

An appointment was made for the next morning—it appeared that the car was just being thoroughly overhauled at the garage, otherwise Hilary could have had a trial trip in her then and there—at the Hôtel d'Azur.

"I'll run her over any time you say. No trouble at all."

"Know where it is?"

"Yes. I've been round by sea to St. Raphael half a dozen times. D'you know anything about speed-boats?"

"Not a lot."

"As a matter of fact, she's not a speed-boat. But she's the fastest motor-boat *I've* ever struck. I say, what about another

drink?"

"This one's on me, then."

They went on talking about the motor-boat.

Hilary became interested.

It would give one something to do, and one might be able to sell it eventually, and make a bit of money. He began to visualise himself in a blue singlet, competent and rather *blasé*, at the wheel.

"Come and have a look at her, why don't you? She's only just down in the harbour."

"Come on, then."

Experiencing the faint, but definite, sensation of cordiality that only drink ever induced in him, Hilary proceeded to go and look at the motor-boat.

His principal concern was to avoid betraying the fact that he knew nothing about motor-boats, and had little natural aptitude for understanding machinery of any kind.

He thought that in this he succeeded rather well, and quite soon he bought the motor-boat. There was a cheque-book in his pocket, which was unusual, for the reason—far more unusual still—that he had some money in the Bank at home. He had borrowed with extraordinary success before leaving England, from an elderly woman to whom he had made love, a sum sufficiently large to pay off the worst of their debts. In point of fact, he had actually used a fraction of it towards that very purpose. But there was quite a lot left.

"I tell you what, I'll buy you a drink out of the price of the boat," said Hilary's acquaintance.

Hilary accepted with a faint smile.

In the bar they arranged for the transfer of the boat to her new owner.

"I'll bring her round to-morrow morning to the bay opposite your Hotel—no, damn it, I can't very well do that if I'm driving the car over, can I? Look here, I tell you what, there's a French mechanic chap I know here who'll be delighted to take her across for me, any time you say. Then he can explain any little thing you want to know. How's that?"

"Absolutely right with me. Say four o'clock in the afternoon. And we'll have another drink on the strength of it."

An hour and a quarter late, Hilary met his wife at the English tea-rooms.

As he came in, she nodded a dismissal to a tall, fair youth sitting at a small table with her. He got up obediently, passing Hilary on his way to the cash-desk. Hilary scowled slightly.

"I've had tea," said Angie. "You're most damnably late. I thought you told the taxi we'd be on the *place* at half-past five."

"Well, it won't kill him to wait, I suppose. Come on, if you're ready."

He followed her out of the tea-shop. Angie left without paying anything at the desk and Hilary neither attempted to do so for her, nor made any comment on the omission.

## (2)

On the return of the Moons to the Hôtel d'Azur they were greeted by Buckland, lounging on the steps.

His eyes devoured Angie's face in a frankly avid look. "I thought you were never coming back," he said. "It's been one hell of a day."

"What was the Réserve like?" Angie asked. She had seated herself at once in the nearest chair.

"Lousy, with a pack of kids all over the place. Look here, what about a drink?"

"Thanks, I don't mind if I do. Hilary's been drinking steadily all the afternoon, I may tell you. He's bought a speed-boat or something."

"I say, have you really?" Buckland sat down close to Angie.

Hilary, perceiving that he would get no attention from either of them, went haughtily away. He had not drunk enough to affect him noticeably, but drink and the heat combined caused him to feel sleepy. He supposed, dimly and indifferently, that Angie would prefer to be left to Buckland's obvious intention of making love to her, and it was part of Hilary's code that marriage should not be allowed to interfere with the liberty of the individual. He left them.

"Thank God he's gone," said Buckland.

"Why?"

"Don't you know why?"

"No."

The lips of Angie and Buckland framed the familiar sentences of this dialogue as nearly as possible without knowing what it was that they said. Each was insistently aware of the hot, vital current racing mysteriously and rapturously between them. Presently Buckland put his hand upon the single thickness of silk that covered Angie's thigh.

Her head fell backwards, and she half closed her eyes, her breast rising and falling quickly.

"You oughtn't to do that," she murmured.

"Why not?" Buckland's voice was thick, and he breathed hard. "You're not afraid of me, are you?"

"Not of you—no."

"What, then?"

She opened her eyes, without moving, and looked at him.

"Oh my God, Angie——"

"Buck——"

His grip tightened.

"Can't we get away from here—go up the hill or something?" he muttered.

"If you like."

"You're the most lovely thing——"

He tore his hand away, and Angie jerked herself upright, as voices sounded behind them.

"Come on, let's clear out," said Buckland.

They stood up.

"Mr. Buckland," said Dulcie Courteney's shrill voice, "my daddy's come. You haven't met him yet, have you? Or Mrs. Moon—this is my father. Pops, this is Mr. Buckland."

Courteney was a very tall, aquiline man, darkly handsome in a theatrical style, and looking too young to have a daughter of Dulcie's age.

He bowed very low to Angie, and exchanged a nod and a handshake with Buckland, his eyes scanning both of them with an air of acute observation even as he smiled, showing extremely good teeth.

His voice, when he spoke, was a deep, rather artificially cultured one.

"I'm so pleased to meet you, Mrs. Moon. I've been hearing about all your kindness to this child."

He laid a hand on Dulcie's shoulder. She smiled rather unhappily, but Angie accepted unmoved this entirely unmerited tribute.

"I hope you've been enjoying life on the coast. I dare say you know it very well already?"

"Not awfully well," said Angie languidly.

"You must let me have the pleasure of arranging an expedition or two—Monte Carlo, and so on. Anything you think might be amusing. Dulcie tells me things have been rather slack at the Hotel. It must have been quite unusually hot, of course."

"A hundred and one degrees Fahrenheit yesterday, Pops."

"I can quite believe it. Of course that's excessive, even for here. Why, I assure you that two days ago in Hyde Park——"

"I say, if you want a stroll before dinner, Angie——"

Buckland made no attempt to conceal his impatience.

"There's a charming walk at the back of the Hotel—up the hill, if you don't mind a bit of a climb."

Buckland, who stood facing the Hotel steps, muttered something below his breath as Coral Romaine came out and walked straight up to him.

"There you are," she said in a loud, disagreeable voice. "What on earth have you been doing? And where's Patrick?"

"Patrick's all right. He's not a baby. He doesn't want someone tagging after him all day long."

"It's a damned good thing he doesn't—you never go near him that I can see. I don't know what you think I'm paying you for."

Courteney moved away with an air of studied inattention, followed by Dulcie.

Angie shrugged her shoulders and sketched a faint movement in the direction of the Hotel.

"Don't go," said Buckland. "I was just going to buy you a drink. You'll have one, won't you, Coral?"

"I don't know that I will," she said angrily.

"Yes you will. Come on, sit down here. Patrick's all right, I swear he is. Look here, these people have bought a motor-boat. Don't you call that frightfully enterprising? Has Hilary ever had one before, by the way?"

"Never," said Angie. "He'll probably drown us both. He doesn't know anything about machinery, either."

"Well, I do," said Buckland positively. "You'd better take me out with you."

"Don't mind asking, will you?" Mrs. Romaine said. "I never knew anyone cadge as you do, Buck."

"It's the life," said Buckland. "One's got to, if one's going to get anything out of life at all. Here, *garçon—ici!*"

They remained on the terrace, drinking their cocktails, and were presently joined by Hilary.

Soon afterwards Mrs. Romaine stood up.

"Coming, Buck?"

"Where to?" he asked without stirring.

"We're going up to the Villa Mimosa, aren't we? To dinner."

"I didn't remember."

Buckland's foot stealthily pressed Angie's beneath the table.

"I thought you were dining with us," she said innocently. "You said you were."

"I say, Coral, I'm awfully sorry—I honestly had no idea I was expected at the Villa. D'you awfully mind if I don't go?"

"I'm afraid I do," said Mrs. Romyne. "I want you to drive the car."

"Why not let Patrick?"

"Because you're the person I'm paying to do the job," said Mrs. Romyne furiously. "What a swine you are, aren't you? Always ready to do anything except a job of work."

Patrick came down the steps, hesitated, and then came and stood beside his mother.

"Ready, mother?" His boyish voice sounded as though he only kept it level by an effort of will. "Shall I get the car?"

"I'm not going."

She threw herself down on a chair.

"You're perfectly mad," said Buckland. "Of course you're going."

"Then you're coming with me. *I'm* not going to tell a pack of lies for you, and have everyone asking what I brought a tutor out here for at all. D'you think you're just having a holiday at my expense or what?"

"Oh my God," gently said Hilary Moon in a high, superior voice. He walked away.

"See you later, then," said Angie to Buckland, without moving.

"Mother, I thought—I'll drive you. Won't that do?" stammered Patrick.

"No it won't. How often have I told you I won't have you driving the car out here on these bloody roads—a kid like you. Besides, it's Buck's job."

Buckland sprang to his feet scowling.

"All right, all right! I'll come. Anybody would think I was the damned chauffeur."

"See you when I get back, Angie," he added in a loud, determined voice.

Mrs. Romyne got up too.

"Come on, we'll start from the garage."

She swung along the path, her long stride keeping pace with Buckland's.

Patrick stood and stared after them for a long moment, and then followed.

### (3)

Coral was blindly and furiously angry. Buckland's open defection had not only enraged her, it had frightened her as well. She saw in it, clearly and finally, proof that she could no longer hold her own against younger women. Cads like Buckland would only be amused by her so long as there was nobody else to make love to—nobody younger. Her day was over—finished.

She flung herself into the back of the big car, as Buckland climbed sulkily to the driving-seat.

Patrick took the place next hers. She was not even aware of him. She bit her handkerchief viciously and threw herself about. All her life she had vented her feelings in physical restlessness, or actual violence.

She made no attempt to control or conceal them when the Villa Mimosa was reached. Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, advancing with short steps and faintly wagging behind, offered her favourite formula of greeting.

"How nice to see you, dear. And Patrick—quite the young man now, isn't he? Had you a good bathe this morning?"

"We went for an idiotic lunch-party to that beastly place across the Bay. Oh Christ, I'm tired. Doesn't the heat ever let up in this beastly place?"

"You must let me give you a cold drink," said Mrs. Wolverton-Gush authoritatively. "Miss Challoner will be down directly, I'm sure. She's obliged to go out this evening, but I said I knew you'd forgive her."

"I don't care if she goes or stays," said Coral. "It's all one to me."

"Take a seat, dear, won't you? Buck, are you going to be very sweet and mix the drinks for us?"

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush wore an air that Coral knew well: that of being a complete woman of the world. Quite suddenly, it made her want to laugh.

Old Gushie really was a scream. She didn't know what she looked like, in that black-and-green affair that clipped her just too tightly in all the wrong places. Instinctively, Coral stretched out her own still lithe and slender shape, in a soft flowered-chiffon frock, loosely clinging to her figure. Insensibly, she became more calm. Buck, handing her a cocktail, grinned at her with a pleading expression in his dark eyes. She did not respond, but it was by an effort that she refrained.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, with a resolute display of conscious good-breeding, continued to make conversation, her mouth stretched into a fixed smile, her eyes alert and watchful.

She apologised for Chrissie Challoner.

"Really these Bohemians.... She's a dear little thing, and I'm quite fond of her—of course I admire literary people very much and always have done—but I'm afraid that, where she's concerned, time is not. Simply. It may be all right out here, but of course, English servants won't stand it. The difficulty I've had with them when I've been working for her in London!"

"Does she keep any servants? I should have thought a daily char was more in her line," said Coral rather brutally. It amused her to prick at her friend's social pretensions from time to time.

Though Gushie never let herself be shown up for the old humbug she was—she'd say that for the old girl.

"One resident maid, dear," said Gushie, unperturbed. "It's quite a small establishment. Naturally, it would be, with just the one person in the flat—and she's out a great deal, and away very often. I must say, these people who write have a very easy time of it, compared with the rest of us in this workaday world."

"I suppose she makes a pretty good income out of her books, doesn't she?" Buckland asked curiously.

"You'd be surprised. Really, it does seem as if some people had all the luck."

"Miss Challoner must be awfully clever," said Patrick shyly.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush turned on him a rather pitying smile.

"Oh, of course. No one would deny that for a moment—naturally they wouldn't. I don't know that I care very much for her style myself, but then I'm peculiar in that way. But there's no doubt that she's managed to hit the popular taste, once or twice."

"I say, will she expect us to talk about her books?"

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush emitted a cultured ripple.

"Buck, you're quite refreshing, I assure you. Miss Challoner is a most ordinary girl, except for this gift of hers—because writing is, undeniably, a gift—and she won't—Ah, there you are, dear."

Chrissie Challoner trailed in with rather vague greetings and apologies. She had the appearance of not quite knowing who any of them were, and of wondering why they had come.

"Well, I must say——!" exclaimed Coral Romaine.

"I know, dear."

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush did know. She was profoundly exasperated and yet slightly triumphant. There was a certain satisfaction in knowing that other people realised—couldn't possibly help realising—something of what she had to put up with.

Dinner had not been a success, in spite of her own efforts. In vain had she introduced first one topic and then another—the climate, the Hotel, the Royal Family, and the latest film star, each in turn—in the endeavour to promote general conversation. No one had given her the slightest help. It had been a positive relief when dinner was finished, and they had all gone out on to the loggia for coffee.

About two minutes afterwards, Chrissie Challoner had murmured an unconvincing apology, and left them.

Buckland, perhaps chagrined at his complete failure to attract her attention during dinner, had escorted her to the gate and not returned.

"What a little bitch!" said Coral. "Is she always like that?"

"Please, dear——" Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, outraged, indicated Patrick by a gesture.

"Patrick, can't you go for a swim or something? Go and find Buck," directed his mother. "I want to talk to Gushie."

The boy stood up.

"There's a gramophone in the sitting-room, Patrick—or the wireless, if you prefer that."

"Thanks very much."

He left them.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush exhaled a deep breath. She experienced the painful and familiar sensation of on-coming indigestion. It added venom to her spirit, although she never, at any time, permitted herself the relief of wholly unbridled speech. She had long ago learnt that such a luxury was only for employers, never for the employed.

"Yes," she said. "Of course, in some ways she's generous, and naturally there's no question of my being treated other than as a gentlewoman, which is more than I can say for *some* people I've been obliged to work for—but she's spoilt, that's about what it is. Utterly spoilt."

"I thought she was damned rude, to-night."

"She's like that, dear. Spoilt, if you see what I mean. I suppose it's this writing, and her being so young. She's got that silly way of going all moonified, as though nobody was good enough to talk to. I've seen her carry on in precisely the same manner with her own friends. Precisely the same."

"I wonder she's *got* any friends."

"Well, these Bohemians—they form clicks, you know. Simply clicks. That's all they are."

"Do men like her?"

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush slightly shrugged her shoulders. She would have liked to convey the impression that Chrissie was entirely unattractive to men, but had no intention of saying so in words that might possibly be repeated.

Coral answered her own question:

"I suppose they do," she said vehemently. "Anything that's under thirty can always get hold of a man of sorts. I tell you, Gushie, the young simply don't know how lucky they are. Once a woman's turned forty, it's the end. Everything's over. It's damnable."

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush sighed again—not because the thought of waning sexual attraction disturbed her, since she had never been able to turn her own share of it to any profit—but because she realised that Coral was about to talk about her own grievances.

"At any rate, dear," she said in an affectionate tone, "*you* needn't worry, I'm sure. Whatever your age may be, you don't look a day over thirty-five. And we all know that a woman is as old as she looks."

"That's all very well ..." began Mrs. Romaine.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush settled down to think about her investments. She had a small amount of capital, and lived in constant anxiety lest it should diminish. She studied the share-market every day, and lay awake at night, sometimes, sweating with terror at the thought of the future, if she should ever lose that tiny bulwark against destitution. Supposing she were ill—unable to earn her living any longer—supposing she had to undergo an operation?

Years ago, Ruth Wolverton-Gush had watched first her mother, and then her sister, die of cancer. A supreme fear lay always at the bottom of her soul.

As Coral Romaine's complaining, indignant voice went on and on, her friend from time to time made a clicking sound of sympathy with her tongue against the roof of her mouth. She possessed to the full the faculty—so indispensable to those whose living depends upon the willingness of other people to employ them—of giving a surface attention to whatever was being said to her, whilst at the same time following her own train of thought.

Without any undue effort she gathered that Coral was furious with Buckland, and it did not in the least surprise her. She had known Buckland for several years.

"How does he get on with Patrick, dear?"

"All right, I suppose—I don't know. He doesn't seem to be with him much. And now I suppose he thinks he's going to spend his time doing nothing at all except sitting about with this Mrs. Moon. Though if you ask me, she doesn't look like Mrs. Anybody. If ever I saw a tart, she's one."

"Well, dear, the remedy's in your own hands. You're paying him, aren't you, and he's out here at your expense. You've nothing to do but tell him that he's paid to do as you wish. If you're paying him, it follows to reason that he must be at your disposal."

Coral, disconcertingly to Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, burst out laughing.

"Yes, I can hear myself. Gushie, you really are a perfect scream."

"After all, it's an extraordinarily good post. Look at what he's getting out of it!" Mrs. Wolverton-Gush ejaculated bitterly. "Practically a free holiday out here, and allowed to drive the car and all the rest of it."

"I suppose I'm too easy-going. I suppose he thinks I'll stand anything and everything. Well, he's got a surprise coming, that's all. My God, as if I couldn't get a hundred holiday tutors, any day, if I wanted to."

"Well, naturally, dear."

"That little ass of a secretary—old Bolham's—would give his ears for the job. He's always trying to play at being Boys Together with Patrick. He simply loathes Buck, too. Jealous, I suppose."

"Is that young Waller?"

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush spoke in an intentionally significant tone.

"Why?"

"Quite between ourselves, I think he's trying to make up to Miss Challoner."

"That little worm? She wouldn't look at him."

"One never knows, does one?"

"Gushie, what on earth d'you mean?"

"Well, dear, I certainly shouldn't mention it to anybody but yourself, and not even to you if she ever made any secret about that kind of thing. But she never does. She practically told me that she was attracted by him, and I'm as nearly as possible certain that she's gone out to meet him to-night."

"My God, she must be pretty hard up for a man."

"Do you know anything about him, dear?"

"Only that he's afraid of the water—and of nearly everything else in the world, I should think, from the look of him. And I don't suppose he's got a bean."

"That would account for it," said Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, really believing it. "Naturally, he'd realise that *she* has money, and may very easily make a lot more."

"But she wouldn't be idiotic enough to marry him?"

"I should hardly think so, dear, but one never quite knows with these so-called clever people. They do the most extraordinary things, when it comes to affairs of this kind. They're at the mercy of their emotions, is what *I* always say."

"That's more than *you've* ever been, Gushie," said Mrs. Romaine. "I don't agree with you about Waller. He's a worm, if you like, but he isn't an adventurer. He hasn't got the guts, for one thing."

"I dare say you're right, my dear. You've had more opportunity for judging than I have. All the same, I shall keep my eye on the young man. He's perfectly capable of trying to borrow money, I should say."

"They all do that, give 'em half a chance, including your friend Buck. Where the devil has he got to, by the way?"

She was getting restless, and Mrs. Wolverton-Gush suggested moving indoors.

They found Patrick sitting at the table, his hands over his ears, reading an old volume of the *Graphic*. He told them that Buckland had found one of the tyres flat, and had walked to the nearest garage to get a man.

"He couldn't have changed it himself, I suppose," said Mrs. Romaine. "Doesn't that just *show*?"

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush nodded portentously.

Patrick looked from one to the other in puzzled silence.

## (5)

It was characteristic of Buckland that although he frequently drank too much, he never did so unintentionally.

At the unsuccessful evening at the Villa Mimosa he had strictly limited himself, partly because he was always very careful when he was in charge of a car, and partly because he wished to do nothing further to annoy Coral Romaine. He was, at the same time, comfortably aware that he could probably restore her to good-humour without much difficulty, and this he intended to do.

It wasn't worth while risking a soft job, even for Angie Moon's favours. Besides—Buckland grinned at the thought—it ought to be quite possible to carry on an affair with Angie without letting Coral suspect that there was more in it than a flirtation.

His breath came faster, at the thought of Angie's seductions, and he deliberately turned his mind away from it.

Time enough for that later on.

For the past ten years Buckland had contrived to live at the expense of other people, generally women, whilst binding himself to no particular type of work. He had, indeed, neither special training nor aptitude, beyond a strong interest in motor-engines, and a certain cleverness in dealing with them.

Buckland was the illegitimate son of a nursery-governess, who had been seduced by her first employer at the age of nineteen. She had given birth to her child in terror and secrecy, and had acquiesced without question in the decree of her relations that it should be taken away from her. How, otherwise, could she have continued to earn a living?

So the baby had been sent or smuggled into a Home, and the mother, by the united efforts of her family, had obtained another post in a distant part of England, where her story was not known. She never saw her baby, nor learnt what had become of it.

The boy, a large, handsome child, was adopted at six years old by a childless couple, respectable elderly tradespeople living in Bristol. They treated him kindly, and gave him their own name, but when they died, within a month of one another, it was found that they had left no provision for him. Buckland by this time was sixteen, but looked a great deal older. An actress in a touring company, meeting him at her lodgings, where he knew the son of the landlady, took a violent fancy to him. She actually found him a small job with the company. He remained with them for nearly a year and in that time learnt that he was attractive to women, especially to those older than himself.

On that knowledge he had practically lived ever since.

He possessed personality, great self-confidence, and the assured manner that goes with it, and a natural fund of animal spirits that had stood him in very good stead. Nor was he devoid of the type of intelligence that is quick to see, and take, any possible advantage to its owner.

Unlike Denis Waller, Buckland had never lost a job through sheer incompetence to hold it. Either he had deliberately thrown up a post because he had something better in view, or he had found himself kicked out by the infuriated husband of a woman to whom he had made love.

Women were his weakest point. He was violently sensual, and practically devoid of moral sense.

It was Buckland's intention eventually to marry a woman with money, and settle down. He had a conviction that he could manage an estate, and he was quite prepared to do so to the best of his ability, for he was by nature energetic.

He had even thought, vaguely, of Coral Romaine—but he was far from certain that she would agree to marriage, and in any case, he did not feel sure that she had any money of her own besides the allowance from her husband, that would naturally cease if she obtained a divorce and remarried.

Besides, sixteen years difference in age was a bit steep ... he ought to be able to do better than that.

There must be plenty of younger women about, like Chrissie Challoner, who were earning large incomes. Everyone said that women were making such money as there was to be made these days.

It was a pity that Chrissie Challoner was so upstage and affected. Frigid, too, unless Buckland was very much mistaken.

Rightly judging that an observation of this kind would be a success with Coral, Buckland made it aloud.

Coral immediately told him in return what Gushie had said about the attraction between Chrissie and Denis Waller.

Buckland roared with laughter.

"It's perfectly true, I bet you anything you like. Gushie thinks she's meeting him to-night."

"She went mooning off in this direction. I suggested driving her wherever she wanted to go—I knew you wouldn't mind, Coral—but she wasn't having any. D'you suppose we shall find them sitting hand-in-hand on the terrace at the Hôtel d'Azur?"

Mrs. Romaine's answer was sufficiently ribald to make him laugh again loudly, and also to assure him that she had recovered her temper.

Actually, as the car swung round the corner of the road, under the archway that led to the steep approach they passed Denis, walking with bent head.

"Offer him a lift!" screamed Coral.

Buckland put on the brakes and the car drew to a standstill.

"Want a lift, Waller?" he shouted.

"Thank you so much—how very kind of you—I should be most grateful, if I might——"

The stammered civilities of Denis were, as usual, cut short.

"Get in, then—there's plenty of room at the back."

Buckland started the car again almost before he had finished speaking. Denis made a scrambling and awkward jump, and was pulled in by Patrick.

"Where have you come from? Solitary drinking at the beer-shop?" Buckland called out over his shoulder.

"Just a walk," Denis shouted back, with more assurance than usual in his tone.

Buckland hooted with derisive laughter.

As the Buick drew up before the steps, he quickly scanned the terrace. It was empty, save for the red point of a cigar, denoting Mr. Muller drinking charged water in solitude.

In the hall, however, there were lights and voices. Someone was strumming on the piano.

Buckland made a brief calculation.

"I'll take the car round, shall I?"

"All right. I'm going to have a drink."

"I could do with one myself."

"I'll order one. Get out, Pat—it's time you went up to bed."

Buckland turned the car, and drove her up to the garage, three or four hundred yards from the Hotel.

If Angie Moon had been anywhere near the open windows, she must have heard the car drive up, and Buckland's purposely-raised voice.

He walked very slowly back.

She did not come out.

Buckland strode into the hall. The *concierge* did not intimidate him in the least, although the man made a point of never stirring from his seat when Buckland passed in or out—for thus did the *concierge* denote the fine line of distinction between regular clients of the Hotel and their paid dependents.

The person at the piano was Courteney. He was playing jazz spiritedly and without music, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth. Young Madame Duval sat watching him, Dulcie and Olwen Morgan were waltzing together with very serious expressions.

"Here, Buck," said Mrs. Romaine's voice from a table near the window.

He turned to join her.

"I say," said Denis Waller's voice at his elbow—"who's that?"

"Who's who?"

"That fellow at the piano."

"Don't you know? That's Pops—our little girlie's long-lost Pops."

"Is *that* Courteney?"

At the same moment the tune came to an end, and Courteney turned round.

He looked hard for a moment at Denis Waller, and then came up to him.

"We've met before, haven't we?" he said pleasantly.

Denis Waller's reply was so long in coming that Buckland, surprised, looked at him. A greenish tinge seemed to have come over Denis's habitually sallow face. He wore an expression of abject terror. Buckland, contemptuous rather than curious, felt inclined to laugh. He waited to hear what Denis was going to answer.

"I—I don't quite remember—I don't think we have, have we?"

Buckland saw Angie Moon coming down the stairs, and ceased to attend.

## (6)

Denis, horrified, saw nothing but the aquiline, predatory face of Mr. Courteney gazing down into his own with an air of sinister assurance, a bland, immovable faith in his own convictions, that no denials or evasions would in the slightest degree shake.

His mouth suddenly felt dry and his scalp began to prick.

Courteney continued to smile. "Perhaps I'm mistaken?" he suggested politely.

Denis's presence of mind, which was never great, had deserted him absolutely. He felt extremely sick. "I think you must be," he muttered feebly.

Courteney gave him a little bow, as though assenting. "You're out here for a holiday?" he added suavely. He looked round, as though to find someone with whom Denis might be connected. Denis, swallowing hard, began to speak.

"I'm out here as temporary secretary to a Mr. Bolham. I—I dare say you've met him."

"My small daughter has mentioned him as having been extremely kind to her. So she has you, Mr. Waller. I'm most grateful."

"No—no—not at all. I've done nothing."

A waiter passed.

"*Garçon!*" said Mr. Courteney. "You'll have a drink with me, won't you?"

He gave the order.

"You must forgive me for making such a stupid mistake just now. Probably a passing likeness, deceiving me for a moment."

Mr. Courteney's extremely observant eyes met the terror-stricken ones of Denis in a long look.

## (7)

At the age of twenty-three Denis Waller, without either means or a position, had secretly married a young woman two or three years older than himself, with whom he had made friends at his suburban boarding-house.

This act of impulsive weakness had sprung from at once the best and the worst in his nature.

He and Phyllis had fallen genuinely in love with one another in the course of a spiritual flirtation originating in Phyllis's assertion that she was an agnostic. Denis had been earnest and sentimental, had lent her books and talked to her a great deal, and induced her to go with him once or twice to Evening Service, He had been supremely conscious of his influence over her.

After a little while, both of them forgot all about the question of Phyllis's attitude towards religion, and talked of other

things. She told him that she was alone in the world except for the manageress of the boarding-house, who was her aunt. Phyllis lived with her, and in return kept the books, and did typewriting, and mended the linen. She hated the life and her aunt was often unkind to her.

Denis pitied her passionately, and all the more because he, too, hated the aunt, who despised him for being poor, and continually out of a job, and was often faintly rude to him.

It had actually been, in part, an obscure desire to score off the aunt that had led him to suggest marriage to Phyllis. Imaginatively, he was in love with her. She was pretty in a slender, anemic, dark-haired style that he admired, and he was just sufficiently her superior in education and intelligence to be able to feel that she looked up to him. She was, like Denis himself, affectionate and even demonstrative, without being passionate. They had shyly agreed that "all that side of things" counted for very little.

At first, Phyllis refused to consider the question of marriage at all. She pointed out that it would spoil all chances of a career for Denis. (He had told her with great conviction that he was ambitious, and meant to go far.)

It was Denis who had had the idea of keeping the marriage secret. It would, he explained carefully, make no difference to anybody but themselves, and it would be much easier for him to get a job, if it was supposed that he was unattached. As soon as he could afford it he would make a home for Phyllis, however humble.

As long as she continued to withstand him, Denis ardently wanted to marry her. When at last she agreed, an inward sinking of the heart warned him that he was about to commit an irreparable folly.

They were married in a City church, and no one known to either of them was present.

A week later, Denis got a job. He took two furnished rooms—all that he could afford—in another part of London, and Phyllis joined him. The weeks that followed were a nightmare to Denis. He found the close proximity of another human being in cramped quarters almost unendurable, and his fastidiousness revolted at having continually forced upon his notice the details of domestic life. The recurrent processes of purchasing, preparing, and eating food, of making and unmaking a bed, of carrying and emptying slops, all filled him with disgust. He hated and despised himself for his squeamishness, and feared to hurt Phyllis by showing it.

Denis, however, was not of the stuff to withstand a strain. He broke helplessly within a month.

"It's the sordidness of it all," he had cried piteously, gulping and sobbing. "I—I just can't stand it. I *can't* live like this."

And Phyllis had understood.

Denis remembered with shame and passionate gratitude how good she had been to him.

The rooms had been given up. Phyllis had said that she would not go back to her aunt, but would get a job somewhere as a typist. She had actually succeeded in doing so, and had begged Denis not to send her any money, but to let her keep herself. It was important, after all, that he should not appear to be hard-up.

Denis had protested emphatically, and said that at least she must let him help her. But Phyllis had kept her job in the City, and continued to earn three pounds a week, and Denis, often out of employment, in actual fact never did send her any money, although he quite frequently bought her little presents.

He found another boarding-house, then a resident post, and was unspeakably relieved at his return to what he viewed as a civilised way of life.

His infatuation for Phyllis had died almost instantly, although he continued to be fond of her, and they very often met and sometimes he took her to a hotel for a few days. Eventually, he took a tiny flat in Cicely Road, North London, and Phyllis moved into it. She always kept his room ready, and told her neighbours that her husband was a commercial traveller.

For long stretches of time nowadays, Denis could contrive to forget altogether that he was married. He embarked freely on emotional and sentimental relations with women, that he always thought of as friendship, stifling occasional scruples with the reminder that he had never been physically unfaithful to his wife. He had, in fact, no desire to be. Phyllis was enough to satisfy his very occasional urgings of the flesh.

He knew, when he thought about it, that she still loved him, and would probably always do so. She was of an inalienable faithful type. Denis was grateful to her, affectionate towards her, and utterly convinced of his own superiority to her in character, intelligence, and sensitiveness. He felt that he ought never to have married her.

Side by side with this conviction existed a terrible suspicion in Denis's mind that he was fundamentally a cad, and that some day everybody would find it out.

Often he rehearsed to himself long speeches in which he would prove to imaginary auditors that he was doing no wrong to anybody in concealing the fact of his marriage. It was nobody's business but his own. If he could have known, with absolute certainty, that nobody would ever find out about it, the recollection of it would have ceased to trouble him, for his only real criterion of conduct was what other people might think.

Since meeting Chrissie Challoner Denis had been both happier than ever before, and more intensely miserable. He was terrified lest she should discover that he was married, not so much for fear that she would give him up, as because he did not want to admit that he had ever been seriously in love before knowing her. He was also, in the depths of his heart, ashamed of having married secretly without means to support his wife, and of living in Cicely Road, and of admitting that Phyllis earned her daily bread as a City typist.

It was the worst luck in the world that Courteney should have come to the Hôtel d'Azur at the same time as himself. Denis knew him perfectly well by sight.

He had lodgings in the house exactly opposite to the Wallers' basement flat, and Denis remembered that Phyllis had once run across the road and asked Courteney if he could let her have change for a florin, for the shilling-in-the-slot meter.

Courteney, when he was at home, seemed to spend quite a lot of time sitting in the front window smoking. Of course he must many times have seen Denis arrive, with his little bag, and be greeted at the door by Phyllis, and go away again next morning, or a few days later.

Denis had always thought it madness for Phyllis to speak of him as her husband, even though both of them used her maiden name, but she had declared that it was impossible to avoid making an occasional acquaintance, and that if she did not say she was married, people would think her a kept woman. Denis had reluctantly submitted. He was now half frantic with anger and alarm at the thought that this concession might lead to the betrayal of his true circumstances.

He burned with shame as he remembered his ignoble panic in the face of Courteney's recognition of him. He felt sure that his abject denial had been of no avail in convincing Courteney that he was mistaken.

Sitting, half undressed, on the edge of his bed at the Hôtel d'Azur, Denis suffered qualms of actual physical sickness as he rocked himself to and fro, clasping his head in his hands, and turning over and over in his tormented mind every possible aspect of his predicament.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### (1)

The Moons, with much outward nonchalance and some inward excitement, organised an expedition in honour of their new motor-boat. A brief dialogue had taken place between them on the subject.

"Have you the least idea how to work this blasted thing, Hilary?"

"Naturally. I had a trial trip with the mechanic who brought her over. One only needs a little common sense."

"Who're we taking?"

"If we ask those Villa Mimosa women, it'll save having them here for a meal. I dare say they won't come."

"The Gush woman'll sink the boat if she does. And I suppose Chrissie'll want her little pet dog asked, too."

"Very well—we'll cut out Gush and take Waller. I suppose you want Buckland?"

"May as well. *He* knows about motor-boats."

Hilary, who was in a good temper, caught Angie by the shoulders, shook her, and then kissed her violently on the mouth.

The invitation was refused by Chrissie Challoner and accepted by Buckland.

Denis demurred, and made a good deal of fuss about leaving his work. Angie, who was determined to have at least three men to two women in the party, appealed direct to Mr. Bolham.

"He says, For Heavens' sake go," she reported maliciously. "He can get on much better without you. What have you been doing?"

Denis flushed hotly.

"I've not been very well this last day or two," he said quietly. "I'm subject to violent headaches, as Mr. Bolham knows."

"Really," said Angie, quite uninterested.

"I'd rather you didn't mention it to anyone, if you don't mind. I very seldom say anything about them."

Angie, far from mentioning the violent headaches of Mr. Denis Waller, had ceased to remember them almost before he had finished speaking about them.

She was deciding what to wear for the expedition. They meant to go to one of the more distant islands and bathe from there.

A white bathing-dress and her long yellow trousers, she decided, and a new yellow-and-white handkerchief on her head. She felt calmly pleased that Chrissie wasn't coming. Not that it really mattered. Chrissie had no chance whatever—clever women never had. Angie's lovely mouth curved into lines of genuine amusement as she reflected that Chrissie, reasonably young and pretty, with money and a well-known name, had apparently not succeeded in attracting the admiration of anyone better than Denis Waller.

At the last moment, on an impulse, she asked Courteney, whom she found lounging on the terrace by himself, to join them. He accepted very readily but annoyed her by asking if he might bring Dulcie.

Ungraciously she agreed.

The boat was moored to a tiny jetty near some fishing-huts. Hilary, who had suddenly donned a white cap with a peak, stood over her and drawled some information that he had, Angie felt perfectly certain, just acquired and probably rehearsed to himself until he knew it by heart.

"Six cylinders," said Hilary amongst other things, "... she'll do twenty knots easy ... could take half a dozen people ...

oiling ... cooling ... petrol tank...."

Angie paid very little attention. It was too hot standing in the sun on the jetty.

"Come on, let's start."

"Wait a minute," said Hilary, annoyed.

"It's too hot."

"Buckland, you can be engineer, if you like," said Hilary haughtily. "I shall take the wheel. Waller, let go the painter when I give the word."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Denis, appropriately facetious.

Hilary took the boat out of the bay at half-speed, and then turned her eastward. Angie was secretly impressed. She liked the light-coloured cushions of the *Hirondelle*, and the sense of ownership, and she had not really expected Hilary to have any mastery over the boat whatever.

"Full speed ahead!" shouted Hilary grandly.

Buckland opened up the throttle, and the *Hirondelle* bounded forward, sending a sudden shower of spray from the bows.

The speed of their progress afforded them a delicious breeze.

Angie, with calm cruelty, reflected that Denis was exactly the sort of person who might be seasick, even though the sea was dead quiet. She looked across at him, sitting beside Dulcie, exchanging with her small platitudes of conversation. Angie thought that he looked a perfect fool. She pushed her foot against Buckland's, and, with her eyes, directed his attention to the spectacle presented by Mr. Bolham's secretary. Buckland grinned derisively. There was an odd expression on the face of Courteney as Angie, in turn, caught his eye.

"I say, she's marvellous!" shouted Hilary at the wheel.

He swung the *Hirondelle* westwards, in the direction of the island.

"We must be doing pretty nearly fifty, I should think," remarked Denis critically.

Buckland guffawed.

"More like twenty—if that."

"I should have said fifty," stiffly returned Denis.

"It doesn't matter what you'd have said, it won't alter facts. What d'you think, Courteney?"

"It's difficult to estimate, quite, isn't it?" replied Courteney non-committally. "But scarcely fifty, I think."

Denis turned and looked at him.

There was a grinding, violent bump. Angie was thrown forward on her knees, and at once automatically screamed.

Hilary began to curse Denis for not keeping a proper look-out.

Buckland said: "Hell, we've struck something."

Whatever the *Hirondelle* had struck, the obstacle was submerged beneath the water.

"I couldn't possibly have seen it," icily said Denis—but no one paid any attention to his self-justification.

## (2)

At the impact, Buckland had instinctively reduced speed. A moment later, he opened the throttle again and the speed of the *Hirondelle* increased.

Perhaps no great harm had been done.

He felt grimly certain that neither Hilary nor Denis would be of the slightest use in any emergency. Courteney had guts, and probably common sense, but he'd admitted that he knew nothing about machinery.

The girls—of course—were both shrieking and exclaiming. They'd be no good, anyway.

"I say," said Hilary uncertainly, "d'you think there's much harm done? The engine seems all right."

"I wonder what it was," said Angie.

"A rock."

"A submarine."

"A whale," suggested Buckland sardonically. He was in reality thinking hard.

They were about half-way between the mainland and the island. If the worst came to the worst, either he or Hilary could swim ashore. So, in all probability, could Courteney. Dulcie certainly couldn't manage it, nor Denis. He didn't know about Angie, but thought it doubtful.

Screwing up his eyes against the glare, he looked all round at the glittering expanse of sea and sky.

Good—there was a tiny, rocky islet to be seen, well above the water. Probably not much more than half a mile from where they were now, if only Hilary would have the sense to head that way, instead of in the opposite direction.

"Look here——" he began.

"Oh!" wailed Dulcie. "The water's coming in—look!" Water was indeed coming in, rising fast between the floor-boards.

Angie screamed again, although with moderation—rather as if she felt that screaming was the proper thing to do, Buckland told himself. He grinned at her reassuringly.

"It's all right. I say, Moon, what about stopping the engine and having a look over the side? She may have been holed, when we bumped."

Hilary, muttering and cursing below his breath, stopped the engine.

"You think we ought to look over the side?" he asked Buckland, with the irritability of the unsure.

"Shall I do that?" Denis Waller volunteered in a tone of quiet efficiency that caused Buckland to take him at his word on the spot. He'd teach the little sweep to show off!

"Right you are. Pop over the side, and have a look at her," he commanded briskly.

Denis, with some deliberation, removed his shorts, and stood up, looking skinny and helpless, in a pair of turquoise-blue bathing-drawers.

"How shall I—what shall I——?"

"Get on with it," roared Buckland.

"Here," said Courteney, more charitably, and thrust the painter into Denis's hand.

Clutching it, he gingerly let himself into the water. The others watched him in silence, scrabbling with one hand along the side of the boat.

"I can feel a gash—here—in the side."

"Damn—I thought so," muttered Buckland. "How far down is it?"

"About a foot below the surface, I should think."

Hilary came over to Buckland. He suddenly assumed an authoritative manner.

"We must plug the hole," he announced. "What about doing it with rope?"

"Not a chance," said Buckland. "Here, wait a sec." He jumped overboard and investigated Denis's discovery for himself.

There was a gash of about fifteen inches long in the side of the *Hirondelle*, through which the water was coming fast.

"We'd better start baling, hadn't we?" Dulcie Courteney timidly suggested. She sounded frightened.

Denis, with some difficulty, crawled into the boat again.

"There isn't anything to bale *with*," Angie pointed out.

"Chuck me the painter—or the cushions—anything," said Buckland.

He pushed the things they gave him into the gap in the boat's side, but was aware as he did so that he could neither ram them in tightly enough, nor were they sufficiently large, to be of any very great use.

"We shall have to swim for it," he thought, climbing over the side.

The two girls, Denis, and Hilary were inefficiently baling out water with their hands and Hilary's peaked cap.

Courteney had found a very small bilge-pump and was unsuccessfully trying to work it.

"No scoop anywhere?" said Buckland.

Courteney shook his head, at the same time raising his eyebrows in a silent enquiry that Buckland perfectly understood. In reply he grimaced ruefully, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well?" enquired Hilary sulkily. Buckland decided that he was tacitly expressing his willingness to make over the command of his unfortunate *Hirondelle* to anyone who might understand the situation better than he did himself.

"Well, I think we're all going to get wet—but everyone can swim, I suppose?"

"I'm absolutely no good," said Dulcie, her voice suddenly high.

"Yes you are—you're all right," interposed her father sharply. "We're quite close to some rocks. I think we'd better make for them as fast as we can. We may not have to swim at all."

"But if we *do*," shrilled Dulcie.

"If we do, Mr. Moon and I can take you along between us. You're all right in the water, Mrs. Moon?"

"Yes, pretty fair."

Buckland glanced at Denis, rather amused at the prospect of seeing the little worm in a blue funk. Denis, however, had set his lips firmly and sat with his arms folded, in his favourite attitude. He said nothing.

Buckland went to the engine. He was not surprised when he found it impossible to start the boat again.

"Water's got at the magneto, I expect," he observed laconically. He was streaming with perspiration.

"This boat *can't* sink," said Hilary Moon loudly and suddenly. "I was told that there are special air-chambers under the seats that make it impossible for her to sink."

As though she had only been waiting for the word, Angie suddenly lost all control of her temper.

"I don't believe you know anything whatever about it. I can't think why I was such a fool as to let you take anyone out in your beastly boat. You'll drown us all, before you've done—I know you will."

Her voice broke, and she began to scream abuse at him on a shrill, cracked note.

Hilary snarled at her in return.

Buckland, who always expected women to behave badly in any difficulty, took no notice of them.

Courteney held up a very small oar.

"Look! Couldn't we use these? There's another one here."

"Used for paddling her about in harbour, I expect. Come on, then."

Buckland seized one oar and Courteney the other. The progress that they made was very slow, and rather erratic in course. Buckland wondered if Courteney had ever used an oar in his life before.

The water, rising rapidly, had reached the seats.

"Oh, God!" said Angie, and stood up. Denis, at the same instant, suddenly climbed to the gunwale, evidently with the idea of sitting there, and hanging his legs over the side.

"Get back, you fool," panted Buckland, straining at his oar.

Just then the *Hirondelle* quietly rolled her side under. Buckland heard the water rushing in, and the hissing of the engines as they submerged.

He struck out strongly, shook the water out of his eyes, and then looked round.

The *Hirondelle* was slowly sinking out of sight.

Within a yard of Buckland was Hilary Moon, wearing an oddly astonished expression.

"What do we do now?" he enquired.

"Make for the rocks. They're farther off than I thought, too. All right for us, but I don't know about the girls. Anyhow, they've got to make it somehow."

Hilary swore wearily.

Dulcie, looking terrified, and panting already, swam up to them with short, choppy strokes, her body half out of the water. Buckland could see Angie's yellow handkerchief bobbing steadily along, with Denis beside her. He thought: We're all right, if the girls don't panic. But that damned rock *is* farther than I thought.

"Well," said Courteney in a conversational tone, "quite an adventure we're having. Sorry about your boat, Moon."

"It's a mercy the water's warm. Fancy if this was the north coast of Cornwall! What are we all going to do next?" demanded Angie.

"There are some rocks quite close to where we are now. I vote we all keep together and get there, and then we can hold a council of war," said Buckland. "No distance at all," he added, for the benefit of Dulcie.

"I can't do it," she moaned.

"You don't have to do it. Put one hand on your father's shoulder, and the other on mine. We'll take you."

"And for God's sake don't start struggling," added Courteney severely.

"You're all right, aren't you?" Buckland asked Angie.

"I suppose so. Come on, let's start."

For a little while they kept together, then Hilary drew ahead of the others, closely followed by Buckland and Courteney, both strong swimmers, in spite of the hampering burden of Dulcie between them.

She was terrified and gave them no help whatever, but Buckland saw that they could get her to safety easily enough.

But it was the deuce of a long way.

"Only a few yards more," he panted encouragingly.

The rock was a jagged and uncomfortable-looking perch, the only one standing above water of a small group against which the swimmers cut themselves one after another. Courtney, the first to land, pulled Dulcie up beside him, whilst the other two men pushed her from below.

She landed beside her father, sobbing and breathless, the blood streaming from her scraped knees and ankles.

Hilary and Buckland, both out of breath, hauled themselves up in turn.

"Well done," said Courtney politely, to nobody in particular. Dulcie clutched at him, and he tried to find something for her to lean against.

"I suppose the others are coming," said Hilary. "It's a great deal farther than it looked. Quarter of a mile, I should say."

They could see Angie's yellow handkerchief, moving along very slowly, and the head of Denis beside her.

"Why the devil is she crawling like that? She can swim fast enough if she wants to," said Hilary crossly. "I suppose she's standing by in case Waller throws a fit."

"Far better let him drown if he wants to—what's the matter?" Buckland replied.

"I'm thinking about that boat. I tell you, Buckland, this is no laughing matter for me. One hadn't even had time to insure her."

"Bad luck. I say, I believe one of us ought to go back and see if they're all right."

"Rot! Angie can swim perfectly well. I bet you anything you like there was something wrong with the engine. Otherwise she'd never have stopped like that."

Buckland, cursing, slipped into the water again, driven partly by the forlorn hope of shaming Hilary, and partly by the conviction that Denis Waller was, or very soon would be, in difficulties in the water.

Angie hailed him with relief.

"Denis says he can't make it," she explained. She herself was swimming slowly, but easily.

"Bosh, of course he can. It's not more than a few yards. Look here, you go on ahead—I'll bring him in on my back if necessary. You can make it, can't you?"

"Yes, easy," said Angie. She turned over, and swam on her back.

"Well, you go on," repeated Buckland. He saw that Denis was on the verge of panic. His face was colourless, and he was beginning to thresh feebly at the water with flapping hands.

"He's just a bit tired, that's all. I can manage him perfectly, and I'd rather do it alone."

Buckland purposely spoke in an off-hand manner, and to his relief Angie did as she was told.

"Turn on your back and float, Waller. You're all right."

"I can't float," Denis panted. He flapped again, uttered a strangled shriek, and his head, for the fraction of a second, disappeared under water.

When he emerged, almost instantly, gulping and choking, his eyes were wild with fright and he made a frantic clutch at Buckland.

"Stop that!" shouted Buckland. "Pull yourself together, you little fool, or I swear I'll drown you."

He was perfectly certain that Denis was in no danger whatever, except from his own cowardice, and made not the slightest allowance for the helpless terrors of a vivid imagination combined with a feeble physique.

For sole response, Denis, sobbing and shuddering, caught at him again.

Without the slightest hesitation, Buckland swung back his right arm and dealt him a knockout blow on the point of the jaw.

Denis collapsed instantly.

"Pretty good, that, for a first attempt at lifesaving," thought Buckland. "I suppose I must tow him in now."

Half-way to the rock, Courteney swam out to meet them.

"He panicked, didn't he?"

"Yes. He'll be all right. I haven't killed him—worse luck."

"Bit of a boxer, aren't you?"

"I've done a bit in my time."

They shoved the unconscious Denis along between them without wasting breath on further conversation.

Arrived at the rock, and in the presence of Angie and Dulcie, they were obliged to adopt a tone of greater solicitude.

"Waller's thrown a bit of a faint, I think," explained Buckland. "He may have a weak heart or something."

He sat down, panting.

Denis lay on the rock. Presently he stirred, groaned, and opened his eyes.

Buckland, his back to the others, exchanged a grin with Courteney.

### (3)

Staring straight up into the blazing blue of the sky, Denis remembered, at once and quite clearly, exactly what had happened to him.

Instinctively he shut his eyes again, prepared to feign unconsciousness, so that he might gain time to adjust himself to the unescapable facts.

He, alone of them all, had lost his head. He remembered those awful moments in the water, when he had felt that he *could* not swim another labouring stroke ... his head had gone right under.... Denis shuddered violently.

He assured himself that he must have come very near to drowning. It had been a long swim, and his heart had given out—it must have been that—the others must realise that that was what had happened. That beast, Buckland! Denis felt tears of helpless wrath stinging beneath his eyelids, as he remembered the upward swing of Buckland's fist. He wondered exactly where he had been hit, and put his hand to his head.

"Oh, Mr. Waller, are you better?" said Dulcie's voice, close beside him.

Denis opened his eyes and saw her, sitting hunched up on the rock beside him, her face looking oddly mottled, as if with cold. Almost without realising that he was doing so, Denis, following methods that had become habitual to him, began to dramatise himself and his situation.

"What happened?" he began feebly. "I stuck it out as long as I could, swimming, and then—I went right under—I think I must have had a very slight heart-attack."

"Pops and Mr. Buckland brought you in between them," said Dulcie. "You were absolutely unconscious, weren't you, Mr. Waller?"

"I must have been. I don't remember anything at all, except that I saw Buckland in the water, and called to him. I didn't want Mrs. Moon to be frightened—I know she's not a very strong swimmer—and yet I realised that I wasn't going to be able to hold out much longer."

He looked piteously up at her, half believing his own story already, and prepared to believe in it altogether if he saw that

Dulcie did. She was gazing at him with an expression of deep compassion mingled with retrospective horror at the thought of his peril.

"Oh, how awful for you! You might easily have drowned, I should think—easily, if Mr. Buckland hadn't been there. He's simply splendid, isn't he? Do you feel better now?"

"I think I'm all right," said Denis. He raised himself into a sitting position and looked round.

The rock was an irregular, spiky mass, rising some ten or twelve feet above the water, and sloping away sharply on every side excepting the one by which the swimmers had reached it. The whole of the surface measured not more than ten foot in diameter, but one large, and two small, jagged promontories rose into the air. On the tallest of these Hilary Moon now stood precariously balanced, gazing at the surrounding expanse of water. Buckland, from whom Denis quickly averted his eyes, sat on the flat surface below, leaning against a ledge, and panting like a dog. Angie was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's Mrs. Moon?" asked Denis.

"Behind the rock, somewhere. She's rather upset, I think. You know—about the boat and everything."

"We might all have lost our lives," Denis pointed out solemnly.

"I know. That's just what I feel. I was simply *terrified*. You see, I can't swim very well, and I couldn't possibly have managed, if they hadn't helped me along. In fact, even as it was, I didn't know how I was *ever* going to get here. The rock never seemed to be a scrap nearer, even after we'd been swimming for ages and ages."

"Yes, I know," said Denis with feeling.

Courtney came up to them.

"All right again, Waller?"

"Quite, thanks. I hear you helped to tow me in. I'm so grateful. I'm afraid I made a complete ass of myself."

"Dear me, no. It was a bit too much for you, that's all. As a matter of fact, it was a pretty long swim."

"About a mile, I should say," Denis suggested, hoping to hear that it was more.

"Lord, no. Quarter, at the outside."

Denis thought that Courtney's tone sounded contemptuous.

"I'm not a judge of distance in the water," he said quietly. "As a matter of fact, I've been forbidden to attempt any long swims at all. My heart isn't up to it—as we've just proved."

"Bad luck."

Courtney's tone was, as usual, very polite. Evidently he would not dispute the assertion.

"Pops, what are we going to do? We can't stay here all night."

"My dear child, ask me another. I suppose one of us could swim to the mainland, and send out a boat, but personally I've had enough violent exercise for one afternoon. We'll see what Buckland thinks about it."

Denis gritted his teeth.

His subconscious hatred of Buckland, born of a violent jealousy, had of course been augmented a hundredfold. He found it unendurable that Buckland should be the hero of the whole adventure, the natural leader to whom they all turned. He was also terrified lest Buckland should throw doubt upon his own version of his collapse in the water.

When Buckland came up and joined them, Denis rose to his feet, folded his arms in his favourite Napoleonic pose, and drew his brows together, unconsciously trying to assume the appearance of those characteristics in which he was most deficient.

He said nothing—anxious, as usual, not to commit himself.

Buckland, ignoring Denis altogether, shouted to Hilary:

"Come on down! We've got to settle the next move."

Hilary descended.

At the same moment Angie appeared. She had pulled the wet handkerchief from her head, and her thick, soft curls, already dry, hung loosely round her face and neck. With most of the make-up gone from her beautiful young face, she actually looked prettier than any of them had ever seen her look before.

For a moment they all stared at her.

"Well," she said crossly. "This is the lousiest party *I've* ever struck. You've got us into the mess, Hilary; may I ask how you propose to get us out of it?"

Hilary shot her a vicious look.

"We can stay here all night."

Dulcie alone gratified him by uttering an exclamation of dismay.

Buckland said:

"Don't rot. We're not on a desert island. One of those fishing affairs might show up, any minute."

Instinctively they all looked to sea, but there was no sail to be seen.

"They won't come when they're wanted, you bet," observed Angie. "I say, I suppose there's no chance of the tide coming up and washing over these rocks?"

"Not the slightest. There's no tide here. But all the same, we can't let you stay here without food or clothes or anything, much longer. It's not a tremendous way to the mainland," said Courteney. "One of us must just swim back to the nearest point—that's the jetty—and tell 'em to send out a launch."

Hilary swore, just audibly.

"Oh, hell!"

Denis, to whom what he called "swearing in the presence of ladies" seemed an almost unpardonable social offence, was unable to resist displaying his own superior degree of chivalry.

"I'd volunteer without a moment's hesitation," he remarked emphatically, "if it wasn't for my wretched heart. How far is it, exactly?"

Buckland swung round, looked him full in the face, and burst into loud, brutal laughter.

Denis flinched as though he had been hit. Humiliated vanity scorched him through and through.

He saw that Angie Moon was laughing too.

"I don't want to have to knock you out again, Waller," said Buckland, with a not unfriendly derision. "You mightn't come round another time, you know. How's your jaw feeling, by the way? Sorry if I punched too hard, but you'd have had me under, as well as yourself, if I hadn't done it."

"Did you knock him out?" cried Angie. "I thought he'd fainted."

"Had to. He was properly scared, weren't you, Waller?"

"My heart was giving out—I was afraid of sinking——"

"Bosh. You can't sink in the Mediterranean. If you hadn't lost your head, I'd have floated you in, easy. Never mind—it's

all over now."

Denis turned aside. He was nearly choking.

"Mr. Waller," said a breathless, emotional voice in his ear, "I think it's a shame. They don't understand. *I* think it was simply splendid of you to hold out as long as you did."

Denis, almost in tears and scarcely knowing what he did, put out his hand and convulsively squeezed Dulcie's fingers.

(4)

"Darling, what *did* happen? Really and truly?"

Chrissie Challoner and Denis sat by themselves, at the far end of the terrace, that evening after dinner. Chrissie and Mrs. Wolverton-Gush had dined at the Hôtel d'Azur.

"What was Buckland's version?" said Denis.

"Don't hedge," she said impatiently. "Can't you just simply tell me the truth, without waiting to find out if it's going to tally with what Buckland said?"

Almost as she spoke, she knew she had made a mistake. Denis stiffened, instantly on the defensive.

"I'd much rather hear what you've been told," he persisted obstinately.

She saw that she would get nothing out of him at all whilst his mind remained obsessed with fear as to what she knew already.

"Dear, it's all right. Nothing that anybody says is going to make any difference."

Denis responded instantly, as he always did, to the change in her tone. He was sensitive, she thought, to an almost unbearable degree.

"I know, Chrissie. I do trust you. It's only that—it was all so horrible. I do loathe Buckland."

"So do I. But he's the Hotel hero at the moment. He, and the Moons, and the Courteney's, are having a champagne dinner with Coral Romaine. They're all over him."

"Because he swam from the rock?"

"Because he swam from the rock," assented Chrissie. "It was really rather dramatic. That Frenchwoman—Madame Duval—had promised the Dulcie child to take her in to St. Raphael with them, when you got back. Supposed to be about four o'clock. When no one turned up, she drove the car down to the jetty, to wait there. I was bathing in the little cove, just beyond, with the Morgans and the Romaine boy and his mother. We saw the Duvals go down to the jetty, and look out to sea, and then they began talking to some fishermen, and Madame Duval got agitated, and Gushie—who always hears everything—heard her scream out that she had a presentiment there'd been an accident. So quite soon afterwards—you know how catching that sort of thing is—we all started having presentiments too, and went round to the jetty, and joined the Duvals. My dear, you should have heard the shriek she gave when we suddenly saw there was someone in the water, making for the jetty!"

"Did you think all the rest of us had been drowned?"

"I don't know what I thought, Denis. But I was terrified that something had happened to you. Buck was coming along at a pretty good speed, and of course we couldn't tell what might have gone wrong—but it was fairly obvious something had. The Duvals were full of the most blood-curdling suggestions—Madame kept on saying that there must have been an explosion. Then Buck landed, and told us what had happened, and how he'd left you all stranded in mid-ocean on a rock. The fishermen said he must have swum half a mile, or more, besides getting from the *Hirondelle* to the rock."

"He's a very strong swimmer."

"Why didn't Courteney go—or that worm Hilary?"

"Courteney did offer, but he's a much older man than Buckland. As for Moon, he behaved like the cad he is. He didn't even trouble to look after his own wife when we were all in the water together. *I* kept beside her—not him."

"Angie swims pretty well, doesn't she?"

"Oh yes," said Denis uneasily. "Not like poor little Dulcie, who simply had to be towed along. She was terrified, poor kid."

"According to Buckland, nobody was ever in any real danger at all."

"Chrissie, what did he say about me? Please tell me."

"He didn't say anything, till I asked if you were all right, and then he said Yes."

"That's not all."

"He said you'd not been able to manage the swim to the rock."

There was a silence.

Chrissie had guessed instantly, from Denis's own manner rather than from that of Buckland, that something had happened of which Denis was deeply ashamed. She could even hazard a fairly accurate conjecture as to what it was. The protective element, more predominant than she realised, in her feeling for Denis, rose strongly within her. She wanted him to tell her the facts, so that she might console him, and prove to them both that her love for him was a secure, unfaltering thing, able to withstand the revelation of any weakness.

"What really happened was this," said Denis, very carefully. "Buckland had been rather on my nerves all the afternoon. I can't stand the fellow. He's not a gentleman, and he doesn't know how to behave. I wasn't feeling particularly fit, either, though naturally I didn't say anything about that. One doesn't. Of course when the boat struck a rock—or whatever it was—I realised that it might be frightfully serious. I don't think any of the others did. After all, none of them know anything about motor-boats. I think I kept my head all right—I don't usually get rattled in an emergency. I told Moon to slow down his engine, then I let myself over the side, and examined the boat very carefully, and found a hole in her. I knew then it was simply a question of time—as I'd guessed at once that it would be—before she sank.

"I didn't want to frighten the others, and I let them try baling out the water, and so on, and said as little as I could. As a matter of fact, I was working out in my own mind what our chances were. I don't mind telling you that it was a relief to me when I caught sight of that rock, and I knew that if the worst came to the worst we could swim for it."

Denis paused, and passed his tongue over his lips. Chrissie, sitting motionless, could feel the tension to which he had strung himself.

"I'd changed my place, to see if I couldn't spot a nearer rock or something, when the boat went over. I think I was the first person to strike the water, *and* to come up again. Naturally, it was rather horrible for a moment, but one's first thought was to see whether the two girls were safe. Angie was quite close to me, and I told her it was all right, and she was quite sensible. Not frightened, I mean. Dulcie was scared—very naturally. She can't swim much. However, her father looked after her, and I kept with Angie. Chrissie, it was a pretty long swim. Courteney fancied it was only about a quarter of a mile, but I'm fairly sure he was wrong there, and it was a good deal more. And I suppose the strain on my nerves from the whole thing had been greater than I realised. I'm a rather highly strung person, I'm afraid. Anyway, I began to realise that I couldn't possibly do it. I've been told, you know, by my doctor, that my heart isn't any too strong. I knew I couldn't hold out."

A note of real sincerity suddenly crept into his voice.

"It was horrible—having to go on, and feeling that I simply couldn't do another stroke. I'd have given anything in the world if only I could have stopped and rested for a minute. But I couldn't even turn over and float. I hadn't the strength left. You see, apart from anything else, I was quite out of training. It's ages since I've done anything like a long swim."

"What happened?" said Chrissie in a low voice.

"I told Angie to go on. I didn't want to let her see there was anything wrong. Then Buckland came back—to see if she

wanted help, I suppose. He——"

Denis stopped suddenly, and she could hear him swallowing, as if his throat were dry.

"Let me see, what did happen next? It's all a bit of a blur, somehow. Angie went on ahead, and I asked Buckland to stand by, as I was a bit doubtful whether my heart would stand the strain. I fancy I was pretty far gone by that time, although I still kept on going, until—well, I suppose I must have lost consciousness, really, because I can just remember my head going under, and then coming up again, and calling to Buckland."

There was another silence.

"What did Buckland do?"

"He lost his head," said Denis, in a loud, firm voice. "I suppose he was afraid I might hang on to him in the water, or pull him down or something. Of course, it's possible that I *may* have made a clutch in his direction. I don't *think* I did. But it's just possible. Anyhow, he got the wind up, and let out with his fist, and simply knocked me silly. It was an idiotic thing to do, of course, but it simplified matters in a way, because after that he simply floated me in the water. There wasn't very much farther to go."

"He seems to have saved you, Denis, anyway."

"I don't know that I was ever in any very great danger, dear. That's to say—it all depended on my heart. It might have held out, I suppose—or it might not. Perhaps it wouldn't really very much have mattered, either way."

At the utter artificiality of Denis's final remark, delivered in a pseudo-whimsical style that she had never heard from him before, Chrissie experienced a violent revulsion of feeling.

Her grave patience, and tolerant, analytical interest, deserted her abruptly and she turned on him suddenly.

"*Don't*, Denis. I simply can't bear it."

She heard him catch his breath. Like a child that has been frightened, she thought involuntarily.

"Stop dramatising yourself," she said, speaking much more gently. "What do I care whether you can swim or can't swim, or whether you were frightened or not frightened? Can't you *see* that the only thing that matters is that you and I should be honest with one another?"

"Chrissie—I have——"

His voice broke.

Chrissie felt herself torn between acute shame and equally acute compassion.

In another moment Denis's hysteria might communicate itself to her. Putting the strongest force upon herself of which she was capable, she spoke quietly and steadily:

"Don't let's talk about it any more. Not till to-morrow, I mean, when you're rested. I do understand, Denis—I do really."

"You don't believe that I've told you the truth."

"Don't let's talk about it any more."

She stood up, feeling all of a sudden extraordinarily tired.

"Where's Gushie?"

"Shall I go and look for her?" Denis asked submissively.

She said "Yes, please," only longing for him to go, that she might be freed from the emotional strain that the conflict between them had induced.

She watched him pass from the deep shadow cast by the ilex trees into the moonlight that flooded the terrace.

"I suppose I'm in love with Denis," thought Chrissie, instinctively analytical, and invariably articulate. "Otherwise, I don't see how I could help despising him."

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## CHAPTER IX

### (1)

Madame, her mouth compressed into a thin line, little beads of sweat shining on her forehead and upper lip, drew her pointed steel pen across the double page of the open ledger.

"*C'est ça,*" she hissed between her teeth.

She pressed the cheap violet blotting-paper on to the wet ink with vicious firmness.

"*Sales Anglais ...*"

She would have applied the epithet almost automatically to any of the English visitors, but the special emphasis in her voice was for the Moons.

Naturally cunning, and profoundly experienced as well, Madame was nearly certain that the Moons were insolvent. She was determined not to allow them even twenty-four hours' grace before demanding the settlement of her account.

"*Ce qu'ils ont bu, hier soir!*"

The treble sheet of flimsy paper that set forth in detail the account of the young Moons' expenditure lay on the desk. Madame folded it up, placed it in an equally flimsy envelope, and wrote on the outside the number of their room.

"*Voilà!*"

### (2)

Next day, Hilary found the envelope lying, a pale mauve oblong, on the pillow.

He picked it up with disgust, fingered it, and reluctantly tore it open.

"Hell, it's worse than I expected."

"It always is," said Angie languidly. "How much?"

Hilary made no reply. He was puzzled by the French figures, and the extraordinary resemblance between Madame's threes and her fives. The only thing of which he was certain was that the total ran into four figures.

Angie trailed across the room and looked over his shoulder.

"What's that in English money? It looks like millions."

"So it might be, for all the difference it makes. We can't pay it anyway," said Hilary grimly.

"I suppose they'll wait?"

"What for? There's nothing coming."

They looked at one another. Their plight was a thoroughly familiar one.

"Tell her," said Angie, "that we're expecting money from England any day."

"That won't wash for long. You bet they've heard that sort of thing before."

"Why did you go and throw away money on that damned motor-boat?" demanded Angie. "I suppose you had to pay for that on the nail."

"Of course. And if I'd had even ordinary luck, I could have sold her again for twice what I gave, and we'd have been all right. Well—there's the car."

Hilary had become possessed of a car, but had offered no explanation of the transaction.

"Can you raise money on that?"

"I don't want to, if I can help it," said Hilary in a peculiar tone.

"That means you haven't paid for it. What a damned fool you are, aren't you?"

They wrangled furiously.

At last Hilary said:

"Carry on exactly as usual. They won't ask for the money for a day or two, I don't suppose. If they do, I shall say we'll settle up the whole thing all at once when we leave."

Angie cursed and grumbled.

She was in a state of acute nervous tension, caused by the difficulty of pursuing her affair with Buckland to its logical conclusion in the face of Mrs. Romyne's strenuous determination to keep them apart.

This old, recurrent difficulty over money seemed an unbearable exasperation.

"Can't we borrow from someone?"

"Who?" demanded Hilary sceptically. "If you'd had the sense to make friends with Muller, or the Challoner girl, they might have helped us out—but all you've done is to make a fool of yourself with that cad Buckland."

Angie, almost impervious to insult where her husband was concerned, scarcely heard what he was saying.

She was wondering whether, if she went downstairs, she would find Buckland on the terrace. Breakfast was long since over, and Mrs. Romyne had gone indoors again. Angie had seen her from the window. Patrick and the tutor had disappeared in the direction of the garage.

Angie pulled on her large straw hat, looked at herself in the glass, and said: "I'm going down."

Hilary laughed shortly.

On the steps of the Hotel was Courteney. He was explaining a plan for a day at Monte Carlo, that he wanted to arrange for the Hotel visitors.

Angie saw Buckland at once. His dark, bold glance leapt to meet her, and a thrill ran through her veins.

He came up to her.

"You'll come, won't you?" he said confidently. His eyes added a great deal more.

"When?"

"To-morrow. Quite a lot of people are going."

"I don't mind," Angie said in a tone of indifference.

She moved away, aware that Buckland would follow her.

"I say, are you going down to bathe now?"

"Yeah. It's no use waiting for Hilary. I shall walk."

"I'll come with you."

They descended the steps, acutely conscious of one another's proximity.

As soon as they had turned the sharp corner of the drive, and were out of sight of the terrace, Buckland stopped.

"Look here," he said thickly, "it's too hot for you to walk. If you'll wait there, I'll get the Buick out, and run you down."

Angie's eyes glittered.

"You'd better not do that, had you?"

They stood and looked at one another. Angie's breast rose and fell rapidly beneath her thin silk bathing-suit.

Buckland, staring at her, put out his hand and laid it on her waist, as if he scarcely knew what he was doing.

The next moment she was in his arms and he was kissing her with violence.

"God, you're marvellous!"

"So are you," she muttered, her mouth against his.

He crushed her closer and closer to himself, her supple body as eloquent in response as her spoken words were lackadaisical.

When he at last released her, Angie's face was flushed to a deep, dusky rose-colour, her eyes were liquid beneath half-closed lids, her mouth wet, soft, and relaxed. She put both hands against his shoulders and drew them slowly down his thick, muscular arms in a prolonged caress.

For the first time since she had come to the Côte d'Azur, Angie felt fully alive.

It was for this that she had been made.

"I've been aching to kiss you ever since I first saw you," said Buckland, his eyes devouring her.

She smiled at him without speaking.

A car tore past them down the hill.

"Damn, we can't stand about here. Let's get down to the rocks. And you're coming to Monte Carlo to-morrow."

"Am I?"

"There's a whole crowd going—Coral Romaine and the Courteney's and the Duvals, and that ass Waller, and some of the Morgans."

"And my husband," said Angie softly.

"You don't mind about him, do you?"

She shook her head.

"He's not fit to black your boots. You're going to let me look after you to-morrow."

"Am I?" she said again.

The arrogance in Buckland's tone and manner pleased her profoundly. She thought of him as "masterful."

Buck grinned down at her, showing the superb strength and whiteness of his admirable teeth.

"I shouldn't be frightfully surprised," he said slowly, "if we missed the last 'bus home. Should you?"

Angie continued to look up at him, her eyes shining and liquid, her red lips apart.

She said nothing.

### (3)

Hilary, coming downstairs half an hour later, walked past Madame's desk without looking round. He was perfectly well

aware that she was sitting there, her eyes bent upon her ledger, and yet seeing everyone and everything. It made him sickeningly angry to know that he was afraid lest she should suddenly speak to him, and ask for the money owing to her.

The eternal lack of money, the fear of creditors, had loomed large in Hilary's life ever since he could remember. He was the only child of shiftless and drink-sodden parents and his earliest recollection was one of a man and woman—his father and mother—screaming at one another, half undressed, in a stifling little bedroom at the top of a suburban boarding-house.

His father had been conscripted, and killed early in 1918. Hilary's mother had avidly seized upon her widow's pension, whilst grumbling bitterly at its inadequacy.

For a little while after the war they had lived in a flat in Streatham, which Hilary had reason to suppose was paid for by a brother officer of his father's, whom he was told to call Uncle Mike.

But Uncle Mike was several years younger than Hilary's mother and presently he ceased his visits, and the rent of the flat remained unpaid.

There were scenes, as usual, with tradespeople, and Mrs. Moon arranged a stealthy departure in the middle of the night.

After that they had wandered from one English watering-place to another. Sometimes there seemed to be money, sometimes none, but whenever there was money it went on drink, and irregular meals, and clothes. There was never enough for them to keep out of debt, or to pay the bills at the different cheap schools to which Hilary was intermittently sent.

At last, when he was nearly twenty, a piece of luck happened to him. He fell in with the only son of a rich man who had made money out of munitions. The son had been forced into a society where he was ill-at-ease and unhappy, and to which he felt himself inferior. He was a gentle, sensitive youth, not many degrees removed from arrested mental development—a predestined victim for brutal ragging at the hands of his contemporaries. At the military college to which he had mistakenly been sent, his life became a nightmare of terror and agony. One evening a party of half-intoxicated young men dragged him out to Blackheath Common and compelled him to spend the night in the fork of a tree, denuded of everything but his vest and pants.

By pure chance Hilary Moon, after a night spent in the company of a girl off the streets, was walking home across the common because he hadn't a penny left. He found the boy, who was nearly dead with cold and exhaustion, and rescued him from the bonds that he had been unable to release for himself.

Guessing at a possible advantage to be derived from the opportunity, Hilary took young Atkinson home, and met the boy's babbling, gibbering gratitude with a great show of kindness and of indignation against his tormentors.

For nearly three years after that, Hilary Moon was on velvet. He had the run of the Atkinsons' solidly luxurious house in Hampstead, he was treated as one of the family, and given expensive presents, and his account of himself as the sole descendant of a very old and impoverished family from Ireland was unquestioningly accepted.

Hilary, since those days, had often reflected cynically on his own folly in losing all that he had gained.

But young Atkinson's dog-like and idiotic devotion irritated him unbearably, and he took to snubbing him savagely.

Atkinson, made to be kicked, would have endured it all, but his mother resented it for him.

Hilary was shown the door.

In the days of his vicarious prosperity, he had broken off all relations with his mother, and had no wish to resume them, since he felt certain that she neither could nor would give him any money.

But he had made useful acquaintances with the Atkinsons, especially amongst women. Natural adaptability and a spurious air of intelligence enabled him to acquire a standing in one of the many fifth-rate artistic and literary sets of suburban London. Drifting from one group to another, and borrowing money whenever and wherever he could, Hilary picked up quite a number of temporary jobs, that were usually paid on commission, and when he fell violently in love with Angie, married her, mainly because she was the central figure of a large circle, and boasted frankly that she never had to pay for her own meals.

On Angie's beauty, and Hilary's powers of cadging, they had been living ever since.

Hilary told himself bitterly that he was becoming heartily sick of it. Angie's admirers, now, were apt to ignore her husband altogether, and Angie did nothing to remind them of his existence. Hilary thought how much better he could have done for himself as an unmarried young man. There was Chrissie Challoner, for instance—obviously the romantic type, and certainly making a good deal of money....

Hilary was at once both too obtuse, and too conceited, to doubt his own ability where love-making was concerned. He felt sure that he could, by flattery, please any woman, especially one older than himself, as Chrissie was, and devoid of obvious prettiness.

Would it be worth trying?

He knew that there was not the faintest prospect of his being able to pay the Hotel bill, and he suspected furiously that Madame did not intend to wait long for her money. Then there would be a very unpleasant scene, and he and Angie would have to make a get-away.

Hilary looked with hatred at Muller, the rich American, crossing the terrace just outside.

Hilary hated all rich people, but most of all the ones from whom he knew that he could not possibly hope to get money.

"Good-morning—er—Moon," said the voice of Denis Waller just behind him.

Wearing his too-expensive silk dressing-gown, over the turquoise-blue bathing-suit from which his skinny legs and arms protruded oddly, he looked sallow and more nervous than usual.

"Hallo," said Hilary contemptuously. It gave him a definite feeling of satisfaction to make it plain that he despised Denis. This satisfaction was increased when Denis showed, by the sudden disappearance of his tentative smile and a compression of his thin lips, that he noticed and resented Hilary's tone.

He continued, however, to stand his ground.

"What are the plans for to-day, I wonder? I—I think Mr. Bolham would like to know."

Hilary made use of a coarse expletive.

"... as if he gives a damn! I wish I'd your job, Waller, I know that. You seem to me to get time off just whenever you want it. By the way, how's your head feeling this morning?"

Hilary's intonation left—and was meant to leave—no doubt whatever as to the offensiveness of the allusion.

Denis uttered an inarticulate exclamation, crimsoned, and turned away. Hilary laughed loudly.

"Sorry, and all that, if it's a tender subject."

Denis surprised him by suddenly turning round again and facing him.

"I don't know if you mean to be deliberately rude to me," he enunciated in a voice pitched unnaturally high, "but I resent your tone very much indeed. And I don't think, if it comes to that, that you came very creditably out of yesterday's accident yourself."

Hilary stared at him in some astonishment. He had not sufficient perspicacity to connect Waller's sudden outburst with the presence of an audience, but he realised that Dulcie Courteney had appeared in the hall, and was gazing at Denis with adoring schoolgirl eyes.

With her was Patrick Romayne. They were carrying bathing-wraps.

Ignoring Denis, Hilary turned to the boy.

"Going down to the rocks?"

"I think we're bathing from the *plage* this morning. My mother sent me to find Mr. Buckland. Have you seen him

anywhere about?"

"No, I haven't."

It occurred to Hilary that he had not seen Angie about either, and he felt fairly certain that she and Buckland were together somewhere.

"Look here, can I run you and Mrs. Romyne down in my car to the *plage*? If Buckland's not available, I mean? You don't drive, do you?"

"Not supposed to," the boy admitted, with a fleeting smile that gave sudden charm to his young, anxious face.

"I say, would you really? That would be awfully kind of you. Will there be room——?" He indicated Dulcie by a gesture.

"Certainly," said Hilary coldly. He thought nothing of Dulcie, but knew very well that it was advisable to remain on good terms with her father. Courteney, he suspected, had been far from admiring his conduct of the motor-boat expedition.

"I'll bring the car round, if Mrs. Romyne is ready to go now," he said, and walked out ignoring Denis Waller.

That motor-boat affair would need a good deal of living down, he morosely reflected as he walked the length of the blazing terrace towards the garage. They'd all made a hero out of Buckland—the fools—and Angie was clearly loopy about the fellow.

What was the sense of it, when Buckland was solely dependent on his job? And he wouldn't keep that long, if he didn't play his cards better.

Hilary climbed into the long, low car, backed her with consummate skill and swiftness out of the garage, turned in a single movement and drove smoothly up to the Hotel steps, drawing up there with perfectly-timed precision.

He thought himself a most beautiful driver—as indeed he was—and was superbly indifferent to the fact that he was almost entirely ignorant of the mechanism of a car.

It was a point of view that neatly typified Hilary Moon's attitude towards life.

#### (4)

Patrick, like Hilary, admired Hilary's driving. His appreciation of it renewed his ardent desire to drive his mother's Buick.

It was only that beast, Buckland, who'd put it into her head that she mustn't allow him to drive in France. Just because he wanted to do it himself all the time.

Thank Heaven he was out of the way for a bit. It might be fun bathing from the *plage* where the raft was, without him.

Abruptly, Patrick realised that they were waiting for his mother.

"Shall I go up and see if she's ready?" he suggested.

"Let me—I'd love to," Dulcie cried effusively.

She was rushing half-way up the stairs before Patrick could answer her.

He grinned a little.

If she wanted to fag, better let her do it, he supposed.

Hilary Moon was still reclining at the wheel, smoking a cigarette as usual, and evidently with no desire to make conversation.

Patrick sat down on the stone coping of the balustrade, consciously liking the impact of his body against the sun-heated

surface, and gazed, screwing up his eyes against the glare, at the shimmering blue of sea and sky, set in a crescent of red rocks and grey-green pines and cypresses.

How odd it was that no one ever seemed to notice that the Côte d'Azur was so beautiful. Or if they did, they never said anything about it. People only talked about themselves, or the other visitors, or clothes and trains and food, and the service in the hotels. And even when a plan was made to go to some special place, it was mostly for the sake of having drinks there, and a meal, and perhaps swimming a bit.

The Morgans, thought Patrick dreamily, probably noticed a bit more. They were different.

He remembered that David, who was only a tiny little chap, had once said that it was a pity there were no song-birds on the coast. It turned out that he was interested in birds, and knew quite a lot about them. His father had taught him about them, at their place in Wales.

Patrick, who secretly admired Captain Morgan, had admired him more than ever after that. He must be a frightfully intelligent man, as well as kind to have taken all that trouble so that David should know about birds.

Patrick rather liked birds himself, though he knew very little about them. But he remembered a book—with a lot of coloured plates—all about birds, that he'd liked frightfully as a kid.... That was ages ago, when he and mother and daddy were all living at a place near Haslemere, in Surrey. What had happened to the book? he wondered.

"Backside getting scorched?" said Hilary Moon, and Patrick found, rather to his surprise, that he must have moved without realising it, for he was standing up.

"It is a bit hot," he said.

## (5)

Chrissie Challoner and Mrs. Wolverton-Gush went that morning to the *plage*.

This was not by any wish of Mrs. Wolverton-Gush. Bathing from the rocks below the Villa les Mimosas was one thing: a comparatively decent and simple affair. It was easy to walk down the garden steps with a wrap over one's bathing-dress, slip it off on the flat rock below the wall, and lower oneself into the water.

But the *plage*, from the point of view of Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, was open to a number of objections.

To begin with, the hired car that took them there stopped amongst the pine trees at the edge of the road, and a very steep and sandy descent had to be negotiated on foot.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush hated the climb down, along a narrow path of sandy soil, thickly bordered with small, tough, low-growing bushes that scratched her legs and caught in her bathing-cloak. Every day her feet swelled with the heat, and the sandals that had seemed durable in the morning had become red-hot instruments of torture by noon.

And when the *plage* was at last reached, it was crowded with fat, semi-nude Frenchmen, and still more nude Frenchwomen, and groups of tiny brown naked children walking in and out of the water, screaming, throwing about large, coloured rubber balls with unsteady aim, and staring out of enormous, hostile dark eyes at the English and American visitors.

The French people, as a rule, had bathing-tents, although they seldom used them. The visitors had none.

"One can manage under a towel, or something," said Chrissie indifferently.

She did not in the least mind exposing her little slim figure.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, however, would not for the world have shuffled in and out of a bathing-dress on the open *plage*, and she always adjusted her tight bust-support, and her dark green silk costume, with a short skirt from waist to knees, before leaving the Villa. It was uncomfortable having to sit about in it after her bathe, but it dried quickly enough in the sun.

The objective of all bathers from the *plage* was the raft. It swung slowly from side to side on the glittering water, and

was almost always crowded with shrieking, sliding figures, slipping backwards and forwards on its wet surface and splashing in and out of the sea as the balance of weight shifted.

From one end of the raft uprose the diving-steps. Almost every time that a bather stood poised on the topmost step and then sprang through the air there was a moment's hush, whilst people watched.

The divers were usually English or American, although one or two Frenchmen performed admirably.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush never swam as far as the raft. Her swimming was an affair of determination rather than of skill, and she did not enjoy being in the water. She seriously believed that she might at any moment drown, and exercise, in any case, was apt to bring on her indigestion. But as usual her private concerns must be sacrificed, ruthlessly and in silence, to the whims of her employer.

Otherwise she might find herself out of a job. Mrs. Wolverton-Gush knew exactly what that meant for a woman of her age. She sat down on the hot sand, consciously restraining the heavy grunt that was nature's protest against unfamiliar exercise for elderly muscles buried in fat, and pulled the skirt of her bathing-dress as far down as she could over her large thighs, tinged with violet.

Chrissie, in a scarlet swimming-suit that left the whole of her back, sides, and shoulders exposed to the sun, threw herself down at full length, protecting her eyes from the glare with her hands.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush glanced down at her with a secret envy. Chrissie lay as flat, as straight, as an immature child of ten or eleven years old. Even the rise of her tiny breasts was almost imperceptible. Her stomach, thought Mrs. Wolverton-Gush resentfully, was positively concave.

It was unnatural.

Yet she knew that Chrissie neither dieted nor did slimming exercises.

"Look, dear, there's your friend Mr. Moon, with Mrs. Romaine and Patrick."

"Oh, damn," said Chrissie.

She sat up.

"I don't mean your Mrs. Romaine, Gushie, but Moon bores me beyond words. Have they seen us?"

They had, and were picking their way through the groups.

"Good-morning," said Hilary Moon, with more amiability than usual. "Have you been in yet?"

"I'm going in now," said Chrissie. "Are you coming, Gushie?"

"I think, dear, that I'll sit here a little first."

"I'll come with you to the raft, if I may," Hilary announced.

"All right. Come on, Patrick."

The three of them raced down to the edge of the water. Coral Romaine, her face a thunder-cloud, threw herself down beside Mrs. Wolverton-Gush and began to fling the sand about violently with both hands.

"I think I'm going to leave this place," she announced abruptly. "I'm perfectly sick of it."

"Are you thinking of Cannes, or dear old Monte? I must say I've a terrible weakness for Cannes myself. It's what I call such a really smart place."

Coral made no reply. She pulled a comb from her cretonne beach-bag, and dragged it repeatedly through her lustreless thatch of coarse, discoloured hair.

At last she burst into angry speech, her voice rising higher and higher as she went on.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush listened, but paid no attention. She knew what Coral's grievance was. It was the age-old grievance of a woman no longer young, to whom sexual adventure is supremely important, and whose chances of it are daily diminishing.

Ruth Wolverton-Gush attached but little importance to sexual adventure herself. She saw life in terms of money, and had done so almost ever since she could remember. Had she ever been attractive to men, she would have exploited her attractions for the sake of the material advantages they might have brought her. But even as a girl she had never had the admiration of men. She was too hard, too dictatorial, too obviously out for what she could get.

Life had not softened her in the least: on the contrary. But it had taught her to conceal her hardness under a veneer of lip-sympathy.

She offered it to Coral now, her mind all the time busy with her own affairs: the pain that warned her of oncoming indigestion, the one-sided pull of her bust-support, denoting that one of the hooks had given way and must be sewn on directly she got in.

"It's too bad, dear. I'm really sorry. It does seem as if he was behaving badly. I certainly should never have expected Buck to let you down like that. I almost feel it reflects on me, in a way, as I introduced him to you."

"Oh, it's nothing to do with you, Gushie," said Coral mechanically. She kept silent for a moment, and then burst out again.

"It's perfectly indecent, the way Angie—or whatever she calls herself—runs after men. It makes me sick! And just because Moon was fool enough to spill them all into the sea out of his rotten motor-boat, and Buck didn't scream and panic like that dirty little coward What's-his-name, you'd think he'd saved all their lives."

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, who had heard Coral loudly proposing Buckland's health in champagne the night before, at once said with great decision:

"Hysteria, dear—that's all it is. Simply hysteria. Mrs. Moon and that silly little Courteney girl were thoroughly worked up, and they had to make an adventure out of what was probably a very simple occurrence. Naturally, if it had happened in England, it might have been most unpleasant—not to say dangerous—but an hour or two in the water in this climate means nothing at all."

"I can't see that Buck did anything marvellous," Coral repeated sullenly. "By the way they go on you'd think he'd saved a dozen lives. As a matter of fact they could all swim perfectly well. Buck just happened to be less of a fool than the other men, that's all. If you can call either of them men," she added viciously.

"I certainly don't care very much for Mr. Moon, I must admit."

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush had no intention of committing herself to any statement whatever about Denis Waller. Chrissie was, or seemed to be, temporarily infatuated with him—and Chrissie was her employer.

But Coral was not interested in the very least in Denis. She wanted to talk about herself and Buckland.

"I've been frightfully generous to him, too—taking him with us everywhere, and never making any fuss about money, and God knows he's always done himself well. I don't believe there's another woman in the world in my position who'd have stood for it. I know one thing: it isn't going on."

"You mean you're going to tell him he can go?"

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush did not really believe this. She had had previous experience of Coral Romaine, of her instability, her violent changes of mood, and susceptibility to flattery. She thought that Buckland was behaving like a fool.

Suddenly Coral gripped her arm, digging her pointed nails painfully into the flesh.

"Look at that! Just *look* at that! What did I tell you?"

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush looked.

Angie Moon was coming easily down the steep slope that led from the road, and Buckland was close behind her.

Coral muttered an epithet.

"Now, dear, listen to me. Will you let me have a talk with that young man? I think I can bring him to his senses all right. You don't want to have to get rid of him just now, do you, on account of Patrick?"

"A fat lot of good he does Patrick!"

"You don't want to lower yourself by speaking to him about his present behaviour, in any way. Really, dear, I wish you'd leave it to me," earnestly said Mrs. Wolverton-Gush.

She did not want Buckland to offend Coral Romaine irretrievably. She had herself obtained the position for him, and a business-like arrangement subsisted between them that she found advantageous.

She was also anxious to retain Coral Romaine's friendship. It had been useful to her in the past, and she fully intended it to be so in the future as well.

"Let me have a word with him. You can trust me not to compromise your dignity in any way."

"Dignity be damned, Gushie!" Mrs. Romaine burst out laughing, her temper altering suddenly. "Go ahead if you want to. But you must make him understand that it's his last chance. I'll take him to Monte Carlo to-morrow—they're making up a party—and if he spends his time running round after that pop-eyed girl, then it's *finish*."

Coral stood up, passed her hands swiftly along the slim line of her hips, and went down to the edge of the water.

Angie Moon, sprawling on the sand, was arranging her tight white rubber helmet over her curls. Her long limbs were already tanned to a lovely golden-brown. She had lacquered her toe-nails, as well as her finger-nails, with vermilion.

The Frenchmen, most of them surrounded by their families, were staring at her openly.

Buckland stood just beside her, his big torso displayed to full advantage.

He was gazing down at her.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, with an effort, heaved herself up. Grimly conscious of the heaviness of her body, she walked up to him with dauntless determination.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Moon. Well, Buck—good-morning."

"Hallo," said Buckland amiably. "Looks jolly in the water this morning, doesn't it?"

"Very delightful. But I hope you're not going in this moment, are you?"

Buckland looked down at Angie. She immediately rolled over on her front, raising her legs in the air and letting them fall again in a slow, rhythmic movement.

"What about you, Angie?"

"I'm going to sleep," she announced, laying her face in the curve of her arm.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush wrenched at her opportunity.

"I mustn't disturb you. And, as a matter of fact, Buck, I want you to tell me about this day at Monte Carlo. I fancy Miss Challoner might like to join in. She was saying something about going there the other day."

She moved away as she spoke, and Buckland followed her.

Angie did not look round.

(6)

"... And so," said Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, "you can take it straight from me that you're going the right way to lose a soft job."

She was much less genteel, both in enunciation and vocabulary, with Buckland than she was with her employer, or anybody else whom she suspected of underrating what she thought of as her claim to good-breeding.

Breeding, good, bad or indifferent, meant nothing whatever to Buckland, she knew very well. Her inborn shrewdness told her that he would pay attention only to the plainest and most direct statements of fact.

He received her announcement exactly as she had expected: with a sharp glance at her, as if to see whether she really meant it, and then a frank exclamation of annoyance.

"Hell! Did she put you on to tell me so?"

"Certainly not. Mrs. Romaine is perfectly capable of telling you anything she wants to herself——"

"That's true," Buck ejaculated, with a rueful grin.

"But I can see for myself that she's not going to stand for your going on as you are at the present moment. Why should she? Here you are, having a free holiday, for that's all it is, at her expense, and all you've got to do in return is to drive the car, and keep an eye on the boy when he wants it, and make yourself decently agreeable to Coral. If you can't do that, Buck, you're a greater fool than I take you for."

There was a long pause.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, with a recrudescence of gentility, hoped that it would be unnecessary for her to speak more plainly. She sat looking straight in front of her.

"Hell," said Buckland again, this time thoughtfully. "I suppose I've been a fool. God knows it wouldn't suit me to get the chuck just now—jobs aren't so easy to come by."

"Certainly not jobs like this one."

"I'm not the *gigolo* type," said Buckland curtly.

"Nobody ever suggested——"

He stopped her with a rough gesture.

"You know as well as I do that's all it amounts to."

"Very well, then," said Ruth Wolverton-Gush grimly, "if that's all it amounts to, you must put up with it. People without money, nowadays, have to take what they can get, and be thankful for it whatever it may be."

Her mouth closed in a hard line over the words.

She had testified to the only faith she held.

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# CHAPTER X

## (1)

"Can I go to Monte Carlo too?" said Gwennie, her tone suggesting a threat rather than an appeal.

"I'm afraid not, Gwennie."

"But, mummie, Olwen is going."

"I don't know that she is. And in any case——"

"Daddy said at breakfast this morning he'd take Olwen."

"Olwen is a great deal older than you are."

"She isn't twenty-one, so she won't be allowed to go into the gambling-place any more than I would be, so what's the point of her going any more than me?" said Gwennie, with her usual devastating power of grasping the essentials of any situation.

Mary Morgan gazed at her rather helplessly.

Gwennie, very straight and sturdy in her short yellow bathing-drawers and yellow cretonne hat, gazed back at her parent with undeviating, unwinking directness.

Mary—one of whose weaknesses it was that she applied to the upbringing of her hard-boiled youngest child methods of reasonable persuasion that had proved successful with the gentler Olwen and David—perceived that there was to be a struggle.

Gwennie was intelligent enough, her mother knew, to understand that she had no real hope of gaining her point—but it was quite evident that she had made up her mind to relinquish it as dearly as possible.

"I don't think I shall be going to Monte Carlo myself, darling. You and I and David can do something else instead."

"I don't want to do anything else. I want to go to Monte Carlo."

"Gwennie, it really wouldn't be much fun, even if you did. It's just a town like St. Raphael, only larger."

"Everybody else is going. Dulcie is."

"I thought you didn't much care for Dulcie."

"I simply loathe her. That's why I don't like her to go, and me not."

Confronted with this fresh evidence of Gwennie's lack of principle, Mary felt more helpless than ever.

She was toiling slowly up the avenue towards the Hôtel d'Azur. Mervyn and the elder children were far on ahead. It was like Gwennie, she reflected, to launch her attack exactly in those circumstances and at that moment. It was far, far too hot for the exercise of parental firmness.

She tried to effect a diversion.

"I wonder what we shall have for *déjeuner* to-day."

"*Poulet* and watercress," said Gwennie promptly.

"*Cresson*."

"Watercress. I asked Henri and he told me. And no pudding, only cheese and fruit, but to-morrow there's going to be ices."

"Well, that'll be very nice."

Mary was panting slightly from the ascent. They rounded the last sharp bend, and were within sight of the steps.

"I *do* so want to go to Monte Carlo to-morrow."

"You're not going, Gwennie. Make up your mind to it like a good child."

Mary hurried up the terrace steps, not looking round. There were several people on the terrace as usual, and she hoped that one or other of them might call to Gwennie as so often happened, for she was a child with whom strangers invariably made friends.

"*Bonjour, ma petite fille.*"

"*Bonjaw, m'seu,*" returned Gwennie mournfully.

"*Ça marche, ce matin?*"

Gwennie replied to monsieur Duval's pleasant enquiry by thrusting out her under-lip and looking at him piteously out of suddenly tearful blue eyes. Both the Duvals immediately broke into compassionate shrieks and exclamations. In less than a moment, it seemed, Gwennie was the centre of quite a large group of interested people.

Mary, at once exasperated and amused, went on into the hall.

Only Mr. Muller was sitting there, reading an American newspaper.

It was his courteous custom invariably to stand up whenever any lady whom he knew went past, and he did so now.

Mary felt obliged to stop.

She rather liked Muller, who contrived to make his silences intelligent ones, and whose very dark blue eyes held an extraordinarily attentive expression, as though he were always observing.

"Are you going to join the Monte Carlo expedition to-morrow?" asked Mary.

"Why, no, Mrs. Morgan, I am not. Monte Carlo is a place I've visited a good many times, and I shall probably be doing so again when my wife and family join me here, and I think it can very well wait till then."

"I've been there once. I didn't like it much," Mary confessed.

"It's a place to see once," Mr. Muller judicially observed. "But there's nothing *to* it, unless a person wants to gamble. All *this*"—he waved comprehensively at the blazing blues and reds outside—"is seen to better advantage here than it is there. Though it's a lovely drive along the coast, of course."

"My husband is going to take Olwen. He doesn't specially care about going into the Rooms."

Muller gazed at her with his most considering expression.

"You and I will have the Hotel more or less to ourselves, then, to-morrow. Courteney is very determined to collect everyone he can."

Gwennie walked into the hall, rolled a baleful eye at her mother, and marched upstairs, trailing her bathing-cloak behind her.

"Your daughter looks somewhat ruffled," suggested Mr. Muller mildly.

"So she is. She wants to go to Monte Carlo, and I've told her she's got to stay behind, and David too."

"Isn't that too bad! Would it ease the situation at all, Mrs. Morgan, if I asked you and the children to honour me to-morrow with your company in a drive? We might find some place along the coast that you haven't yet visited, and have a bathe, and a picnic tea, and then dine early and drive home afterwards. Most of the hotels provide quite a nice dinner, I believe."

"They'd love it," said Mary. "And so should I," she added very truthfully.

"Well, then, we'll consider that's settled."

She smiled at him gratefully, and went upstairs feeling oddly exultant.

At home she scarcely ever went anywhere at all, excepting to very dull local functions, and she could not remember ever, since her marriage, having been taken out by any man but Mervyn.

Mary felt slightly alarmed by her own feelings of excited anticipation, and joyful sense of having received a compliment.

She told herself that it was absurd and that she ought to be ashamed of herself for her childishness.

But the feeling persisted just the same.

Uncoiling the plaits of her fair hair she brushed it with unwonted energy in front of the looking-glass, and presently found that she was mentally debating the possibilities of displaying those shining lengths in the presence of Mr. Muller next day.

"Well!" said Mary to her own reflection in some astonishment. With the exclamation, and a vigorous re-coiling of her hair, she supposed the unhallowed impulses of her imagination dismissed by her refusal to dwell upon them.

Mary Morgan for many years had successfully evaded facing facts. Her childhood had been an unusually happy one. She had been brought up in a mountain village in South Wales, where the only large house was her father's. Life had followed a very simple, recurrent pattern through nursery and then schoolroom days at home, occasional visits to relations, school for the two boys, and a kind, faded, permanently installed Mademoiselle for Mary and her sister, the chief excitements of the year centering in the hunting-field in the winter, and the Saturday village cricket-matches, captained by the children's father, in the summer.

At eighteen, Mary had come out in a mild and unsensational way at the Hunt Ball, and had then led very much the same life as before, except for occasional dances at Christmas, to which she and her parents drove in the closed carriage any distance from five to fifteen miles. When Nesta, two years younger than Mary, was also grown-up, they had to take it in turns to go to dances. On one occasion only had their father been persuaded to give a dance for them at home.

Mervyn Morgan had come to the dance, as well as every other young man they had been able to collect from the neighbourhood, but Mary had not been specially interested in him, although they had danced together.

At that time she had secretly cherished a romantic, schoolgirl ideal of the man that she was to marry. A blend of Rudolf Rassendyll and Mr. Harry Fragson, whom she had once seen and heard at a Drury Lane pantomime. It was all vague and foolish and immature. Mary had never been in love, no one had ever made love to her. She supposed that she would marry, because it had always been taken for granted that this was a girl's natural destiny. The two unmarried Misses Jones at the Rectory, the five Misses Williams on the other side of the river, the Misses Lloyd, aunt and three nieces, at Plas Lloyd, were all elderly. It never even occurred to Mary and Nesta that any of them could ever have been young at all. There could be no connection whatever between themselves, young and pretty and happy, and these numerous spinsters. They took it for granted that some day they would fall in love, and be married, and have children. Meanwhile, impressions were accumulating—happy, unrealised, unformulated, and destined to return to Mary's mind again and again throughout her later life in a series of disconnected recollections ... the garden with clumps of mauve Michaelmas daisies, drenched in dew ... the waterfall below the lodge gates swollen to a brown, foaming torrent by the heavy autumn rains ... a white mist swirling up the valley, and the tops of the larches hidden in cloud ... a brakeful of village cricketers stopped outside the "Sloop Inn," and the sound of the Welsh voices breaking into part-singing: "Wait till the clouds roll by, Jennie."

It went on, unchanging and seeming unchangeable, until the time of the war.

Mary's elder brother had been killed within a year from the declaration of war.

Nesta, after training in a London hospital, had gone to France and married a Canadian officer. Mary went to work on the land, but came home when her second brother was taken prisoner. They were unable to get news of him for a long while, and Mary accompanied her parents, one or both, on piteous and restless journeyings to and from London.

The months and the years seemed endless, but they went by.

The war was over, and reconstruction began. Everyone was much poorer, and nearly everyone seemed to have grown much older. Many had not returned, even of those who had survived the fighting.

Mary's remaining brother married a North-country girl, whom none of them liked very much. She had some money, and the old people decided to give up the place to her and her husband.

They found a small house outside Chepstow, and talked of settling there, but wanted to go first to Canada and see Nesta and her husband and child living in Hamilton, Ontario.

It was then that Mervyn Morgan asked Mary to marry him. He said that he had meant to do so for a long while, but had deliberately waited until the war should be over. He told her that he had been in love with her for years, and should never care for anybody else. But it was because he had known the old life, and had so often ridden with her brothers in childhood, and could remember Mary and Nesta playing together in the larchwoods, that Mary fell in love with him, and accepted him.

She was not introspective enough to realise that, all the time, she was nursing a vague hope that marriage with Mervyn would bring back the old vanished days.

To a certain extent it did so.

The house to which she went as Mervyn's wife was one that she had always known, within a few miles of her home.

After her children were born, it made Mary intensely happy to see them in the surroundings that her own childhood had known. She sought to recover, through them, the past. Although her youth was gone, she still, to a large extent, lived in it, protecting herself from the full pain of disillusionment.

Her affection for Mervyn was deep and enduring, although he never woke her to passion, and she accepted without question his assurance that she was naturally frigid, and that most decent women were the same.

Neither of them had ever fallen in love with anybody else.

They were poor, and the three children cost them every penny they could afford.

The holiday in France had been Mary's last bid for adventure. She knew that Mervyn thought it a wild extravagance, as indeed it was, but the money was hers—an unexpected legacy—and she allowed him to invest two-thirds of it.

She wanted warmth and colour, and a change of atmosphere, and an outstanding memory for the children.

And, without being aware of it, she wanted romance.

## (2)

The departure for Monte Carlo was well staged by the experienced Mr. Courteney. Knowing well that he could not hope to control the movements of his party unless they all kept together, he had persuaded Mrs. Romaine and Hilary Moon, who alone were the owners of motor-cars, that it would be less tiring and much pleasanter to let themselves be driven in hired ones, for which he would arrange.

Accordingly at ten o'clock a shining platoon of blue saloon-cars stood outside the Hôtel d'Azur, each with a swarthy chauffeur, wearing a black béret, at the wheel.

Courteney, very calm and pleasant, walked about with a list in his hand. He was still calm and pleasant when, at half-past ten, a message reached him that the Duvals had changed their minds, and were not coming, when the *concierge* assured him that a change in the weather was imminent and that *le mistral* would be blowing before noon, and when Hilary Moon suddenly announced that he had, on the previous afternoon, invited Miss Challoner and her secretary to join the expedition, and they had agreed to do so, and were expecting to be picked up at the villa at a quarter-past ten.

It was by then twenty minutes to eleven.

Nobody showed any signs of being ready to start excepting Captain Morgan and his daughter Olwen, Denis Waller—who was scribbling at the farthest writing-table in the hall, and shielding from sight with one hand what he wrote with

the other—and Dulcie.

Courteney thanked Hilary with quite effusive politeness for his belated and unwelcome announcement, and sent a telephone message to the Villa les Mimosas to say that the start had been slightly delayed.

Madame came out of her office, smiling and bowing, and Courteney, in French superior to her own, paid her compliments on the beauties of her native Provence.

At ten minutes to eleven Angie Moon came downstairs wearing a new suit of beach-pyjamas of white silk with a bright-green diagonal stripe, a huge grass-green straw hat, and green sandals.

She said that Mrs. Romaine was on her way down.

Denis rose from his writing-table, and pushed the envelope that he had just addressed into the pocket of his new blue flannel suit.

"Do you want to post your letter, Mr. Waller?" said Dulcie, who had been watching him with her head on one side. "It'll go at eleven o'clock, if you do."

"No, thanks," returned Denis colouring. "I—it'll—I think I'll post it in Monte Carlo. It'll probably get to London quicker that way."

"Oh, but it won't, Mr. Waller. It——"

Courteney half turned round and gave his daughter a look that silenced her on the instant.

Denis, striding as he always did to try and make himself look taller, approached the others. He cast an uneasy glance round at the other men.

Morgan, who had said that he was not going into the Rooms, was wearing khaki shorts and shirt. Courteney had on an old pair of white flannel trousers and a zip-fastened cotton singlet. Buckland, strolling in from the terrace, wore grey flannels.

Denis began to mutter. He went up to Courteney.

"I'm not sure—I hope I've got on the right clothes—I wasn't quite certain. I can easily slip upstairs and change."

His anxiety to be seen wearing the right clothes was only surpassed by his reluctance to admit ignorance on the point.

Courteney, polite on principle to any visitor in the Hotel, did not in reality rank Denis as such, any more than did the *concierge*, or the waiters.

"You're all right," he said curtly. "Anyhow, you haven't got time to go up again now. We shall start extremely late as it is."

He consulted his list.

"Who isn't here? Mrs. Romaine—Patrick. And we have to pick up Miss Challoner and her friend on the way. I really think the first car had better start now, and do that, which will give the other cars time to catch up."

Courteney's slightly raised voice had somehow assembled everybody on to the steps, those who were going, and those who were not. Even Mr. Bolman put down the newspaper that he was reading on the terrace and stood up.

"If I may be allowed to make a tentative suggestion or two about the seating in the cars, it might save a little confusion," said Courteney, smiling agreeably, and crushing up into a tiny ball the paper on which he had worked out the whole of his tentative suggestions with great care and in the utmost detail the evening before.

"Moon, will you and Waller get in, and take up Miss Challoner and Mrs.—er—Wolverton-Gush? Good-morning, Mrs. Romaine—no, indeed, you're not at all late. I hope you'll let me come in the car with you, and let me see—Buckland—and you, Dulcie."

("Am I going with you, Pops? How lovely!" squeaked Dulcie, with a small skip.)

"Captain Morgan, that leaves the remaining car for Mrs. Moon, if you'll look after her, and then your daughter and Patrick Romaine. Now I think we're all accounted for. We're all going to drive straight to the car-park outside the Casino, so we shall meet there."

Gwennie Morgan climbed up on to the stone coping of the terrace, and began to call out "Good-bye!" dancing up and down and waving her hand.

"Good-bye," echoed David, joining her.

Everybody began to exclaim, to say good-bye, and to exchange wishes for a pleasant day.

The cars moved away, down the drive.

### (3)

The day spent by Mary and her two younger children with Mr. Muller had been a great success.

They drove a long way in the extremely magnificent car of Mr. Muller, they saw beautiful scenery, they bathed, and picnicked on the rocks, and finally dined early on the terrace of a French hotel overlooking the sea.

It was eight o'clock when they got back to the Hôtel d'Azur.

"Thank you so much for taking us. It was lovely," said Gwennie.

"Thank you very much," echoed David.

They had been angelic all day.

Mary sent them up to bed, feeling a glow of pride and thankfulness.

"We loved it," she told Mr. Muller, standing beside him in the lighted hall.

It was still stiflingly hot, and strange insects were buzzing and flapping about, more noticeable than usual in the silence, for half the Hotel was at Monte Carlo and the other half at dinner.

"You don't have to go just yet, do you?" enquired Muller. "Won't you come and sit on the terrace for a few minutes? Have an iced drink or something."

"*Ce soir*," said the unexpected voice of the *concierge* behind them, "*il y aura des feux d'artifice au village*."

Mr. Muller glanced enquiringly at Mary.

"Oh, I adore fireworks," she said.

"That's fine. We'll go down right now and see them."

"Just let me run upstairs and say good-night to the children first," cried Mary.

"Sure. I'll wait for you here."

She ran upstairs, as excited as a schoolgirl, and in five minutes was back again.

Muller's car was at the steps once more, and he sat at the wheel.

Mary took her place beside him, conscious that the long day spent together in an intimacy that might have been domestic had it not been so unfamiliar, had created between them a surprisingly strong sense of companionship. She knew instinctively that the silent American liked her very much.

She liked him too.

They found the small *place* in the village thronged with a typical Southern crowd of stout men in shirt-sleeves, hatless women, and small, bullet-headed children.

Dance-music blared out from a loud-speaker placed in an open doorway, and couples were dancing all over the road. Every now and then the glare of approaching head-lights, and the sound of a motor-horn, caused the dancers to swerve violently, screaming, and scattering in every direction. Muller drew up close to the side of the road and put out the head-lights.

"I guess the fireworks will take place by the edge of the sea. They usually do. If we sit here, we shall see them very nicely."

The raucous sound of the ill-regulated wireless was so loud that they made no attempt to talk.

It was curious, thought Mary, how possible it was to sit beside this chance companion in silence, without any feeling of self-consciousness.

Presently the dance-music stopped and there was a kind of pause. Many of the people surged across the road to the open doorway of the *brasserie*.

"Look," said Mary, "there are some men going down to the edge of the water. That's where the fireworks will be; you were quite right."

"Didn't you think I would be?" Muller enquired dryly.

They both laughed.

"I guess I know the way things are done on this coast about as well as I know anything," said Muller. "I've been here nearly every year for the last fifteen years."

"And do you like it?"

"Well, I don't know that I do, so very much. I've got tired of it, I expect. The place is beautiful enough. I wouldn't get tired of that. But it's just seeing the same crowd of people, over and over again, with nothing different about them except their names."

"Are they all so much alike? I didn't know. You see, I've hardly ever been abroad—and never to a place like this before."

"Excepting Bolham, and your own family, Mrs. Morgan, there isn't anyone staying at the Hôtel d'Azur that you couldn't meet, almost by the dozen, in any other hotel along the coast."

"Oh!" cried Mary. "Not anyone as pretty as that girl—Mrs. Moon. She'd be remarkable anywhere."

"Not to me, she wouldn't," said Mr. Muller with simple finality. "She's pretty, I quite agree, but so are many other people of her age. And they all talk the same way, and walk the same way, and drink the same way, and make love the same way. And that's about all they ever *do* do."

"I thought," said Mary simply, "that any man in the world would admire her, just for her looks. It's very evident that some of the people in the Hotel do."

"Well, when they've lived a few years longer and seen a few more hundreds of young women, just exactly like her, walking up and down the pavements in Paris, or London, or N'York, they won't any more—that's all."

Mary remembered how very often she had thought of Angie Moon's youth and loveliness as passports to some undefined region of romance. The thought had been a sentimental one: common sense told her that romance would hold no place whatever in Angie's scheme of existence.

There was a sharp, hissing sound, and the first rocket shot up into the air, hung, a point of light poised for an instant against the velvet sky, and then shivered into a rain of tiny, coloured, falling stars.

They exclaimed, almost involuntarily.

She was fascinated and sat leaning forward, earnest and absorbed as a child, watching the display.

(4)

Muller, sitting silent beside her, smoking, was watching his companion rather than the indifferent Roman candles and Catherine-wheels. He was, and had been from the first moment of seeing her, strongly attracted by Mary Morgan.

Her natural setting was one of which he scarcely knew anything at all, except that it still existed, and would probably not continue to exist very much longer.

His own upbringing had been the cosmopolitan one of wealthy American youth, and—knowing almost every great European city—he was almost wholly unfamiliar with society other than urban.

He thought Mary beautiful in an unusual style, intelligent rather than cultured, and profoundly and passionately romantic. To Mervyn Morgan, he inwardly conceded the merit of good-breeding. In every other respect he considered him to be wholly negligible. He would not have suffered any compunction, on Morgan's account, in making love to Morgan's wife.

A great many women had been more than ready to let him make love to them—some of them far readier than Muller had been to do so.

It was a great part of Mary's charm for him that she should be so unaware of the fact that she attracted him.

He reflected, without fatuity, that it would not be difficult to rouse her to awareness. She was, he felt certain of it, both sensitive and responsive. She was lonely, because no companionship existed between herself and her husband, and she was not the type of woman to seek for it elsewhere. She had sublimated her unfulfilled desires, perhaps, in her evidently deep affection for her children?

A chorus of shrieks and exclamations went up, as a rather shaky set-piece appeared.

With any other woman whom he admired as he did Mary, the long companionship of the day, this close proximity of their bodies in the warm semi-darkness would have ended in a kiss at least.

Muller bit hard on the stump of his cigar. Then, with a stifled sigh, tossed it into the low tangle of bushes below the car.

The gesture was unconsciously histrionic. Relinquishment.

(5)

"Good-night," said Mary, half an hour later on the steps of the Hotel. And she added, very much as her children had done:

"It's been so lovely, thank you *very* much."

She held out her hand, smiling.

Muller held it for a moment in his, looking gravely down at her.

"Good-night," he said at last. "And it's for me to thank you for a very wonderful day."

He turned back again to his car, and Mary went indoors. The *concierge*, rising sulkily to his feet, told her that the party from Monte Carlo had not yet returned.

"*Merci. Bonsoir.*"

"*Soir, madame.*"

The lift took her slowly and jerkily up to her own floor. Feeling suddenly very tired, Mary went into the double bedroom, and sat down on the edge of the bed without troubling to turn on the switch near the door. Through the half-closed shutters she could see lights trembling on the water, and other brighter clusters, denoting St. Raphael. In the village, the music had started again, and reached her softened and beautified by distance.

The sound of a car approaching swiftly up the hill came nearer and nearer. There was another one close behind it.

They were back from Monte Carlo.

Mary sat still for another second or two, her hands covering her face.

She had wondered, when the American said good-night to her, if he wanted to kiss her.

For a brief moment, before she sprang to her feet and switched on the light, she wished very much that he had done so.

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# CHAPTER XI

## (1)

It seemed to Denis that an almost incredible piece of good fortune had befallen him when he was told by Courteney to go in the first car—the one that was to stop at the Villa Mimosa for Chrissie.

He superstitiously told himself that his luck had turned: he believed implicitly in good and bad luck.

His wretchedness of mind throughout the last few days had been intense. During the daytime he could distract his thoughts but at night he suffered tortures, turning over and over the possibility that Chrissie would find out, perhaps through Courteney, his major deception of her.

He did not think that she would view his marriage as an obstacle to the relationship between them that he always scrupulously called their friendship, but he had an unescapable, agonising conviction that she would despise him for having kept it from her. It was not only his vanity that writhed at the thought: he was sentimentally, if not passionately, in love with Chrissie, and felt that to lose her would be unendurable.

Leaning back in the swiftly-moving, comfortable car, Denis felt his nerves relax for the first time since Courteney's recognition of him.

Perhaps everything was going to be all right after all.

Little as he liked or esteemed Hilary Moon, it was a relief to be with him, rather than with Buckland or Courteney. And in another minute or two he would see Chrissie. They could spend the whole day together.

Denis even told himself that he might be lucky at the Casino and win some money there.

He looked at Hilary, lounging beside him.

"Shall you try your luck at the tables this afternoon?" he enquired in his best imitation-Oxford voice.

"What else do you suppose I'm going for?" said Hilary contemptuously.

Denis drew his lips together and relapsed into an offended silence.

At the Villa, Denis sprang out of the car, eager as usual to display his good manners, and then stood in the road for five minutes feeling that he was looking foolish, whilst they waited.

As soon as Chrissie and her companion appeared Hilary also got out of the car, and it was he who helped them both in. Denis had been prepared to shake hands, but Chrissie only smiled at him, and Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, creaking slightly at the waist, gave him a stately little bow.

The car could comfortably accommodate four passengers, and the two men sat on the back seats.

Since Hilary had preceded him into the car Denis found himself opposite to Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, his feet in an awkward proximity that he found embarrassing, to her massive legs, which seemed to have no ankles at all.

He pressed his knees tightly together, and in a screwed-up and uncomfortable position he spent the journey.

Chrissie and Hilary seemed suddenly to have discovered that they might have something in common after all, and talked about books and literary acquaintances. Denis would have liked to join in, but recent experiences with Mr. Bolham had taught him wisdom. He contented himself with looking from one to the other, with the air of one intelligently following a conversation without caring to contribute to it. He hoped ardently that Chrissie was noticing him.

From time to time she glanced at him and once she leaned forward to touch his arm and draw his attention to the loveliness of the road they were following.

Cars were numerous, and one, flashing past them with reckless speed on a dangerous curve, caused them all to exclaim.

"It was one of the Hôtel d'Azur lot," declared Hilary. "I'm certain it was, I saw Angie's green hat. Besides, they waved to us—didn't you see?"

"These foreign chauffeurs are really terrible," Mrs. Wolverton-Gush said, shuddering. "If anything had been coming the other way, round that bend, nothing could have prevented a smash."

"The roads are so heavily cambered, too. That car would have gone clean over the edge."

They all turned involuntarily and gazed at the red, jagged rocks below.

"Certain death," Denis observed, glad of an opportunity for making his voice heard at last.

"I hope they'll complain to Mr. Courteney, I do really," said Mrs. Wolverton-Gush. "With two children in the car too!"

"You can hardly call that oaf, young Romaine, a child," Hilary remarked disagreeably.

Denis decided that his chance of asserting himself and of diverting Chrissie's attention from the intolerable Moon had come.

"Patrick Romaine interests me very much," he began, in a mincing, instructive voice. "I know a little about psychology, as it happens, particularly where boys are concerned. I've studied Patrick rather carefully. He's an extraordinary mixture of sophistication and immaturity."

No one responded immediately. Then Chrissie said: "Yes, he's an interesting boy. I always feel sorry for him, somehow."

Denis looked across at her, smiling confidently, thinking only of displaying his superior knowledge.

"You need not. He's quite a normal, cheerful person, I assure you. Patrick and I are very good friends and he's talked to me quite freely. I have a method of my own with boys of that age, and I may say that it's usually quite extraordinarily successful. As a matter of fact I've often thought that I ought to try for a job like Buckland's."

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush uttered an unexpected laugh. Denis, startled, looked at her.

He had forgotten all about her previous acquaintance with Buckland and the Romaines. He now perceived that his small, oblique boastings had offended her very much, and the realisation frightened him, for he had a horror of offending people.

"A job like Mr. Buckland's requires several qualifications, including athletic ones," said Mrs. Wolverton-Gush crushingly. "And as far as I know, my friend Mrs. Romaine is perfectly satisfied with her present arrangement."

"Quite so. Naturally. You misunderstand me entirely," Denis stammered in an agony, "if you think I was suggesting anything else, for a single moment. Naturally, I——"

"Denis," Chrissie's voice clearly and deliberately interrupted him, "are you going to do some gambling this afternoon? Because I am."

Denis felt perfectly certain that she intended to snub him. He was so deeply hurt that he felt himself crimsoning, whilst actual tears pricked at the back of his eyelids.

Through the rest of the drive he spoke not another word.

Outside the Casino at Monte Carlo they found Captain Morgan with Olwen and Patrick. The third car drove up, and Courteney sprang out of it.

He was anxious to forward everybody's plans.

Angie, looking very cross, came and joined them. She had been watching the people pass in and out of the Casino.

"I want a drink," she announced instantly. "This place is as hot as hell."

The air of the town was, in fact, stifling. It was the middle of the day, and hot sunshine poured down upon them.

"Let's lunch first and go in afterwards," Coral Romaine exclaimed, indicating the Casino by a gesture of the head. "Are we all keeping together, or what?"

"I have a table reserved at one of the hotels quite near," said Courteney.

Denis went up to Chrissie.

"Will you come and have lunch with me, somewhere where we can talk?" he asked in a low voice.

She nodded.

"I'd meant to suggest that."

He felt reassured. Perhaps she hadn't meant to speak contemptuously to him, after all. He wondered, at the same time hating himself for doing so, whether she—who could so well afford it—would pay for lunch for them both.

The group from the Hôtel d'Azur was dispersing.

Captain Morgan had gone off with Olwen and Patrick and Dulcie Courteney. No wonder, thought Denis, that he wouldn't leave his fourteen-year-old daughter longer than he could help in the company of Mrs. Romaine and Buckland. They were standing together now, talking noisily, with Buck's arm thrust through hers.

Angie Moon, still looking sulky, was with Courteney. He was taking her and Hilary with him to the Hotel.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush approached Chrissie.

"What are your plans, dear?" she enquired brightly.

"I don't want lunch at the Hotel, wherever it is. You go, Gushie. Denis will look after me."

"Just as you like, dear."

They saw her join up with Coral Romaine and Buckland. The three of them followed Courteney and the Moons.

"Thank Heaven we're rid of them," said Chrissie frankly. "Now then, where are we going?"

She sounded terribly brisk; not at all as she had sounded in their previous conversations.

The heart of Denis sank again.

"Anywhere you like," he said feebly. "I don't mind at all. I don't know this place."

"Let's find an open-air café somewhere."

It was not difficult.

In less than ten minutes they were sitting together beneath a striped awning, and Chrissie had ordered cocktails, iced *consommé*, and lobster *mousse*. Her frank appreciation of, and interest in, good food amazed Denis, who always sought furtively to conceal his own greed, whilst at the same time indulging it as far as possible, although never at his own expense.

He now felt certain that Chrissie intended to pay for the lunch herself, and the conviction served to raise his spirits. When the cocktails arrived he raised his glass to her, smiling naturally for the first time that day.

Spontaneously and sincerely, he paid her a compliment.

"What a pretty frock that is! You ought always to wear bright colours."

It was true.

Her small, childish form and straight-cut dark hair were admirably suited by the frock she was wearing: a short, full-skirted one, very simply cut, with rounded neck and little puffed sleeves that barely covered her shoulders, made of bright-blue cretonne with a tiny pattern of pink and blue roses.

Chrissie smiled at him in return.

"I'm terribly glad you like it. I do myself."

"Chrissie, how is your book getting on?" he asked rather timidly, hoping to please her.

"Quite all right. I'm only correcting proofs. Don't let's talk shop. Tell me what you've been thinking about since I saw you last."

"About you, mostly. When I saw you again, this morning, I was afraid perhaps I'd annoyed you in some way."

Chrissie frowned a little. She spoke, however, quite gently.

"You're always being afraid about something or other, aren't you?"

"Does that mean you think I'm a coward?"

"I *know* you're a coward," said Chrissie calmly. She finished her cocktail, and put down the empty glass. "Denis, dear, I've told you all along that the only thing that matters is for us to be honest with one another. I don't care in the least whether you're a coward or not—I'm a most fearful one myself, in some ways—but I do care about your being sincere with me, and I'm quite sure that you're not being anything of the kind. Are you?"

Denis stared at her in abject terror. For the moment, he saw her as the only person who had ever seemed to understand him, or to give him the affection that he so needed. Whatever he said or did now, he felt that he was bound to lose her.

"Then you don't really care about me?" he said at last.

"Yes I do. I want to help you, if you'll let me. I thought I could. Oh, Denis! I do understand that, all your life probably, you've been obliged to lie, and pretend, and posture—but *won't* you understand that you needn't do it with me? That if there's anything real between us at all, you've got to drop all that and be yourself?"

There was a piteous note in her voice, almost as though she were pleading with him. Denis, instinctively avoiding the real point at issue, caught at an evasion.

"You say '*if* there's anything real between us.' Don't you believe, any more, that there is?"

"Yes I do," she said quickly. "I *want* to."

She paused and then added reflectively:

"Or is it only that I don't want to think I made a mistake? You see, I did feel so sure at first, Denis, and so did you, didn't you?"—he nodded emphatically—"but now it all seems to be going wrong somehow. And I think it's because you can't bring yourself to be sincere with me. You don't trust me. How much have you ever told me about yourself?"

"I never tell anyone about myself. I'm a very reserved person, by nature."

"Only because you're afraid of committing yourself—of being found out," she said ruthlessly. "Am I being horrible? I know you've a right to your own privacy, if you want it—we all talk about ourselves far too much, really—but, Denis, I do so hate it, when you hedge—and tell half-truths—and contradict yourself."

He felt that it would be useless to deny the charges, and took refuge in his old formula.

"If I've not said as much to you as—as I might have done otherwise—it's because I owe a certain loyalty to—to other people. There are things in my life that I can't possibly mention to you or to anybody, for the sake of others, who trust me." The words did not sound as noble as he had meant them to sound.

Chrissie received them in silence.

For a few moments he wondered wildly whether to tell her about Phyllis. It would at least relieve him of the continual dread of being found out. He sought in his mind for a form of words that should convey the actual fact so as to make it sound creditable to himself, and failed to find one.

How could he say that he had secretly married a girl whom he could not afford to keep, and that he had for years passed himself off as being single, whilst his wife earned her own living in London?

He remembered, against his will, having told Chrissie again and again that he had always been lonely, that no one had ever shown him any real affection, that he was quite alone in the world.

He knew very well that she, also, would remember, and he felt that she might resent far more deeply the false claims he had made on her compassion than his silence about his marriage. It was characteristic of Denis that his immediate reaction to such a train of thought should be one of acute self-pity.

"I think I always knew," he said, with a little, twisted, miserable smile, "that our—friendship—was much too wonderful to last. I've never been a very fortunate person, somehow, and I don't think I ever shall be."

He wondered whether to add that it was for this reason that he was so often able to help other people in their troubles. But he was beginning to be afraid of Chrissie's tongue, and still more of her incisive, analytical mind. The little implications to his own credit, and small, semi-sincere platitudes that had always been accepted at their face value not only by the young women to whom he had so often spoken them, but also by himself, seemed now so many snares lying in wait for him.

"I think you're a natural defeatist," said Chrissie, looking at him critically. "Never mind. I suppose you can't help it."

"Then you're going to give me up as a bad job?"

Chrissie sighed and made no answer.

"Here's our lobster *mousse*. Doesn't it look heavenly? What are we going to drink?"

"What would you like?" faltered Denis.

She looked at the wine-list, and suggested a white wine.

Denis agreed at once.

Surely, he thought, she *must* be going to pay for them both. She must know that he couldn't afford wine.

The wine, when it came, was very good, and so was the lobster. Denis felt cheered and almost exhilarated as the drink, taken in the hottest hour of a broiling day, went to his head. He was scarcely startled at all when Chrissie, leaning across the table and fixing her enormous dark eyes on him, enquired abruptly:

"Denis, are you in love with me?"

"I'm very fond of you, dear."

"That isn't an answer. Or—is it?"

"So much depends," began Denis sententiously, "on what you mean by being in love. I'm afraid I don't, in some ways, look on these things in exactly the same way that the average man does."

He hesitated, crumbling his roll, feeling that his reply had sounded utterly unreal and wondering hazily why they were finding it so impossible to recapture the atmosphere of their first meeting in the moonlit garden at the Villa Mimosa.

"I think," said Chrissie in cold, level tones, "that we may take it that you're *not*. Well—that's all right." She signalled to a waiter.

"I'm going to have an ice. Are you?"

"Yes—no—yes, I mean, I will please. But Chrissie——"

"What kind? They've got raspberry, or mixed, or chocolate."

"Any kind. I'll have whatever you have."

"*Deux glaces au chocolat, s'il vous plaît.*"

"*Bien, madame.*"

Denis lifted the bottle of wine from its bucket of ice and held it over Chrissie's glass.

"No, thanks. You finish it. I don't want any more."

He refilled his own glass, and drank quickly.

"You know, Chrissie dear, however much I care for you—and I *do* care, perhaps more than you realise—I'm simply not in a position to ask you to marry me. I'm absolutely dependent on what I earn—and most unfortunately I wasn't brought up to suppose I should ever have to work for my living—and you—well, you're what you are, with a name, and a position, and money, and—and everything."

"Good Heavens, I wasn't thinking of marriage. I don't ever mean to marry, unless I absolutely can't help it. I should hate married life."

"But if you loved anyone sufficiently, surely you'd want to be with that person all the time and for always," said Denis solemnly.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"All the time and for always! It's a pretty tall order, isn't it? I might have thought so at eighteen—but I do know something about my own limitations by this time. I'm terribly fickle, you know. People who do my sort of work—creative—nearly always are, I think."

Denis, his head now swimming slightly, stared at her across the table. He was conscious of a difficulty in finding his words, whilst at the same time he felt released from his usual inhibitions.

"You seem quite different to-day. You're not a bit like I thought you were, the first time I met you. Either you are a most wonderful actress, or else you've changed completely in your feelings towards me. I shan't be in the least surprised if you have; you needn't be afraid to tell me."

It seemed to Denis that he was saying something very courageous and striking and honourable, in making this speech. He hardly noticed whether Chrissie made any reply to it or not.

He sat and finished the bottle of white wine, suffused in a gentle glow of self-approbation.

Without any demur he allowed Chrissie to pay their bill, and then followed her out into the crowded, brilliantly sunny street.

"We'll go and play roulette, shall we?" said Chrissie, in a voice that sounded rather far away and indistinct.

"Yes," said Denis boldly.

He felt that he would almost certainly win money.

## (2)

They walked along the street in silence, gazing into the shops. Every other window seemed to display silky clothes in bright colours and thin materials, or else elaborate cakes and confectionery.

Chrissie looked at them all without seeing them. She knew that her nerves were on edge, and could without difficulty guess the reason why.

Her brief infatuation for Denis Waller had begun to wane from the moment she had detected that he was lying to her, on the day the motor-boat had gone down—and no one knew better than Chrissie with what undignified, what unescapable rapidity, such waning, once begun, could accomplish itself.

She told herself that she had given Denis his chance, in their *tête-à-tête* luncheon, and that he had wholly failed to profit

by it. Neither her habitual honesty of outlook, nor her passion for self-analysis, allowed her to delude herself. The glamour through which she had so inexplicably viewed Denis had vanished, leaving very little behind it except impatience, humiliation, and a slight feeling of remorse.

She asked herself uneasily whether Denis really cared for her enough to suffer from her defection—and decided that his vanity was more deeply involved than were his affections. All the same, she knew that she was going to hurt him, and felt angry with herself, and still angrier with Denis.

He walked beside her with his exaggerated stride, and a rather foolish, fatuous expression on his deeply flushed face. Every now and then he whistled softly just below his breath, a little out of tune.

"Here we are," said Chrissie. "Good luck."

"Aren't you coming in?"

"No. I've changed my mind. Good-bye."

She turned away abruptly and left him, disconcerted, on the steps of the Casino.

Just beyond the car-park she saw Mervyn Morgan, with Patrick Romaine and the two girls.

Chrissie, anxious not to be left alone with her own thoughts, crossed the street and joined them.

### (3)

Coral Romaine was in a mood of rather strident good humour. She had enjoyed an excellent lunch, and had a great deal to drink, and Buckland had taken the seat next to hers and kept his foot pressed against hers underneath the table all the time. He had scarcely looked at Angie Moon, and Angie had laughed and shouted noisily with Courteney.

After lunch they went to the Casino.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush was the only person who did not intend to play.

"I can't afford to risk the little I have," she said firmly. "But I shall certainly come and look on. I'm sure one can learn a great deal about human nature in a place like this."

"God knows I can't afford it, but I'm going to take a chance," declared Buckland. "I've got a feeling that to-day's my lucky day."

He looked significantly at Coral, and she laughed. Her small gold bag was stuffed with notes, for she had cashed a large cheque that morning.

"Come on then, Buck."

He followed her into the Casino. They obtained their passes.

In the roulette room they exchanged money for counters.

For a little while they watched the crowd surrounding a roulette table. Presently they obtained seats.

*"Faites vos jeux, messieurs-dames—faites vos jeux."*

The sound of the monotonous voices of the croupiers was followed by a kind of general rustling movement all round the table, as the players placed their stakes. One or two spoke, but for the most part there was silence.

It became almost intense at: *"Rien ne va plus,"* and the dry rattle of the little ball, racing round and round as the wheel twirled, was clearly audible.

*"Le trente-cinq.... Rouge, impair, et passe...."*

As the tension round the table relaxed, people spoke, exclaimed, and moved again freely.

The croupiers raked counters backwards and forwards across the green cloth.

"Thirty-five. That's your age, isn't it?" said Buckland in an undertone to Mrs. Romaine. "I shall bet on it next time."

"How do *you* know my age?" she asked innocently.

"Anyway, the same number won't come up twice running."

"I've a hunch it will," declared Buck confidently.

He counted out the maximum stake and placed it *en plein* on the number.

"Buck, you're loopy."

"You wait and see."

Superstitiously impressed by his air of assurance, Coral followed Buckland's lead to the extent of placing money on red, *impair*, and *passe*.

"*Faites vos jeux....*"

"You're a fool," said Coral. "You know you can't afford to lose that."

"I'm not going to lose it."

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush had joined them, with Courteney and Angie Moon.

Hilary was nowhere to be seen.

"*Rien ne va plus....*"

The saucer-shaped disk twirled again. None of them could see the ball. They heard an exclamation or two:

"*Le dix-sept....*"

"*Non, ce sera le vingt-et-un....*"

And then a woman's high, shrill, American voice:

"Why, it's the same as last time——"

"*Trente-cinq.... Rouge, impair, et manque.*"

"My God!" said Coral, really impressed.

Buckland laughed triumphantly. People standing near turned to look at him, as he pocketed his winnings without counting them.

"How much have you won?" gasped Mrs. Wolverton-Gush at his elbow.

"Quite enough to stand drinks all round," said Buckland, grinning broadly.

"Buck, you're a wonder. I swear I'll follow you next time," said Coral.

"Can't be done, my dear. What I've got, I mean to stick to."

"You don't mean you're not going on playing?"

"We'll see, later."

"Your luck may have turned later. Don't be such a fool—you should always follow your luck when it's in."

Coral pushed counters recklessly into his hand.

"Put on something for me—anywhere you like," she commanded.

"What'll you do to me if I lose your money?"

"Curse you, I expect," she declared with a high, excited laugh. "Look here, if you win I'll go fifty-fifty with you."

"Done," said Buckland swiftly, taking the counters.

Behind him, Ruth Wolverton-Gush made an irrepressible sound that expressed mingled envy, impatience, and boundless disgust at her friend's prodigality.

#### (4)

By four o'clock Mervyn Morgan had decided that Monte Carlo was the hottest and most crowded town that he had ever in his life visited.

Olwen had gone in and out of a number of shops, and had spent what seemed to him a great deal of time in selecting small, useless presents; Dulcie Courteney had stood first on one foot and then on the other, looking in at all the shop windows, especially those which displayed cheap jewellery, and uttering exclamations; Patrick Romaine had remained transfixed for a quarter of an hour in front of a large Rolls-Royce, drawn up beside the pavement; and Chrissie Challoner had visited three libraries and bought eight Tauchnitz volumes, of which Morgan carried six, and Patrick four.

The sun blazed down upon them, and heat struck upward from the asphalt. A shimmering haze lay over everything.

"Let's have tea and ices," said Chrissie suddenly.

Mervyn looked at her approvingly.

He had not been sure, at first, that he was going to like her. He did not approve of professional women, although if they did insist upon a profession, writing was amongst the less unsuitable ones. But he thought her rather pretty and appealing, and she showed no signs of cleverness. He was now, in fact, glad of her company. He was sorry for Patrick, and thought him a nice lad, and he tolerated Dulcie by dint of never looking at her or speaking to her if he could help it, and was definitely proud of taking Olwen about with him—but a whole day spent in the society of children was boring.

Chrissie Challoner, to his great surprise, had proved a most agreeable companion. She had asked him about his Army days, and made intelligent comments on his replies, and she had found out—Morgan could not imagine how—that the question of tithes preoccupied his mind very often. It appeared that she had once read a book on the subject and been interested.

They found a vacant table outside a large *pâtisserie*, and sat down thankfully.

"I do wonder how Pops has got on at the Casino," Dulcie remarked. "It does seem such a shame that we're not allowed to go in, doesn't it, Olwen?"

"I don't mind," said Olwen. "Though it would be fun to win some money. I wonder if any of them will."

"Here comes the Man who broke the Bank at Monte Carlo," said Captain Morgan.

Denis Waller, hurrying past them, turned at the sound.

"Hallo!"

"Sit down and have a cup of tea," said Morgan. "Well, have you lost your last penny?"

"I'm sorry to say that I've lost four hundred francs, which is a great deal more than I can afford. I suppose it was silly of me to play at all, really."

Denis, looking highly perturbed, sat down next to Dulcie.

"Oh, Mr. Waller! Have you really? I'm so sorry."

"Have you seen anything of the others?" Chrissie asked.

"Yes. Buckland has been winning the whole afternoon. It's most extraordinary. And I think Mrs. Romayne has been winning too."

"What's Gushie doing?"

"She left the Rooms some time ago. I think she found it too hot or something. She said she was going to sit in the gardens for a little while, and then look for an English tea-shop."

"And ask for a pot of Indian tea and a tea-cake, I suppose. Let's come and choose some cakes, shall we?"

Olwen and Patrick and Dulcie went into the shop with her.

Denis stood up, and then sat down again.

"Courteney's been winning, too," he said resentfully. "I shouldn't have thought a man in his position would play, I must admit."

"I don't suppose he put on very much," Morgan said.

"Oh no, I don't think he did. He told me he was about sixty francs to the good, or something like that. I only wish I hadn't thrown away my own money."

"Hard luck," returned Morgan, not in the least interested. He thought Denis a young ass, when he thought about him at all, and was not surprised that he should have wasted four hundred francs at roulette, nor that, having done so, he should whine about his losses.

Except for the gloom of Denis, tea was a cheerful meal. They ate cakes and ices, and drank orangeade through straws.

Chrissie Challoner was talkative and animated, and Mervyn found her very amusing. She talked to him nearly all the time, though she made Patrick join in too. The boy was much more gay, and less silent, than Mervyn had ever seen him. Probably he's less self-conscious without his mother, reflected Mervyn.

"What are we going to do now?" he enquired. "Go home?"

"Oh *no*, daddy," Olwen protested. "You know we aren't going home till after dinner."

Patrick looked at Dulcie.

"What else is there we could do? You know this place."

"There are the swimming-baths," Dulcie suggested.

"Oh, lovely! Let's go."

Mervyn Morgan asked for the bill. Chrissie protested, but he overruled her. No woman should ever be allowed to pay for herself in Mervyn's opinion. He would have made no demur at all had Denis Waller offered to settle his own share of the bill, but Denis, looking abstracted and miserable, was standing at a distance, talking in a low voice to Dulcie.

He appeared to take it for granted that he was to remain with them, and Mervyn supposed, without much satisfaction, that they must take it for granted also.

## (5)

"Chrissie, why didn't you come in, at the Casino?"

"I didn't want to, that's all."

"But you suggested it. If I'd known you weren't coming in I shouldn't have gone myself."

"I expect you would, Denis, all the same. No one goes to Monte Carlo for the first time without going into the Rooms."

"I joined in this expedition to-day entirely in order to see something of you. Don't you think you're letting me down rather

badly?"

There was a silence, of which both Denis and Chrissie were more sharply aware than they were of the noisy cries and splashes that surrounded them in the big swimming-bath.

At last she turned her great dark eyes on him. They were full of concern, but there was no emotional force behind her words when she spoke.

"I'm sorry. I think perhaps I *am* being rather unfair. Don't take any notice, Denis dear. We'll talk—to-morrow or some time."

"I see exactly what's happened. You think you made a mistake in offering me your friendship, and you're wondering how you can get out of it. You needn't worry, Chrissie—I shan't make it difficult for you. I'm not that kind of man."

Denis, standing with folded arms in his favourite Napoleonic attitude, gazing at her morosely, waited for her denial.

It did not come.

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## CHAPTER XII

### (1)

"I want some money. I haven't a cent."

"Allow me to be your banker, Mrs. Moon."

Angie, who was angry with Courteney for not bringing Buckland with him, took no notice of him. She continued to look at her husband.

"It's no use coming to me. I'm cleaned out."

"You've been losing, I suppose."

"Well, so have you."

Angie stared reflectively at Hilary.

She guessed that, in all probability, he really had staked and lost all the ready money that he possessed in the world. And she knew well that there was nothing in the Bank at home.

It was the first time since their marriage that they had found themselves in exactly those straits, but not the first time that they had been obliged to change their quarters at short notice, leaving their bills unpaid.

Angie, however, did not want to leave the Hôtel d'Azur. She wanted to go on wearing her lovely and expensive new clothes, and to remain where Buckland was. She was violently attracted by him, and the attraction had become doubly strong during the course of the day, when she had been angered and bewildered by his neglect of her and ostentatious devotion to Mrs. Romaine, whilst at the same time she felt him to be acutely aware of her own presence.

It was not in Angie's nature to seek for explanations, either in herself or from other people. She was actuated almost entirely by her instincts, and of these one of the strongest was that of acquisitiveness. She wanted Buckland, and it was her intention that he should become her lover.

Angie had taken her first lover at the age of sixteen. She was the only and unwanted child of a mother who herself had taken lovers promiscuously. The man to whom she was married had refused to hold himself responsible for Angie's paternity. Angie had been disposed of at a cheap school where her bills were left for the most part unpaid, until the Headmistress threatened to refer the matter to her solicitors.

Angie, by that time, had learnt from a series of surreptitious, stolen, giggling meetings with semi-grown youths hanging round the back door of the villa that called itself "Marine View," that she could enjoy herself in the society of boys.

She was sent to spend the holidays with her mother's sister, who lived in respectable poverty at Ealing, struggling to bring up a family that increased annually on the salary of a shabby, harassed little bank-clerk. In childhood Angie had quarrelled with all the family and hated them violently. At sixteen she suddenly discovered that it was amusing to make the bigger boys, aged sixteen and seventeen, fall violently in love with her.

The elder one, Kenneth, was already mildly vicious, and Angie was ripe for mischief.

They were discovered, and Kenneth's mother—determined to believe that her innocent boy had been seduced against his will—turned the girl out of the house. She neither knew nor cared what was to become of her.

Angie, who had too little imagination for self-pity, or even for alarm, decided not to return to her mother whom she disliked.

She went to London, walked into a cheap hair-dresser's shop where a card was displayed in the window, "Young girl wanted," and obtained a job without the slightest difficulty.

She was lazy, but clever with her fingers, and her developing prettiness and unusual degree of sexual magnetism saved her from ever being unemployed.

Just before her eighteenth birthday she became the mistress of a middle-aged Jew, who installed her in a small flat in St. John's Wood and was genuinely fond of her. His wrath was proportionate when he found that she was being unfaithful to him, as of course she was. By that time, however, Angie had made a fairly wide circle of acquaintances, including several women whose social standing was above her own. One of them offered her her board and lodging in return for her help in a small, rather good clothes-shop. Angie accepted, as she accepted almost everything that came her way, in the vague hope that it would lead to something else.

It led to meeting more people, and to parties where everyone got drunk, and there was a good deal of indiscriminate petting.

Eventually, it led to Hilary Moon. Angie thought him superior to most of the men whom she knew because he spoke in a more cultivated manner, and posed as being artistic. When he suggested marriage she was really impressed.

She agreed, exactly as she would have agreed to live with him unmarried, had he asked her to do so. Her attitude to life could be called neither moral nor immoral. It was simply that of a generation born into utter insecurity, mental, moral, and financial.

She had remained with Hilary, after their brief mutual passion had flared and died, but she would have had no hesitation in leaving him, nor experienced any astonishment had he left her.

Buckland attracted her more strongly than Hilary had ever done, or indeed than any man whom she had met at all. She was certain that he was in love with her, and could not understand even the degree of self-control that enabled him to refrain from showing it openly in the presence of his employer.

She supposed dimly that Mrs. Romaine would be angry if Buckland paid more attention to a younger woman than to herself, but she was unable to understand why Buckland would not risk incurring her anger.

The loss of a job was, in Angie's experience, an everyday affair. One either got another job, or lived, on credit and on borrowed money, without one.

It was what she and Hilary had been doing for more than two years. She never looked far enough ahead to wonder how long they would be able to go on doing so.

Even the realisation that they now owed a great deal of money at the Hôtel d'Azur, and that Hilary had just declared he had nothing left at all, did not really dismay her very deeply.

She looked at him contemptuously, and shrugged her shoulders.

"What are you going to do?"

"God knows."

Courteney discreetly moved away.

"Why didn't you ask Courteney to lend you something? He offered to, just now."

"I dare say I shall, later on," said Angie coolly. "It wouldn't be much, anyway. What are you going to do about the Hotel bill?"

"I don't know, I tell you. The only chance is if I can sell the car, and make something on the deal. If only I hadn't had such damned bad luck with that blasted boat——"

"It was your own fault."

"My sweet, you're always so comforting, aren't you? It doesn't ever occur to you, I suppose, that you might help a little sometimes, instead of running up bills for clothes, and signing for drinks, all day long."

In a moment they were in the midst of one of their violent quarrels. No one paid any attention to them. They sat on red plush, in a corner of one of the huge rooms, and viciously spat out insults and reproaches at one another.

Suddenly Angie saw Courteney coming back to them. He was wearing a rather odd expression, and waved a small

bundle of notes in one hand.

"Do you know that Buckland's been having the most amazing run of luck, in there? They're all following him, now. I've just won a few hundred francs myself—oh, nothing at all, I never play seriously—but he's been raking in I don't know how much."

Angie and Hilary both sprang to their feet.

"In there," said Courteney. "I don't ever remember seeing a visitor from the Azur win like that before. He simply can't go wrong."

The throng round the big roulette table was now a large one.

"There," said Courteney. "You won't be able to get near him—they're all crowding round."

They were.

A Frenchman on the outside of the group turned round as they approached, both hands outspread.

*"Encore! Mais c'est formidable."*

*"C'est une farce!"*

"He'll lose it all, if he goes on long enough," Hilary muttered spitefully.

Angie suddenly began to push her way through the people. She could see Coral Romaine's yellow hair, and guessed that Buckland was close beside her. In another moment, she was near enough to put her hand on his arm.

He took not the faintest notice. She saw the sweat shining on his upper lip, and rolling down his temples. His eyes were fixed on the table.

Women were pressing round him closely. One old, raddled creature with a babyish white lace hat above her orange hair and painted wrinkled face, pushed money into his hand.

"Put it on for me, lad," she croaked with a North-country inflection that sounded oddly out of place.

Without looking round, Buckland put the money on to red. It won.

The harridan seized her winnings and melted into the crowd.

Angie, by reason of her height and determination, took her place and pressed close to Buckland's side.

He turned and looked straight into her eyes. His own were alight with triumph and excitement.

"Hallo, sweetest! How long have you been here?"

"Just come. What about celebrating your winnings?"

"I'm not through yet."

"You *are*, Buck," said Angie, with sudden intensity. "Come on out, before you lose it all."

*"Faites vos jeux...."*

Buckland placed his stake carefully on the first dozen, red, and impair.

The wheel spun round, slowed down, came to a stop.

Buckland lost his money.

"I told you so!" cried Angie. "It wasn't all you had, was it?"

"Not by a very long chalk. Come on, then. I've got a thirst on me like the devil."

He had forgotten all about Coral Romaine. Angie could see her, and knew that she was looking at them. But she did not, as Angie had expected, follow them immediately.

On the terrace, which was comparatively empty, they turned and faced one another.

"My God!" said Buckland quite simply. "It's like a dream—you—and now *this*."

"You've never been near me all day."

"I'm going to make up for it later all right. I had to put *her* off the scent, somehow. Not that it matters now."

"How much have you won, Buck?"

"I don't know. I lost count after the first five thousand francs."

"Five thousand francs? How much is that?"

"I don't know. I haven't got these things cashed yet. I can't walk about with a fortune on me. I shall get murdered, or something."

"Ask Courteney what you'd better do. He'll know. Here comes that old bitch——"

"Where's my money, Buck, and how much is it?" cried Mrs. Romaine.

"Haven't got it yet," said Buckland. "It's all in counters. Hallo, Courteney."

Courteney joined them, with Hilary Moon.

They were all excited and anxious to know the extent of Buckland's winnings. Mrs. Romaine kept on reminding him, very loudly and shrilly, that she had given him the money to play with, and that it wasn't really his own.

"Fifty-fifty was what you said," Buckland replied imperturbably, "and you've dam' well got to stick to that."

## (2)

The whole party had arranged to meet before dinner at a café known to Courteney.

Buckland, in uproarious spirits, recklessly standing apéritifs to everybody, was boasting of his achievement. He had won just over four hundred pounds, of which total he had handed over an exact half to Coral Romaine.

Angie wondered how soon she could borrow some of the remainder from him. She felt sure that the same speculation was also occupying the mind of Hilary.

All of them were drinking, at Buckland's invitation. Even Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, who had arrived limping and with an air of exhaustion under her determined brightness, accepted, with elegant protests, a small mixed vermouth.

Angie, restless and dissatisfied, wondered how soon she was going to find herself alone with Buckland.

She looked angrily round, and thought what an enormous party they were. Chrissie Challoner had just joined them with Captain Morgan, Olwen, and Patrick.

Dulcie Courteney was hanging on to her father's arm, chattering about the lovely time she'd had at the swimming-bath.

Denis Waller, Angie observed with malicious amusement, showed plainly in his face, without having the least idea that he was doing so, his almost sick envy of Buckland's good fortune.

Courteney, reviewing his party, was advancing suggestions as to where they should dine.

Suddenly bored, and rather angry, Angie wondered why on earth Buckland hadn't the sense to take her somewhere where they could be by themselves.

## (3)

Hilary was not desperate, because no emotion so violent as desperation held any place in the cynical and pessimistic outlook into which he, like so many of his generation, had been born, and in which he had grown up.

He knew that he was in more serious difficulties than usual, because Madame at the Hotel that morning—easily circumventing his avoidance of her—had curtly and coldly demanded an early settlement of the week's account. She had made it clear, without actually saying so in words, that she did not believe his credit to be good.

He perfectly understood that she would have not the slightest hesitation in making things extremely unpleasant for him and for Angie if he did not let her have almost at once some of the money owing to her.

The *Hirondelle*—a dead loss—had been only half paid for. Hilary intended to tell his Cannes acquaintance that she must have been unseaworthy when he bought her, and to refuse to pay the remaining instalment of the price. If a dispute followed, so much the better. It would give him time to leave France. The Hotel bill was a far more pressing necessity than any problematical payment on the motor-boat, and so was the price of the car. For that, he had undertaken to send, without delay, a cheque to his Cannes friend, who had also arranged the sale of the car.

Hilary had not the slightest doubt that, in the course of the day at Monte Carlo, at least one telephone call from Cannes would have been put through to the Hôtel d'Azur. He had instructed the *concierge* to say that he would ring up that evening without fail on his return.

A vague feeling that he might win money at the tables had sustained him.

Instead, he had lost the few hundred francs that constituted all he had left of the money he had brought to France. In England, he and Angie had nothing but debts. Hilary's banking account, opened in the years of his prosperity under the generosity of the Atkinsons, had long been overdrawn. The bank was continually pressing him for repayment, or for some form of security.

He had heard of Buckland's good luck with cold annoyance, followed by an instant determination to profit by it. His first thought, that Coral Romaine might be much easier to handle than Buckland, he dismissed at once.

She had never shown any signs of liking either of the Moons, was evidently in love with Buckland, and had certainly seen, and resented, his admiration of Angie.

Coral would be of no use at all.

Hilary congratulated Buckland effusively, encouraged him to drink as much as possible in celebration of his luck, and took care to suggest to Angie, coldly and nonchalantly, that she should make a point of driving back to the Hotel in the same car as Buckland.

He felt that it ought to be unnecessary to say any more.

At dinner he sat next to Chrissie Challoner and tried to talk to her about her own books, ignoring Dulcie who sat on his other side.

The dinner was a long one, very noisy, and prolonged by the champagne that Buckland ordered freely.

Only Captain Morgan, his daughter Olwen, and Patrick Romaine, had failed to take any share in it. They had gone to dine elsewhere.

By the end of the evening Hilary was sufficiently drunk to feel absolutely certain that he was the only man of the party in full command of his senses.

The women had gone to prepare themselves for the return journey. Courteney reported that the cars were at the door.

Hilary, oblivious of decisions made earlier in the evening, went up to Buckland and drew him aside.

"Look here," he said very earnestly, "one can say this to you, I know. Don't be an ass and chuck that money away on a lot of champagne for a crowd of women. It's ridic-ridiculous thing to do. They don't respect you any the more for it, either."

"Don't they?" said Buckland. "Thanks for the warning, I'm sure."

"That's all right. Now look here, Buck, I'm going to be perfectly frank and open with you. I've been thinking about you, and this windfall of yours. What you want is a car. A good car is simply an investment. That's all it is."

"Now look here," said Buckland, in his turn, "when I want a car I shall know how to set about finding one. And I may tell you that I shan't come to you for it, what's more."

"Why not?" asked Hilary, hurt.

"Because I don't believe you know any more about cars than you do about motor-boats."

"The motor-boat was a mistake. I'm absolutely and entirely ready to admit that I was done over the motor-boat. But the car is O.K. Definitely."

"You've got one to sell, have you? I thought as much," said Buckland contemptuously. "Well, you and your car can go straight to Hell for all I care. In fact, I'd a bit sooner you went there than not. Got that?"

"Buckland," said Hilary, with extraordinary dignity, "I consider your attitude definitely offensive. Definitely."

"It's meant to be," said Buckland, turning away.

Hilary thought for a moment of knocking him down, but it seemed rather too much trouble. He contented himself instead with going up to Courteney and uttering a solemn warning.

"Buck's had one over the eight, have you noticed? Thought I'd better mention it, because of the drive back. One doesn't want to upset the girls."

Courteney looked carefully at his informant. Then he said: "I see, quite. Thanks very much and all that. Don't worry, I'll see it's all right."

Reliable fellow, thought Hilary. Definitely reliable. Of course that was what he was paid for, in a way. To keep things going smoothly for the Hotel visitors. Would it be of any use to get him to talk to Madame, and explain that she ought to trust people—English gentlepeople—to pay what they owed, all in good time? Damn it, an Englishman's word was his bond all the world over.

Hilary stumbled down some steps and found himself standing on the pavement, under a starlit sky. The jolt made him feel slightly sick, and he lost the thread of what he had just been thinking. This vexed him, for he knew that he had been on the verge of hitting upon a scheme that would put right his financial difficulties. What on earth could it have been?

Something to do with Buckland, that was it.

Buckland was going to buy the car, out of his winnings.... No, he wasn't. He'd been damned disobliging about it. Insulting, in fact. Definitely.

"You get in, Moon, will you?" said the voice of Courteney, suave and yet firm, behind him. With a hand at Hilary's elbow, he helped him into a car.

It had started before Hilary perceived, with disgust and astonishment, that he had somehow been induced to sit outside, in the seat beside the driver.

#### (4)

Dulcie's day had been one of manufactured enjoyment. The Hotel child had long ago been taught that it was her job to seem amused, and pleased, and entertained, wherever she went. She must be attentive to everybody and admire the women's clothes, and keep away from the young men, and allow the elderly ones to pet and paw her if they appeared to wish to do so, and always be very, very friendly with visitors' children.

She did not find any of it very difficult. She had been used to it from early childhood, ever since her mother, whom she could barely remember, had been killed in a motor accident. Dulcie was naturally adaptable and anxious to please, and she was terribly afraid of her father, whom she adored. He was usually kind to her, but if he thought that she had been disobedient, or had deceived him in any way, he always beat her severely.

She very much hoped that he had noticed how, at Monte Carlo, she had spent practically the whole day with Olwen Morgan and Patrick Romaine. It had not really been much fun, because they had talked much more to one another than to her, and in any case she thought Olwen very stupid and childish for her age. And Captain Morgan had taken no notice of her whatever. He had, however, paid for her meals—which was, after all, much more important.

Dulcie had done her best to angle for an invitation to dinner, as soon as she had discovered that Captain Morgan did not intend to remain with the rest of the party, but she had been greatly relieved when it was not forthcoming. She thought it much more amusing to join in the rowdy celebrations instituted by Buckland, and she had besides an underlying wish to remain near Denis Waller.

It was the strange, undeniable fact that to Dulcie Courteney, bred in an atmosphere of cocktails, intrigue, and the cinema, romance had elected to wear, temporarily, the meagre form and nervous mannerisms of the little secretary.

His unvarying politeness impressed her, and she took at their surface value all his hinted references to his own superiority. But most of all she was drawn towards Denis because she felt that there was a certain similarity in their respective positions. She felt sure that he was afraid of Mr. Bolham—as indeed she was herself—and that people "took advantage" of his subordinate position to humiliate him.

Nothing could have been much more innocent than Dulcie's eroticism. With every opportunity for learning vice she had actually remained childishly simple, partly because she had, so far, developed no sexual magnetism whatever, and partly because fear of her father was the dominant factor in her life. It inhibited even curiosity, so that she had no inclination towards experiments, and was satisfied by the long, recurrent saga, told to herself nightly, of which she was always the heroine, and the hero was the latest film-star to have captured her admiration.

Since the disaster to the *Hirondelle*, and indeed a little before, Denis Waller had replaced the film-star.

She had been deeply moved by the unjust and cruel treatment that she imagined him to have suffered at the time of the accident, and still more by the remembrance that he had turned to her for sympathy afterwards. Such imagination as Dulcie possessed had no outlet except the schoolgirl one of day-dreaming, and the inclusion of Denis in her more recent fantasies had helped to foster in her the illusion that he was as much attracted by her as she was by him.

She deliberately manoeuvred for a place in the car that held Denis, for the drive back from Monte Carlo to the Hôtel d'Azur, and obtained it without difficulty.

Her father had not only given her no orders, he was apparently indifferent as to the organisation of the return journey, and devoted his attention to steering Hilary Moon—more than a little drunk—to a safe place.

Denis Waller was standing motionless on the pavement. He had been very silent all through dinner, and had taken very little champagne.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, extraordinarily flushed and holding herself more erect even than usual, came up to him.

"Shall we go back as we came, Mr. Waller?"

"Miss Challoner has already gone," said Denis in an unnaturally deep voice. "She's in the front car."

"We may as well get into this one, then."

Dulcie edged a little nearer.

"Is anyone else—would anybody——" began Denis.

"Oh, Mr. Waller, may I come too? Would it be all right, I mean?"

"Of course, Dulcie. There'll be plenty of room, Moon is going next the driver."

Dulcie climbed in, followed by Denis.

She thought how romantic the night was, and wished that they had been by themselves. But the large and stately Mrs. Wolverton-Gush occupied rather more than two-thirds of the back seat. Dulcie politely compressed herself into the remaining third.

Denis sat morosely humped upon the front seat. Dulcie felt certain that he was very unhappy, and longed to console him. She made one or two timid observations and Denis replied as gently as usual, but with no attempt to prolong the conversation.

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush ejaculated several times on the subject of Buckland's luck at the roulette table and then became silent. Quite soon Dulcie perceived that she was on the verge of falling asleep. Every now and then her head fell forward with a fearful jerk.

Dulcie watched her anxiously.

At last Mrs. Wolverton-Gush slept.

Dulcie pushed her foot against that of Denis and directed his attention to their companion.

A daring idea crossed her mind.

"I think I'll move," she said softly. "If you don't mind, Mr. Waller. It'll give her more room."

Moving very carefully, she took the seat next to Denis. They could talk now, in lowered voices, and the atmosphere became immediately intimate.

"Hasn't it been a lovely day, Mr. Waller? I've *so* enjoyed it."

"Have you? I'm very glad," Denis returned in a tone of profound melancholy.

"Have you enjoyed it too? I do hope you have."

"That's very sweet of you."

"But I do *really*. I wish you'd tell me."

Denis turned at that, and looked at her, with the smile that from time to time redeemed his sallow face from the utterly commonplace.

"Tell you what, Dulcie?"

"Why you've been so unhappy all day," Dulcie said, feeling her heart beat faster at this approach to intimacy.

Denis made no immediate answer, and she was afraid that she must have offended him, and pressed her hands together in a nervous agony.

When at last he spoke, a rush of relief nearly overwhelmed her.

"I didn't know anyone had noticed anything. In fact, I did everything I could to prevent anyone noticing. It's very nice of you to care enough to—to see that I'm not very happy, Dulcie."

"Oh, Mr. Waller!" she gasped breathlessly. "Of course I do. You've always been so terribly nice to me. I only wish there was anything I could do for you—I do *really*, Mr. Waller."

"Thank you," said Denis. And after a moment's hesitation he added: "I'm a very lonely sort of person, and just lately one or two things have happened to make me rather acutely aware of it. So you see, I can't afford to turn down any offer of friendship."

It did not even occur to Dulcie that this phrase might have been more skilfully turned.

She accepted it rapturously, as an earnest that her secret fancies might be translating themselves into fact.

"I'd like to be your little friend, Mr. Waller—ever so much—if you'd like to have me. I always feel," said Dulcie wildly, "that you and I have quite a good lot in common, if you know what I mean. I mean, I think we like the same sort of things, kind of."

"That's very nice of you," said Denis rather vaguely.

"Oh, but I really mean it, Mr. Waller."

At this reiteration of his name, Denis filled Dulcie with delight by saying unexpectedly:

"I think you'd better call me by my name, hadn't you, if we're to be friends. That is, unless you dislike it."

"Oh, Mr. Waller—I mean Denis—of *course* I don't. I'd simply love to."

She was breathless with excitement and happiness. Into the few phrases that had passed she read an amount of meaning far beyond their surface significance. To her starved affections and ill-regulated imagination, this meagre exchange of personalities actually stood for romance. She hardly dared to speak again, lest any further words should come as an anti-climax.

Moved by some prompting of schoolgirl sentimentality, she fumbled for a moment in the semi-darkness, and then caught and squeezed the hand of Denis between both her own.

## (5)

Humiliated and made miserable by the fear that he had lost Chrissie's short-lived kindness, Denis was in no mood to reject even such humble advances as those of Dulcie.

It was true that, as he often said of himself, he was naturally affectionate, and the sub-normal quality of his masculine virility was at all times apt to find expression in small pattings and pawings of the kind usually associated either with immaturity or extreme senility.

He therefore returned readily, and even with a certain feeling of satisfaction, the pressure of Dulcie's fingers.

He had never liked her very much, but he was touched and flattered by her obvious adoration, and it came at a moment when he was feeling more insecure even than usual, and in more urgent need of something other than his own posturings to bolster up his tottering self-esteem.

An audience was always essential to Denis, for he could only believe in himself when he felt that others believed in him. His precarious self-confidence had already suffered severely at the hands of Mr. Bolham—had flared into sudden strength beneath the glow of Chrissie Challoner's approval and suffered a proportionate eclipse at her withdrawal.

He piteously clutched, in his misery of insecurity, at the admiration even of Dulcie Courteney.

They talked in low tones, every now and then glancing at the heavily sleeping Mrs. Wolverton-Gush.

She did not stir.

"What makes you think I've not enjoyed myself to-day, Dulcie?"

"I was afraid you didn't look frightfully happy. Of course, I only saw you outside the Casino for a minute, and then at dinner, but I think one can always *tell*, don't you?"

"People don't always trouble to notice."

"Oh, Mr. Waller!—Denis, I mean—but I think one does if one likes anyone, don't you? You know what I mean, if it's a person one likes, one does."

Dulcie giggled nervously as she spoke. Denis felt rather touched.

"Perhaps I haven't found very many people who did like me enough to notice, where I was concerned. So that, you see, I value them when I do find them."

He gave a little pressure to Dulcie's fingers and relinquished them.

He had liked the physical contact at first, but it was making him feel self-conscious.

"You won't say anything to anyone else, will you, about me? I'm afraid I'm a terribly reserved person. My instinct is

never to show anyone what I'm feeling—just to keep on the surface."

With a terrible pang he remembered as he spoke his first conversation with Chrissie Challoner, and the wonderful feeling it had brought him, of release.

"Of course I won't say anything at all," Dulcie asserted eagerly. "I do wish I could do anything to help you, Denis. I think it's terribly nice of you to tell me."

"But I'm afraid I can't tell you very much, my dear. For one thing I'm not a person who finds it at all easy to talk about himself. And then I've got a very, very strong feeling about loyalty to other people."

"Oh, of course," said Dulcie, disappointed. "I think that's frightfully nice of you, I do truly."

"I'm a very ordinary sort of man," said Denis, his habitual tone of quiet complacency reviving by degrees, "but I do flatter myself that I've always been completely loyal to the people who've trusted me."

"Have you got heaps and heaps of friends?"

"Not a great many. I don't make friends easily. And sometimes," said Denis bitterly, "when I've done so, I've been very, very badly let down."

"Oh, what a shame!"

The car swung round the last sharp curve of the road, and Dulcie was thrown against Denis Waller's shoulder. He could feel that she made no attempt to regain her balance, but let herself drop heavily against him.

He put his arm round her, holding her as he might have held a child. In fact it was as a child that he thought of her, but his mind was obsessed with the situation between Chrissie and himself, and he was thinking far more about that than about Dulcie Courteney.

He was in an agony lest Chrissie should have gone straight to the Villa Mimosa, and meant to give him no further chance of speaking to her that night. He decided that if she had done so he would follow and ask to see her.

Then he remembered Mrs. Wolverton-Gush.

She roused herself as the car rushed up the drive, and Dulcie sat upright again, demurely.

"Did Miss Challoner mean to come to the Hotel?" Mrs. Wolverton-Gush demanded. "I must have had a doze, I fancy, or I should certainly have asked to be put down at our own door."

"I'm so very sorry," Denis apologised, "I really ought to have asked you.... I'm afraid it didn't occur to me...."

"She may be here."

But Miss Challoner was not at the Hôtel d'Azur.

She had stopped the car and got out at the villa, said Mrs. Romaine, who was drinking whisky-and-soda in the hall.

"Then," said Denis, with trembling determination to Mrs. Wolverton-Gush, "you must allow me to escort you back. The car will take us."

"Please don't trouble."

"It's no trouble. A pleasure," said Denis firmly. "Good-night, Dulcie."

"Good-night, Denis," quavered Dulcie.

He took her hand, gave her his favourite little bow, and smiled at her. The thought crossed his mind that Dulcie led a strange unnatural life for a girl of her age, and that it would be very easy, as well as desirable, to influence her for good.

Then he followed Mrs. Wolverton-Gush back into the car once more.

His conversation with Chrissie was unsatisfactory in the extreme.

They stood in the tiny loggia at the back of the villa, since Chrissie gave Denis no invitation to sit down, and said several times that it was late and he ought to go back to the Hotel.

Denis, with the curious spasmodic obstinacy of a weak man, declined to leave her until she had explained to him why she had avoided him nearly all day.

"Don't you think you owe me an explanation, at least? If it's just that you're tired of me, and feel you made a mistake in suggesting that we should be friends, I'd much rather you said so," repeated Denis, although in actual fact his dread lest she might say so was nearly overwhelming him.

Chrissie, to his horror, burst out laughing.

"I'm sorry, Denis; it's not you I'm laughing at—it's myself. Thinking how I've bullied you over not being honest or sincere with me, and then realising that if I *had* made a mistake, about you, I should have too much vanity to admit it, even to myself. It's so humiliating to have gone into heroics over an emotion and then to find out that it wasn't a real one after all."

Denis was intolerably hurt.

He could not understand Chrissie's changes of mood, nor her flippant way of talking. He could only feel that she was no longer taking him seriously.

His strained, tragic expression was not without effect upon her.

"Don't look so miserable, Denis. Am I being a beast to you? I get like that sometimes—you mustn't mind. Look here—go, now, and we'll meet to-morrow. I'll come down to the *plage*."

"I don't know that I shall be there myself. You seem to forget that I have my work to do," said Denis resentfully.

Chrissie laughed again.

"You haven't remembered it yourself very often in the last few days, that I can see. Anyhow, I'll see you sometime or somewhere. Good-night."

She led the way through the villa, and out into the front garden with the little plashing fountain that Denis had thought so romantic and beautiful.

An intolerable wave of misery went over him.

Everything was over. She didn't really care for him at all; he had not, after all, found a friend who would understand, and help him, and believe in him.

A small, involuntary, wholly irrepressible sob shook him.

Chrissie, at the gate, paused and looked at him.

Denis was quite unable to speak, but his odd little formalities did not desert him.

He put out his hand, to shake hers.

"Poor Denis," said Chrissie gently.

She leant forward and laid a butterfly kiss upon his forehead.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### (1)

The drive from Monte Carlo lasted long enough to restore Hilary Moon to something approaching sobriety. He slept heavily for a little while, and woke with a headache, cross and depressed, but in command of his faculties.

He also woke to a violent feeling of resentment against Buckland for having won so much money when everybody else had lost. Besides, Buckland, he vaguely recollected, had insulted him, although he was unable to remember details. By the time the Hotel was reached, Hilary was in a mood of sullen fury, directed against everybody in the Hotel, but more particularly Buckland.

As he went up the steps and into the hall, thinking only of his grievance, he came face to face with Madame.

She wore her usual trim spotted black-and-white cotton dress, tightly belted with patent-leather, her thick greasy black hair was brushed closely to her head, and coiled neatly at the back. Without an instant's pause, she asked Hilary to accord her the favour of a moment in the office.

He saw by her face that it would be useless to suggest a postponement until the morning.

With hard, unwavering black gaze fixed full upon Hilary, and with many politely-turned phrases, Madame explained that several telephone calls had come through from Cannes. The gentleman who had sold a motor-car to Monsieur Moon was most anxious to speak to him. It was a question of business, very important. The *concierge*, in despair, had at last come to Madame. She had herself spoken to the monsieur, had begged him to reassure himself, and promised that he should be called by telephone the very instant that the Monte Carlo party returned.

"It's too late to-night," said Hilary, sweating. "It's all right, Madame. I know what my friend wants, and I'll get a call put through first thing to-morrow morning. That'll be all right."

*"Ah, mais non, c'est qu'il ne s'agit pas de ça."*

Madame explained that, if monsieur's friend was not rung up to-night, he would suppose that she had broken faith with him. It was not to be thought of, not for one instant. She had passed her word of honour that he should be called by telephone that very night, without fail.

Her mouth tightened as she said it.

Hilary decided to bluff.

"Very well, have you got the number?"

"Here, Monsieur."

With inconceivable rapidity, Madame snatched at the telephone receiver on her desk.

Hilary realised that she meant him to take the call in her office.

He wondered grimly how much English she understood. Anyhow, it didn't matter much. He was quite certain that she knew he was being pressed for money.

*"Voilà, monsieur. C'est lui."*

Hilary set his teeth and took the receiver.

Then he looked significantly from Madame to the door, and back again.

Smiling disagreeably, Madame walked to the door, tried the handle, and then set her back against it.

*"Il n'entrera personne, monsieur, et moi, je comprends à peine un mot d'anglais."*

Hilary swore under his breath. He hadn't the courage to defy her.

"Hullo ... hullo.... Yes, I know. Look here, I'm most frightfully sorry. I simply forgot to post the beastly thing, that's all. It's upstairs, made out and everything, in an envelope addressed to you. ... I can't think how I came to be such a fool. Of course I'll post it first thing to-morrow. The car's absolutely O.K.... I know.... I tell you it's all right; don't be such a bloody fool.... How could I ring you up before when I've only just got back?... No, absolutely foul.... Well, good-night and all that. Sorry you went off the deep-end about it.... Yes, to-morrow, surest thing you know.... 'Bye."

He hadn't come out of that too badly, on the whole; anyway, he'd gained time.

The thought flashed through Hilary's mind, as he turned round.

Then he saw Madame's face.

"Will Monsieur settle his week's account at the same time as he sends the cheque for his new motor-car?" she demanded, her tone undisguisedly insolent.

"Of course if you wish it. Though it could perfectly well wait till the end of our visit."

"Is Monsieur thinking of soon leaving the Hôtel d'Azur, then?"

"It depends," said Hilary, going to the door.

"Because I naturally have many enquiries for rooms," said Madame meaningly. "The end of the season approaches, and one can afford to neglect no possible opportunities these days. Only this morning, an American lady wrote to me from London...."

Her voice went on, pursuing him. If only, thought Hilary, this damned buzzing in his head would stop, he could tell her exactly where she got off, the hag.

"Then to-morrow morning, it is understood, we settle the account."

"Yes," said Hilary viciously, and strode into the hall, his hands and forehead damp.

He had been in similar predicaments before: sometimes he had found money, more often he had evaded his obligations by the perpetration of some minor form of fraud. Once or twice there had been no way out, except flight.

Hilary felt very certain that there was no chance of a flight from Madame and the Hôtel d'Azur.

Somehow, he had got to find money, and not only money for his bill, but money to pay for the car as well. It scarcely even occurred to him that he might have to relinquish the car. He still regarded it as a potential financial asset—and as such it was essential that he should retain possession of it. Why the devil hadn't he won money at Monte Carlo this afternoon, instead of that swine Buckland?

He saw Buckland sitting at the open window, with a large whiskey-and-soda in front of him.

An overpowering thirst immediately seized upon Hilary. He went forward languidly.

"Still celebrating, Buck? Where's the crowd?"

"Someone started a hare that there were fireworks going on in the village, or something. Most people are up on the roof. What's yours?"

"Oh—thanks. The same as yours."

Buckland gave the order.

Hilary leant back in his wicker chair, and scrutinised the tips of his fingers, holding his hand some ten inches away from his half-closed eyes, and slightly tilting his head backwards, as though to obtain a better view. When his drink arrived he swallowed it thirstily.

Looking up, he saw that Buckland's eyes were fixed thoughtfully upon him.

Hilary, breathing rather hard through his nose, decided to make another attempt. He had a curious conviction, based upon

no reasonable grounds, that Buckland was actually waiting for him to do something of the kind.

"What about that car, Buck? You said something about it this afternoon, and I'm open to a good offer. Of course, you'd sell her again—easy—when you leave. At a profit, quite as like as not. Cars are always changing hands, out here."

"Why are you in such a hurry to get rid of her?"

Hilary drew a long breath.

"Oh, just financial pressure, as they say. I was badly let down over that motor-boat business, as you know, and some money I was expecting from England hasn't turned up yet. It's only a temporary nuisance, of course, but you know how beastly suspicious these French people are, and I don't want to give Madame any excuse for saying she's been kept waiting for her money, or any bunk of that sort. So Angie and I decided that we might as well sell the car."

"Yeah," said Buckland.

Hilary's hopes began to rise. Apparently Buck had been thinking over the question, and was not surprised at having it reopened.

Hilary abandoned the effort that he had made towards coherence, alien alike to his irresponsible temperament and to his instinctive preference for the laconic style of his generation.

"What about it?"

"Nothing doing."

"She's a bargain. I'll let her go cheap."

"What does Angie say about it?"

"What the hell's Angie got to do with you?" asked Hilary without heat.

"If it was Angie that was going cheap, I might have something to say to it."

"That's in damned bad taste, Buckland."

"Bad taste doesn't matter to me, or to you either, I should imagine. Have another drink?"

"This one's on me," said Hilary automatically.

They were silent until the drinks had come.

Then Buckland spoke again, casually.

"When are you clearing out of here?"

"The first minute I can. I loathe the beastly place."

"Angie doesn't."

"Can't you leave Angie out of it?" Hilary suggested half-heartedly, and watching Buckland closely.

"Angie's a friend of mine," said Buckland coolly. "And I can tell you that she's damned sick of the kind of life you've both been leading for the last two years."

"She can't be more damned sick of it than I am."

"In that case, why not cut it out?"

"Cut what out?"

"Marriage. It's a rotten show at the best of times, and absolute hell when you're hard up."

"You never spoke a truer word," Hilary languidly agreed. "What do you suggest I should do about it?"

"Clear out."

"Leaving Angie to square Madame?"

"No. Settling up with Madame before you go."

"As how?"

Buckland plunged his hand into his trouser-pocket and pulled out a note-case.

"Fifty settles Madame. And one hundred for the car. Pounds, not francs."

Hilary felt his eyes bulging in his head.

"Have you got that in English notes?"

"No. But it could be changed fast enough. Only the exchange is against us. And it depends, of course, if you're thinking of going back to England or staying in France. Paris, for instance."

"The car is worth more than a hundred, you know."

"Oh," said Buckland. "You can keep the *car*, all right."

The two young men exchanged a long and peculiar look. Then Buckland counted out a pile of dirty notes and pushed them across the table.

Hilary's long fingers, that turned back at the tips, closed upon them.

## (2)

"Good-night, sir. Thanks for a marvellous day," said Patrick shyly.

He knew that the success of his day in Monte Carlo had been owing to Captain Morgan and Olwen. He had been with them all the time, and they'd had lots of fun.

Patrick thought Captain Morgan a very witty and amusing man, in a quiet way. His jokes never made one feel uncomfortable, like the things that Buckland and the Moons and that crowd were always shrieking at one another. And his diving was simply terrific. Patrick had never seen anything like it.

He liked Olwen too, and she was extraordinarily pretty. Even Dulcie Courteney didn't seem too bad, when she was with the Morgans.

This had definitely been the best day he'd had in France.

He said so to Olwen, walking upstairs beside her.

"Oh, good," said Olwen. "I've enjoyed it, too, frightfully. I like a thing to end up well, don't you, and we're leaving the day after to-morrow."

"What a shame! I hadn't realised that. Are you going back to England?"

"We're breaking the journey at Avignon, and Lyons, and Paris. And London as well, I expect. It'll be nearly a week before we really get home—to Wales, I mean."

"D'you like Wales?"

"Awfully. I say, d'you think you'd come and stay with us some time, Patrick? It isn't frightfully exciting, I'm afraid, but there's tennis, and riding, and sometimes we bathe in the river."

"I'd love it. Thanks awfully."

"Well, I'll write or something, and suggest it."

They looked at one another, smiling, and both faintly embarrassed.

"Where shall I write to?" asked Olwen at last.

"Oh, Sherborne, I expect. You see, I never quite know where I'm going to be, in the holidays."

"No, of course not. Well, I hope you won't have that Buckland again, wherever you are. I wish he hadn't won all that money at the Casino, don't you?"

"Frightfully," said Patrick with fervour. "I bet he borrowed it off somebody, too—probably mother. She won too, you know. She was fearfully pleased."

"Good," said Olwen politely.

They leant over the balustrade at the top of the stairs, and looked down into the hall below, in no hurry to separate.

In Patrick's slowly moving mind the idea was hovering, on the verge of conscious expression, that he would like to say something to Olwen. Tell her that he should miss her when she went away, or that her being there had made all the difference to him.

A door opened behind them.

"I thought I heard you. Have you had a nice day?" It was Olwen's mother.

"It's been lovely," said Olwen, turning round quickly.

Mrs. Morgan was very nice and interested. She asked them both questions, and listened to the answers, and did not tell Olwen to hurry to bed.

But there seemed nothing special to wait for, so Patrick said good-night to them both, and went away to his own room.

He wondered where his mother was. Perhaps not come in yet. She had not left Monte Carlo in the same car as the one that had brought him back with the Morgans. He tried not to think that she had probably come with Buckland.

It was too hot to go to bed, and too early. He felt absolutely wide-awake, and decided to go downstairs again.

It would be fun to go down to the sea, and bathe by moonlight. He thought, "I wish Olwen or somebody could come with me," but a feeling of exhilaration, such as he had not had for a very long while, drove him on.

He changed quickly into his bathing-suit and snatched up a towel.

Then he ran downstairs.

It was cool, out there in the darkness, after the heat of the day in Monte Carlo.

Patrick ran easily, at a steady, loping pace, down the drive. He could hear sounds of music coming from the village square, and a revolving circle of lights told him that a merry-go-round was in action.

But on the foreshore everything was deserted and quiet, except for the tiny splash of the baby waves against the sand.

He swam about, lazily and happily, in shallow water, his thoughts drifting with the drifting of the tide.

School ... it wasn't too bad, and next year he might get his colours. Football next term instead of cricket, thank the Lord. It was odd to think that next holidays would be the Christmas holidays, definitely winter, and these had been so definitely summer, with all the bathing and picnics and everything. Of course, being in the South of France made a difference. Next year, perhaps it would be Scotland again, and his father. The fishing was fun. It occurred to him that he'd like to know something about birds, like Captain Morgan. There were such lots of birds in Scotland. That little chap David would be interested. It was nice of Olwen to have suggested that he should go and stay with them, in Wales. He'd like to do that, definitely.

Patrick struck out, swam harder and more steadily, and wished that he could learn to do fancy-diving, as Captain Morgan did.

Then he turned and came back to the shore.

The jerky tunes of the merry-go-round were still audible as he walked slowly up the beach, his wet towel hanging over one shoulder.

An unusual sense of physical well-being possessed him. He was just tired enough to look forward to complete relaxation in bed, but not sufficiently tired to dislike the walk up the hill to the Hotel.

He was half-way there when he caught sight of a car, drawn up close to the bushes, with the head-lights turned off.

Patrick recognised the Buick on the instant.

He went straight up to her and saw that the car was empty. Uncertain, he stood still, peering into the thick tangle of green growth beyond.

He could see nothing, but some infallible sixth sense told him positively that there were human beings within a few yards of him.

Then a slight rustle came from the bushes, and a sound like a sigh. Patrick felt himself stiffen with an apprehension that he could not have defined. He clenched his fists, and they were slippery.

"Buck, you're marvellous," came in a woman's whisper, thick and breathless.

Patrick recoiled. He did not want to hear any more. The short triumphant laugh that followed instantly was unmistakably Buckland's. And then came his voice, scarcely lowered at all.

"I told you it'd be all right, sweetest. We can clear out to-morrow, if we like. Just you and I."

Clear out, with the money he'd won at Monte Carlo.... Patrick's mind refused to take in any implications at all, excepting the obvious one that Buckland had finished with them. He was going.

It didn't matter with whom. Some girl or other. The voice had been a young voice. Patrick had assimilated the certainty of that, without drawing any deductions from it, save one.

Suddenly shaking all over, but pervaded by an intense feeling of relief, he stepped quickly back and went on up the hill.

It might be beastly to have overheard, but after all, he hadn't been listening on purpose, and he'd have been well within his rights in trying to find out what his mother's car was doing on the hillside at that hour of the night, without a driver.

Damned cheek, Buckland's having taken the Buick like that. All the same, Patrick wasn't going to say a word about it to anybody. Buckland's day was over. He meant to clear out, and the sooner he did it the better, ungrateful swine that he was.

Going straight upstairs as soon as he got in, Patrick knocked at his mother's door. He felt a new confidence in himself.

When he knocked she did not call out Come in, but opened the door herself. He thought that she looked rather surprised when she saw him standing there.

She was wearing elaborate black chiffon pyjamas, which he knew meant that she was ready for bed, but she hadn't yet done her face.

Patrick had sometimes sat by, and talked or listened to her during the long and complicated process of rubbing and greasing and patting and cleansing that took place nightly in front of the looking-glass.

"Hallo, sonny, where've you been?"

She hadn't called him that for ages. It meant that she was in a happy, contented mood.

Everything *was* coming all right....

"I went and had a bathe, rather a good one."

"God! after a day like that. Did you walk?"

"Yes, rather. I say, mater, can I come in while you do your hair and things?"

She hesitated for a moment.

"Well, not to-night, sonny. I'm all out, and so ought you to be. Had a good day?"

"Marvellous, thanks. You won, at the Casino, didn't you?"

"Yes, quite a lot. It was absolutely Buck's day, and he played for me. He did damn well out of it, on his own account, though."

"I bet he did," said Patrick scornfully.

"Go to bed now, old man. I shan't come down in the morning, so don't wait for me."

"All right. Good-night, mater."

She kissed him, and he went away to his own room.

So Buck was still the white-headed boy. Well, of course, that was to be expected. Nobody yet knew, except Patrick himself, about his proposed treachery.

But soon, perhaps the very next day, everybody would know.

Mother would be furious at first, of course, but she couldn't *really* mind. Not about a low-down beast like that. And there was still a fortnight left of the holidays, and Buckland would be gone.

### (3)

When Coral Romaine had heard the sound of Patrick's door, opening and then shutting, she turned the key in her own lock and went to her looking-glass.

She didn't look a day over thirty, in the subdued light cast on her reflection by the one shaded electric-light bulb that alone was burning.

Those black pyjamas were a success. The best she'd ever had. It was something about the cut—the line showed up her figure marvellously. And it was a figure worth showing, too. Chrissie Challoner, who was under thirty, hadn't got a thing on her, for all her slimness, because nobody was going to look at anything so tiny. Besides, she hadn't an ounce of sex-appeal. Brainy women never had.

Though youth ...

Coral turned her mind elsewhere. She could never bear to think about youth. It would never be hers any more, and none of her ingenious devices for defeating the hand of Time were of any real avail.

It was of no use to worry about it. Worry only made lines on one's face. Look at Gushie, with a face like a ploughshare. Though of course, Gushie was years and years older than she was, and had probably had a pretty tough deal all her life. And not a single man had ever looked her way, unless it was the mysterious Wolverton-Gush, about whom nothing had ever been known, so that Coral sometimes wondered, derisively, if he had ever had any real existence at all, outside the imagination of Ruth Wolverton-Gush.

Coral herself had anyway had her share of lovers, from the moment she left school at eighteen, and became the talk of her father's country parish.

It seemed absurd, and incredible, to recollect that her first affair had been with a curate. She couldn't even remember his surname, but the poor youth had gone away, and she had cried her eyes out, and then embarked almost immediately on a flirtation with his successor. Looking back, she thought how extraordinary it was that she should have found such a number of men to make love to her, in that remote country district. But there had always been someone. She had never even gone into the country town without picking up somebody, either in the train, or at the café where one got cocoa—

called hot chocolate—and cream buns.

Several men had wanted to marry her. She was technically "a good girl" and they knew it. Three times she had been engaged; and had broken the engagement off because she suddenly found that she liked somebody else better, or because she lost her temper with the man over some trifle.

Her parents had welcomed her engagement to Gordon Romaine, who was fifteen years older than she was—which they thought would be "steady"ing—and a rich man, judged by the parsonage standards, with an independent income apart from his Army pay.

They had given her a wedding far out of proportion to anything they could afford, an extravagant trousseau, and seen her off to India with tears and blessings.

For more than eight years, Coral—she had become Coral almost at once after her marriage—had enjoyed life wildly. Her husband tolerated everything, and was proud of the admiration accorded to her looks, her boundless vitality, and her dashing style of dress. He could afford to send her to the Hills during the hot weather, and to send her home once in eighteen months.

She had not been in love with Gordon, and soon tired of him completely, but was kept happy by a series of violent affairs, to which her husband obstinately closed his eyes. The crisis did not come until an infatuation arose between herself and a man in her husband's regiment. Then a scandal flared up, and Gordon Romaine sent in his papers.

He did not reproach Coral, perhaps realising that it would be useless, but from being a complaisant husband he became a morose and disagreeable one, grumbling continually at her extravagance, and forcing her to live in Scotland, where she saw no one and was miserable. At last, when Coral had repeatedly threatened to run away, he agreed to a separation, and then proved unexpectedly generous in the matter of an allowance.

Coral had gone straight to London. Patrick was already at school, and although she went sometimes to see him and provided him lavishly with presents and pocket-money, she had no intention of allowing him to interfere with her life.

Unhampered, and with money, she had visualised for herself a continual succession of triumphs, of new clothes, and social successes. But the past ten years, insensibly, had coarsened her. Her dash had become vulgarity, India had impaired her looks, and the steps that she took to restore them were disastrous, whilst her habit of promiscuous flirtation had so cheapened her that she no longer attracted men of the social standing that had been hers as Gordon Romaine's wife.

Naturally lacking in discrimination, Coral allowed herself to be exploited by men and women to whom dancing, drinking, love-making and the spending of other people's money, were the principal occupations of life. She speedily surrendered to their standards, becoming more strident and noisier than themselves in an endeavour to focus upon herself the attention that was less and less often offered to her spontaneously.

She had always been exceedingly susceptible, and most of her affairs had originated in a violent passing fancy for some man. Young Buckland was of the type that most attracted her, and she had seen, in his open flattery and ready response to her advances, an indication that she could still fascinate men who were neither elderly nor callow.

The idea intoxicated her, because it helped her to believe that she still retained some of the charm of youth.

The arrival of Angie Moon had disillusioned her; but only partly. Passionately anxious to blind herself to the truth, she still believed, as only a woman both stupid and sensual could have believed, that if she gave herself to Buckland, he would cease, at least temporarily, to find Angie attractive. Her temper and jealousy had several times betrayed her, but the day at Monte Carlo had been a success. Buckland had scarcely looked at Angie, and Coral felt sure that he realised exactly what motives had prompted her to give him the money for his successful gambling.

She was at once too reckless, and too well used to the minor forms of swindling, to resent seriously his shameless acceptance of her generosity.

The unexpected chance of their luck at the tables, the amount that she had been drinking, and the conviction that Buckland would certainly come to her room that night, had combined to rouse her to a high pitch of excitement.

She looked at herself in the glass, and added colour to her mouth, but for once she was not really giving her attention to the process. She was listening all the time for approaching footsteps. She heard them at last, and rushed to unfasten the door, checking herself sharply as she reached it and assuming an appearance of indifference.

"Buck! What are you doing here at this hour?" she whispered in mock surprise, at the same time holding the door wide open.

"Don't you know? I've come to say thank-you for the luck you brought me at Monte Carlo this afternoon."

Coral laughed softly and triumphantly.

"I shall have to send you away in about five seconds. It's fearfully late."

Buckland, grinning, stepped across the threshold.

#### (4)

Patrick, also, had heard footsteps come along the corridor, and then stop. The instinct that had been at work within him for weeks past woke from its brief slumber. As he had so often done before, he stood just within his room, the light turned off, and watched, through the barest crack of open door, Buckland, whom he hated, coming down the passage. He saw him stop, and knock softly, and he saw his mother's door open and heard her voice whispering and laughing.

He waited, angrily and with clenched teeth, for Buckland to go away again, as he had always gone before.

But Buckland went inside the room and the door closed behind him.

He did not come out again.

#### (5)

Olwen Morgan, suddenly waking up at some hour preceding the dawn, felt extraordinarily frightened. She did not know why.

She sat up in bed, reaching wildly for the switch that should turn on the light, and was unable to find it. She was conscious that her mouth was dry, and her hair clinging wetly to her forehead, and still the horrible nightmare fear persisted. With an effort that seemed inconceivably great, she forced herself to lean half out of bed, and at last felt her hand against the light-switch, pressing it down.

The hotel bedroom, narrow and colourless, at once resumed its familiar aspect—but still the sense of horror clung round her.

She sank back against the little hard pillow, pushing the sheet away from her sweating body, and lay listening intently. She could hear nothing, except the loud thudding of her own heart.

An overwhelming feeling of unhappiness seemed to be closing in on her. She could do nothing at all except lie there, trembling, whilst wave after wave of sick misery washed over her, to her terror and desolation.

"Oh, what is it?" moaned Olwen.

But no answer came to reassure her.

This agony of fear and suffering was something about which she could do nothing—something outside herself, and yet it was part of herself. She could not escape from it, nor control it.

Olwen, sobbing and sweating, began to pray under her breath.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### (1)

It was on the day following that of the expedition to Monte Carlo that Mr. Bolham, with an injustice of which he was entirely, and very angrily, aware, said to his secretary with suave unpleasantness:

"Mightn't it be an agreeable change, Waller, if you endeavoured to pay a little attention to your work to-day?"

Waller became first red, and then rather green.

"I'm extremely sorry, sir, if you feel that I've not been paying full attention to it. I must say, I wasn't conscious of having given you any reason for thinking so."

"I dare say you've been attentive enough *when* you've been here at all. But I've not been privileged to see very much of you in the last forty-eight hours, you must remember."

"Sir!" cried Denis, with more spirit than usual. "I distinctly understood that you would not require my services yesterday, and had no objection whatever to my taking the day off."

As Mr. Bolham had, indeed, given Denis to understand just exactly that, he became angrier than ever. He wished to find some adequate grounds for his increasing tendency to bully the wretched Denis, and none would present themselves.

It was intolerable.

"Take down these letters," said Mr. Bolham, low and viciously, and beginning to dictate with extreme rapidity before Denis had got either pencil or note-book ready.

In this agreeable atmosphere, the morning passed.

The afternoon was spent by Denis at the typewriter, his instinct for self-dramatisation feeding greedily on the sweltering heat, and the fact that he had not been near the sea all day, nor exchanged a word with anybody other than his employer.

His sense of martyrdom was complete when, at four o'clock, he refused himself the customary break in which to drink a cup of tea and went on working.

By six he had finished.

He wondered bitterly whether Chrissie had been down to the *plage* to bathe, and had missed him. At all events she had not troubled to send him a message, or ring him up on the telephone.

Denis took a long draught of rather tepid water from the tap marked *eau potable* in the bathroom. He would have liked iced orangeade, but he never treated himself to small luxuries unless by doing so he could impress somebody else. Then he changed into a bathing-suit, put on his silk dressing-gown, of which he was extremely proud because it looked so expensive, and went downstairs.

Nobody was there except Dulcie Courteney. Her face lighted up at the sight of Denis, and she sprang towards him, squeaking.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you, Mr. Waller—Denis, I mean. I've been wondering all day where you were, and I couldn't see you at lunch-time because I had it upstairs with Marcelle Duval. She wasn't feeling well. It's been awfully quiet all day. The Morgans are packing, and Mrs. Romaine hasn't been downstairs at all, and Patrick went off by himself somewhere. He looked as if he had a headache—like Marcelle."

"I have a headache myself," said Denis, passing his hand across his forehead. "I've been working at very high pressure all day. I thought I'd go down and see whether a swim would do me any good."

"Oh, are you going to the *plage*? I'd love to come with you. I was at the rocks this morning, with Pops and Mr. and Mrs. Moon. Oh, and"—she hesitated—"I nearly forgot to tell you, *that* Miss Challoner was there, and she asked me to tell you that she was going to St. Raphael this afternoon, but she hoped she'd see you to-morrow."

"That's very kind of her," said Denis, with the most satirical inflection that he could contrive.

"Why do you say it like that?"

"I don't know that I meant to say it in any very special way, Dulcie. It just amuses me a little bit, that's all, to see how very easily success seems to spoil people."

"Is Miss Challoner spoiled?"

"I think so. Just a little bit," Denis answered in a quiet, indulgent tone. It gave him a peculiar satisfaction to speak disparagingly of Chrissie, yet without animosity, as though he was judging her quite impartially.

"She's very clever indeed, of course—quite brilliant in her own line—and it's natural, I suppose, that she should be rather capricious and—inconsiderate—to people who've been less fortunate than herself."

"I'm sure she's been beastly to you!" cried Dulcie.

Denis had been far too much absorbed in his own histrionics to expect her to voice any such conclusion, and was considerably startled.

But sympathy was pleasant, and Dulcie's eager and unquestioning acceptance of him at his own valuation soothing to his writhing vanity.

"No, I don't think so," he said, in a tone which meant the contrary. "As I say, I can quite understand it. She thought she liked me very much, I believe, for a few days, and then she discovered that I was a very ordinary person, and just dropped me again. I never took any of it very seriously, you know."

He smiled calmly and reassuringly.

But Dulcie made a clutch at his arm, and uttered a sympathetic moan.

"How horrible of her! Oh, I simply hate her!"

"It's very sweet of you to care so much about my troubles," said Denis, really touched. Obeying an instinct that still survived in him from his timid, unloved childhood, he laid his hand on her shoulder with a friendly pressure.

Dulcie caught and pressed it fervently in her own.

"Come along down to the shore, and let's have a bathe," said Denis kindly.

He was moved by her evident adoration of him, and in some obscure way it pleased him to feel that here was somebody for whom he could be sorry.

All the way down to the shore she talked to him, telling him a great deal about herself, although always with her curious unchildlike caution in speaking of other people. It was only in regard to Chrissie Challoner—not a visitor at the Hôtel d'Azur—that she had been outspoken and unguarded. She did not, however, mention Chrissie again until they had swum—slowly and with many pauses—out to the raft, and were sitting on it, paying little attention to the two French youths who alone shared it with them.

"Denis, if you don't mind me asking, did you like her frightfully—Miss Challoner, I mean?"

"I liked her very much, and I still like her very much," replied Denis in measured tones. "I don't change at all easily, I'm afraid. People may disappoint me, sometimes—they do, quite often—but it doesn't make any difference to my feelings for them. I don't change, whatever they may do."

He was genuinely incapable, at the moment, of realising that no statement could have been much further from the truth. Denis was, and always had been, completely at the mercy of his own susceptibility, but he had hypnotised himself into believing that he was possessed of great constancy.

Dulcie was quite prepared to believe this too.

"I knew you were like that," she said fervently. "I do think it's a shame, her treating you like that."

"Promise me you won't say anything about it to anyone," said Denis earnestly. "In fact, there isn't anything to say."

"Oh, of course I won't. I think it's marvellous of you to confide in me, truly I do. I'd love to feel I was a little teeny bit of a comfort to you, Denis."

"Of course you are. I haven't many friends, you know," said Denis sentimentally.

"I shall always, always be your friend."

Denis felt touched, but also slightly embarrassed. He knew that he did not really feel very much drawn towards Dulcie, and never would. His taste in feminine looks, and manners, and conversation, was fastidious, and Dulcie did not by any means conform to it.

He smiled at her, as nicely as he could, and then slipped off the raft into the sea.

She followed meekly.

At the corner of the road, just below the entrance to the grounds of the Hôtel d'Azur, the omnibus from St. Raphael was discharging its passengers. Denis's heart missed a beat at the sudden thought that Chrissie might be amongst them.

But only Buckland got out.

"I didn't know you'd gone to St. Raphael, Mr. Buckland," said Dulcie. "Did you see Miss Challoner there?"

"No. I was only in there an hour," said Buckland. "Hallo, Waller! Been doing any more stunts in the water? How's the poor old heart?"

Denis made no reply, and they walked up the hill in a silence that was, so far at least as Buckland was concerned, unusual.

Dinner had already begun when they arrived. Buckland disappeared from view, Dulcie went straight into the dining-room, and Denis, to whom the formalities were of the utmost importance always, hurried upstairs and changed into a flannel suit.

When he at last entered the dining-room he saw that he would be dining alone. Mr. Bolham was sitting at Mr. Muller's table, with the Morgan family. Denis remembered that it was their last night at the Hotel.

Giving them his self-conscious little bow as he passed, he walked to his place.

Courteney came up to him.

"All by yourself, Waller? Come and dine at our table, won't you?"

"Thank you. That's very kind of you. But don't let me be in the way."

"Nonsense. Dulcie will be delighted. Come along."

Denis, not knowing how to refuse, went. He was always ill at ease with Courteney, although the latter had never again made the slightest reference to their having met before. Denis, in fact, had almost succeeded in persuading himself that Courteney had decided that he must have been mistaken, and forgotten all about the incident.

Almost, but not quite.

Dulcie, rendered more silent than usual by the presence of her father, made a slight grimace, expressive of her pleasure and understanding, every time that she caught Denis's eye, but said very little. Denis was not sorry.

The secretive instinct was strong in him, and he was also afraid lest Dulcie's devotion should make him appear slightly ridiculous. He was beginning to be aware of its ardent and excessive character, and it was making him vaguely uneasy. He would have detached himself from the society of the Courteney's after dinner, but they seemed to expect him to sit with them on the terrace, over coffee, and he had not the courage, or the *savoir-faire*, to break away.

The terrace was unusually empty.

Mr. Muller had taken his entire party by car down to the sea for a moonlight bathe, the French family from Marseilles were out, the Duvals dining upstairs.

Angie and Hilary Moon, in unbroken silence, sat at opposite ends of the hall, yawning over illustrated papers.

Mrs. Romaine and Patrick had dined alone, and left the dining-room before Buckland's appearance there. Then Mrs. Romaine had gone back there and sat beside him whilst he ate. Patrick had walked away, taking the path that led up the hillside, behind the Hotel.

"Isn't it quiet, to-night!" Dulcie exclaimed suddenly. "There's nothing going on at all, is there? And to-morrow night the Morgans will all have gone. I wonder who will have their rooms."

"A party of South Americans," said her father promptly. "They're arriving to-morrow morning. And Muller's wife, and his son and daughter, at the end of the week."

"How much longer is Mr. Bolham staying?"

Courteney frowned.

"Mind your own business, my dear," he curtly told his daughter.

Denis answered mildly, "I don't think he's quite made up his mind, Dulcie," and felt sorry for her, as he always did for anybody who received a direct snub. His understanding of the effects of a snub was profound, and exaggeratedly bitter.

A car dashed up, shattering the quiet of the breathless night, and the party of *commerçants* from Marseilles sprang out of it, screaming and chattering at the tops of their voices.

Courteney rose, extinguishing his cigarette as he did so.

"Don't move, Waller."

He went over to the group, and spoke to them agreeably in his faultless French, asking whether they had spent a pleasant day, and punctuating with polite, ejaculatory comments their voluble replies.

One of the women, with her hand through his arm, dragged him into the lighted hall.

"*Allons, faites un peu de musique*," she urged him. "*On va danser*."

"They're going to dance," Dulcie unnecessarily observed to Denis.

They heard Courteney's strong, competent hands descend on the keyboard. He played with great spirit, and a degree of accuracy unusual in anybody playing by ear alone. Denis wondered whether he ought to ask Dulcie if she would like to dance.

He did not want to, partly because he was tired, and comfortable where he was, and partly because he was a careful, rather than an inspired, dancer, and did not feel at all sure of appearing to advantage.

"It's lovely, sitting out here, isn't it?" said Dulcie rather timidly.

Relieved that she apparently did not expect to be asked to dance, Denis assented with some warmth.

"I'm so glad you like it too, Denis. Oh, Denis, I'm so awfully glad I've got you for a friend. It's so lovely just to sit and talk, isn't it, with just the stars and things?" said Dulcie romantically.

Scraping the legs of her chair hideously against the gravel, she drew it close beside his.

Denis, after a momentary hesitation, put out his hand and took hold of hers.

He felt that her speech demanded something of the kind, and his own tendency to vague pawings was in proportion to his deficiency in normal sex-desire.

He even experienced an indulgent amusement, and a sense of being rather touched, when Dulcie, with small breathless

gasps of ecstasy, hooked her skinny little fingers into his and allowed her head to droop against his shoulder.

Denis had often sat in similar affectionate and meaningless proximity to other young women, his wife Phyllis included, and moreover it had not occurred to him to think of Dulcie as anything but a little girl, to whom nobody else was very kind. He permitted her semi-erotic advances, and even encouraged them mildly, with something of the complacency that a demonstrative child might feel at receiving notice and unaccustomed petting.

They sat on, for some time.

Dulcie talked and babbled, making various confidences of which Denis did not hear more than half.

He was in a mood even more sentimental than usual, induced partly by the tunes that Courteney was playing, and partly by the obviously romantic nature of their surroundings. The thought of Chrissie still hurt, but he was gradually weaving a web of unreality round his sufferings. Soon, Chrissie might become one of those memories on which he dwelt with luxurious melancholy, revelling in the thought of his own faithfulness and the heartless way in which he had been treated. Just below these surface emotions, something more genuine stirred. But he did not want to wake it.

The only possible way of retaining Chrissie's friendship was to be honest with her, and that was a necessity Denis could not face.

## (2)

At ten o'clock Mr. Hilary Moon appeared on the threshold, wearing a light-grey flannel suit.

Denis gently pushed Dulcie into a more erect position.

Hilary went to the garage, and came back in his car. The Hotel *chasseur* appeared with a couple of suitcases and put them into the back of the car.

At the same moment the music stopped, and the dancers began to stray out on to the steps and terrace.

"Are you off?" asked Denis, in some surprise, of Moon.

"Got to see a man in Marseilles to-morrow, if I can, before he sails for America," Hilary replied negligently.

"I hope you'll have a good journey," said Denis politely.

"Cooler, travelling at night."

"When shall we see you back again?" Denis enquired, secretly hoping that it might not be for several days. He had always felt certain that if one could only see something of the lovely Mrs. Moon, away from her very unattractive husband, it would be easy to get to know her. There was much about her that Denis disapproved, but she was very young: probably she had never come under the right influence....

"One'll turn up again one of these days," said Hilary coldly. He glanced back at the lighted hall.

Angie was no longer to be seen in the wicker chair near the open window.

Madame was hovering just outside her little office, black and rather baleful-looking. She held, grasped in one hand, the bundle of notes that Hilary had just counted out in front of her. There was no amiable farewell smile on her swarthy, watchful face, nor did she come out on the steps to see him start.

The *concierge*, without any undue haste, did so instead, at a sign from Courteney.

"Good-bye, Moon," said Courteney, with his usual cordiality. "We'll look after Mrs. Moon till you get back again."

Hilary looked him full in the face and said nothing.

The *chasseur*, shoved by the contemptuous *concierge*, opened the door of the car, and Hilary got in and instantly started the engine.

When it became evident that there was to be no tip, the *chasseur* slammed the door upon him violently, and looked round at the *concierge*, who shrugged his shoulders.

The *chasseur*, turning to look after the swiftly vanishing car, expressively spat upon the ground.

"*Quelle drôle d'idée, un départ à cette heure-ci!*" exclaimed little Madame Duval.

"*Mais du tout. Il a raison,*" her husband immediately contradicted her. "*Le train de onze heures....*"

They began to argue cheerfully about the train service. Other people were calling for cold drinks, and the powerful headlights of Mr. Muller's car were rushing towards the Hotel, appearing and disappearing round the sharp curves of the avenue.

"Dulcie, it's time you went to bed," said Courteney abruptly. "Good-night. I hope she's not been a nuisance, Waller. Run along, kid."

Dulcie made piteous eyes at Denis, and the thought crossed his mind that she had hoped for a more affectionate good-night. If so, she gave no further sign of disappointment, but went away at once.

### (3)

In her own very small room on the top floor, Dulcie gave herself up to a wild orgy of day-dreaming. She had invested Denis with every charm and quality that she most admired, and now visualised a hundred imaginary scenes, from her own early death whilst saving Denis from drowning, to their elopement together by aeroplane.

Nothing was too highly coloured to be seized upon by her ill-regulated fancy, nourished entirely on the cinema, the chatter of semi-educated Latins, and monthly-magazine fiction.

The mere thought of Chrissie Challoner drove her almost to frenzy. And Denis had thought himself in love with her, Dulcie was sure of it. He wouldn't any more now, after the way she'd let him down. Dulcie felt certain that Chrissie had done something to hurt poor Denis frightfully, although of course he was too honourable to say anything about it. A great gentleman, thought Dulcie solemnly.

She was far too much excited for sleep, and wondered whether she could hope to find a bathroom disengaged. When the Hotel was full, especially with English and Americans, the bathrooms—there was only one on each floor—were seldom to be found free, and everybody else, naturally, had a right to them before Dulcie, whose father was really part of the Hotel personnel.

But the Hotel was not very full now, and besides, it was late.

Dulcie fluffed up her thin fair hair, and put on her cheap pink cotton kimono. She hoped, at the bottom of her heart, that she might catch another glimpse of Denis, whose room was at the far end of the passage on the same floor and opposite to the *salle de bain*. Their abrupt and public goodnight had been, to Dulcie, an anti-climax, after the intimacy of the evening.

The type of vulgarity that naturally enjoys and seeks after any form of intrigue, however trivial, was essentially hers. So completely had she convinced herself that she was the heroine of a romance that it scarcely surprised her when the door of Denis Waller's room actually did open, and he came out of it, carrying a bath-towel and sponge.

"Oh, Denis," she fluttered, "did you want the bathroom? Do have it first, I can easily go afterwards—yes, really. I'd love you to go first, yes, *do*."

Denis protested.

"It's quite all right, Dulcie, I'm not in any hurry. I can read a book for a little while, in my room. I'm always glad of a little spare time for reading, you know."

"No, no, you must go first."

"Really not——"

They bandied small phrases about, leaning against the passage wall outside Denis's room.

Suddenly Dulcie said, in a high, kittenish voice:

"What's your room like?" and darted inside it.

Denis knew the quick apprehensive qualm that always seized him at any invasion of his privacy. There was so much that he didn't want anybody to find out.

But his room gave nothing away.

It was extremely tidy, as it always was, and the most compromising object in it was a framed photograph, cut from an illustrated weekly paper, of a girl in Court dress. He had not known her particularly well—her father had once employed him temporarily—but he considered that the portrait looked interesting, and gave a *cachet* to his dressing-table. So he always carried it about with him.

Dulcie saw it instantly, and experienced a pang of jealousy. Some horrible girl who was in love with Denis, of course. She had a profound conviction that any girl who knew Denis must be in love with him.

She said nothing about the photograph, but went to the window, which looked out at the back where a high, rocky hill sloped steeply upwards, showing no lights, and seeming to melt into the starry distance.

"It's lovely, isn't it?" said Dulcie, who would have said the same whatever the view had been.

"Isn't it?" Denis agreed.

He was fond of seeing himself as a person of acute artistic sensibilities, and could not resist adding:

"I often watch the sun rise from this window."

"Do you?" said Dulcie.

She looked round at him as she spoke, but without moving from the window.

Denis, after hesitating for a moment, came and stood beside her.

Dulcie immediately drew his arm round her. Denis, acutely conscious of the open door behind them, felt thoroughly uneasy but lacked courage to hurt her feelings by any lack of response. Instead, he said feebly:

"You can't stay, you know, dear. You must go and have your bath. I can wait for mine."

"No, *I* can. Anyway, I don't take a minute. I'm frightfully quick going to bed, *and* getting up. Olwen takes ages. Fancy, Olwen reads something out of the Bible and says her prayers, every single morning. Isn't that too sweet and old-fashioned?"

The Hotel child spoke in all simplicity, but Denis was distinctly shocked.

"Certainly not. Why do you talk like that, Dulcie? If you think it'll shock me, you're entirely mistaken. I know far too much about human nature ever to be shocked at anything, I assure you—but it doesn't sound at all nice."

Dulcie perceived with horror that she had made a very false step indeed, and sought frantically to retrieve it.

"Oh, Denis, I didn't mean—indeed I wasn't trying to shock you or anybody. I wouldn't be so silly—truly, I wouldn't. And I didn't mean anything at all about Olwen, except just that I was so surprised. I thought it must be because she's Welsh, and they're always very superstitious, aren't they?"

"Do you mean to say that you haven't any religion, Dulcie?"

"Pops says it's all nonsense, to think that creeds matter," said Dulcie timidly. "He says only cowards need religion, to keep them straight."

"Do you think that I'm a coward, Dulcie?"

"No, of course I don't."

"Yet I pray every day of my life, and I believe that my prayers are heard. If it wasn't for religion, Dulcie, I don't suppose I could have borne all the things that I've had to bear in my life."

Denis had forgotten all about the open door, the lateness of the hour, and the fact that he and Dulcie Courteney were alone together in his bedroom.

He was genuinely appalled by his discovery, and yet at the same time pleurably excited at the thought that this unfortunate child had certainly been sent to him to be helped.

"I wish," he said earnestly, "that you'd let me talk to you for a little, about this, some time. I think I could help you a good deal."

"Oh, I'm sure you could. I do wish you would. I know you've read so much, and thought, and—and everything."

"I've gone into all these questions very carefully, certainly," Denis asserted sweepingly. "And I can only tell you that there have been times when nothing but my faith has kept me from—taking the easy way out."

"And you don't think I'm awful?"

"Of course not. I never," said Denis gravely, "despise anyone. And I can quite see that it may not have been your fault at all."

"It wasn't Pops' fault, either."

Denis was silent.

Dulcie, fearful of displeasing him, played her trump card.

"You see," she said quaveringly, "I haven't any mother. I can't even remember her."

Denis was instantly moved, although something in him recognised the cheapness of the appeal. But he, also, had known a motherless childhood, and a memory of genuine grief and loneliness was mingled with much sentimentalising of his own forlorn past.

"I had no mother, either, Dulcie. I'm so sorry for you."

Prompted by a genuine impulse of compassion, he stooped and kissed her cheek.

The bedroom door slammed briskly.

Courteney stood just inside the room, surveying them.

Dulcie, white-faced and with dilated eyes, began to stammer something unintelligible.

Denis was scarlet, casting wildly about in his startled mind for whatever pose might show him in a less unfavourable aspect than the obvious one.

Courteney's eyes were narrowed, and he strode up to Dulcie, and took her by the shoulder with no gentle grasp. His voice, when he spoke, was no louder than usual, but there was a very unpleasant note in it.

"Don't you know better than to play this kind of silly trick?" he demanded. "If you were a year or two older, it might be serious. As it is, you're not too old to be punished. Did he ask you to come in here?"

"No," half shrieked Dulcie.

Her father put his hand over her mouth.

"Shut up, d'you want the whole Hotel to hear you?"

He turned to Denis.

"What have you got to say for yourself? Messing about with a child of Dulcie's age, and keeping your wife—if she is your wife—hanging about waiting for you in London, while you pass yourself off as an unattached man."

"You can't prove any of that," Denis cried, quivering with wrath and fear.

Courteney gave him an ugly smile.

"Can't I? I'm not so sure. And whether I can prove it or not, I'm not going to let you get away with it any longer. I think there's at least one lady out here who'd be interested in a few details about Cicely Road, and I shall make it my business to see that she gets them."

"You can't do that," stammered Denis, wild with fear.

He had forgotten all about Dulcie.

All of a sudden she began to gulp and sob loudly.

Courteney swore below his breath, and pulled her to the door. Opening it, he looked up and down the passage.

"Go on. Get back to your own room. I'll talk to you to-morrow."

Still sobbing, Dulcie went.

The moment's interruption had given Denis time to evolve a hasty conception of himself as a hero of chivalry.

"Courteney," he began earnestly, "I see that from your point of view, perhaps, you've a right to be annoyed. But in the first place, I give you my solemn word of honour that Dulcie simply came in here, innocently, like the child she is, and I said good-night to her as I might have said it to any child—little Gwennie Morgan——"

"Gwennie Morgan is nine years old, not sixteen. And I should like to know what her mother would have said, if she'd found you fooling about with her at eleven o'clock at night. Not that that's to the point. The point is that my job, and Dulcie's livelihood, depend on these Hotel proprietors, and others like them. Dulcie especially. She's only here on sufferance. Any suspicion of her misbehaving herself, and out we go—neck and crop."

"I can't tell you, Courteney, how extremely sorry I am that this should have happened. It was thoughtless of me, I quite admit, and if there's anything I can say or do——"

"There's nothing you can do, except behave yourself—and I'm going to see that you do—and the less you say the better."

Denis again turned cold with apprehension.

"If you have any sense of honour at all——" he began uncertainly.

"I should let you go on making up for all you're worth to a woman with more money than sense, at the same time making a little fool of my daughter, and I suppose of any other silly girl who gives you the chance?"

"Please tell me what you intend to do," said Denis with stiff lips.

"Tell you! I'm not going to tell you anything. You're not worth speaking to. You needn't tell me you weren't trying to seduce Dulcie. You haven't got the guts for that. I believe I'd respect you more if you had."

At the contempt in Courteney's voice Denis's sense of outrage became unendurable. He clenched his hand and struck out.

With one step sideways, Courteney evaded the ill-directed blow, and Denis barked his knuckles with extreme violence against the door.

The sudden pain made him feel sick, and the room reeled for an instant round him.

As from a distance he heard Courteney, quite low and calmly, level at him a stream of abusive epithets. Then the door opened, and shut again.

Denis, quivering, lurched forward and turned the key in the lock, and then fell forward on to the bed, hiding his face

against the pillow, and shaking with hysterical sobs.

(4)

St. Raphael, thought Chrissie, was a tiring place. She had met a party of American acquaintances there, they had all walked up and down the hot streets, and bought coloured handkerchiefs and coloured sandals, and Chrissie had selected enormous baskets of *fruits confits* as parting presents for the Morgan children; they had eaten ices, and drunk lemonade, and finally gone to one of the larger hotels for dinner.

Chrissie, driving home in a hired car, had decided that it was too late, and she was much too tired, to stop at the Hôtel d'Azur and see Denis.

If he'd really wanted to talk to her he could have rung up or come up to the rocks that morning.

Besides, she was not at all sure that she wished to see him. The principal emotions that he now excited in her were an uneasy feeling of remorse, and a rapidly increasing sense of having made a fool of herself.

When she reached the villa, her first enquiry was whether there had been a telephone message.

"Nothing, dear," said Mrs. Wolverton-Gush. She added:

"I've had a very quiet afternoon and evening, and seen no one. None of our friends from the Hotel."

"Gushie," said Chrissie abruptly, "what do you really think of Denis Waller?"

Mrs. Wolverton-Gush looked at her employer, and her experience of the many women she had worked for and of Chrissie Challoner in particular told her exactly what she was required to think.

"To be quite candid with you, dear, I've sometimes felt he wasn't quite worthy of the interest you've shown in him. Even, perhaps, a little inclined to take advantage of it, if you know what I mean."

Chrissie involuntarily recollected the lunches, drinks, and dinners for which she had paid.

"Well, I don't suppose," she said tolerantly, "that he's ever had much of a chance."

"I dare say not. And then, of course—well, not being quite a gentleman *does* make a difference."

Ruth Wolverton-Gush was secretly very much relieved. She always dreaded these violent infatuations, which might so easily lead to the loss of her job.

Now, at any rate, she was safe for a little while longer.

Her relief redoubled when Chrissie said abruptly:

"I think we'll go to Italy for a week, Gushie. I want a change, and to get away for a bit. See about rooms at that hotel I liked last year, will you? The address is somewhere in my book."

"Certainly, dear. You'd like to go as soon as possible?"

"Well, yes. Not to-morrow, you know, but after that—the sooner the better."

She looked at her housekeeper-secretary, and there was an odd expression, half ashamed and half amused, in her big dark eyes.

"I believe I've got a certain amount of copy out of this place. One always does, whether one means to or not."

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## CHAPTER XV

### (1)

At ten o'clock next morning, the Hotel omnibus stood in front of the steps.

The luggage of the Morgan family was being piled upon the roof. Mervyn Morgan was giving halting directions to the *chasseur*. His children were making their farewells to their fellow-visitors.

"There's one thing," said Gwennie, "we shall look much browner when we get home than we do here. Everyone will think we're marvellous."

She stuck out a round, copper-coloured arm from the short sleeve of her now unfamiliar frock, donned for travelling.

"Where's Mr. Waller? I just want to make sure that he sees I really am much more sunburnt than him."

"He's here," said David. "At the furthest table of all, over there. Everyone's here to see us off, pretty nearly."

"Or because they haven't finished breakfast," observed Gwennie cynically.

She walked over to the distant table where Denis Waller, haggard beneath his tan, sat drinking coffee and crumbling his bread without eating it.

"Hallo, Mr. Waller! We're going in a few minutes."

He stood up politely.

"I'm sorry you're leaving, Gwennie."

"So'm I, and I expect it will be boiling in the train. We shall think of you, swimming about in the sea."

"I expect I shall be at work most of the day."

"Why? You aren't as a rule."

Denis gazed at the disconcerting child in silence. He had spent a miserable night, and opened his aching eyes to a yet more miserable waking. He did not feel at all sure that he was going to be able to remain at the *Hôtel d'Azur*. The thought of doing so was only second in horror to the thought of not doing so.

Mrs. Romaine had not come downstairs, but Patrick now appeared from the hall, and Mr. Bolham was immediately behind him. They joined the Morgans.

Denis, with his instinct for doing whatever seemed to be expected of him, followed Gwennie to the steps.

He found himself face to face with Dulcie Courteney, who looked at him with a terrified expression from under swollen eyelids.

Denis muttered "Good-morning" and looked quickly away from her.

Gwennie ran about, saying good-bye to everybody.

Olwen and David stood with Patrick. Denis noticed vaguely that Patrick looked very unhappy, although from time to time he smiled, and even laughed.

Whatever the boy's troubles might or might not be, he was not suffering one-tenth as much as Denis was suffering. Of that, Denis was profoundly convinced.

A car drove up, stopped, and Chrissie Challoner in a scarlet-spotted beach-frock and enormous scarlet straw hat, sprang out. Her hands were filled with parcels, wrapped in white paper and tied up with ribbon.

"I'm so glad I'm in time," she said hurriedly. "These are for the journey. You'll have to eat them quickly, Gwennie, before they melt."

Denis, at the sight of her, shrank inwardly, and was aware of a qualm of actual physical nausea. Suppose Courteney really did say something to her?

Just then Chrissie turned round towards him.

"Can you come for a short drive, presently? I partly came up because I wanted to see you."

She spoke gently, and Denis—unaware that terror and misery were written plainly on his face—thought that her feelings towards him had softened again. Perhaps he need not lose her, after all.

It was an essential part of his weakness of character to be the victim of sudden, violent, and quite unconsidered impulses.

One such seized upon him now.

He would tell Chrissie himself of the threat held over him by Courteney and make her understand that he was not in any way to be blamed or despised.

"I should like to have a minute or two with you, very much indeed," he said quietly. "I don't think I can go for a drive because I may be wanted, but perhaps we could stroll to the end of the terrace?"

Chrissie nodded a quick assent.

Mary Morgan, with Madame and the comparatively negligible Monsieur, came out. Her dark-blue foulard dress and small travelling-hat looked strangely formal, and she was carrying gloves and a hand-bag.

*"Au revoir, madame. Bon voyage. Au plaisir de vous revoir, j'espère, l'année prochaine...."*

Madame was all affability.

She approved highly of the Morgans, perfectly realising that this was *une famille anglaise très comme il faut*. They did not order drinks with the freedom of most of her guests, but on the other hand she considered that they lent a tone to the Hotel—and there was no question there, as to credit.

Moreover, the rich Mr. Bolham, and still richer Mr. Muller, had both made friends with the Morgans.

Mr. Muller was shaking hands with them now.

"That was a grand evening we had," he said to Mary.

"I shan't forget it."

"Neither shall I."

The last piece of luggage was on the omnibus. Morgan came up the steps.

"Well——"

"Good-bye, Mr. Bolham. I do hope you'll let us know, if you're ever in our part of the world," said Mary.

"Thank you very much. Next summer, perhaps. And if you should be in London during the winter—the Athenæum will always find me."

"Good-bye, Patrick," said Olwen. "Don't forget you're coming to stay with us in the holidays."

"Thanks awfully, Olwen. I won't forget. Rather not."

"Please say good-bye to Mrs. Romaine, and thank her for taking us to the rocks in the car so often."

"Oh, that's all right. I'll tell her."

"Where's Mr. Buckland?" demanded Gwennie suddenly. "I haven't said good-bye to him."

"He hasn't come down yet. At least, I haven't seen him."

"Good-bye, Dulcie. Good-bye, Mr. Courteney."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"Have a nice journey. I hope it won't be frightfully hot."

"Good-bye, David. Take *that* back to school with you."

"Oh, thank you," said David with round eyes, his fingers closing on a piece of paper folded very small, pushed into his hand by Mr. Bolham.

"Come along, hop in," said Mervyn Morgan to his children. He was glad that they were leaving France, and thought gaily that, in a very few days, he would get a decent English breakfast of eggs and bacon again.

The *concierge*, looking supercilious, pocketed Captain Morgan's tip, and held open the door of the omnibus.

Mary Morgan gave a last glance round. They had said good-bye to everyone. She responded politely to Madame's hopes that they would return next summer, but she knew that never would their holiday repeat itself.

Well, she'd done it. Seen the blue sky and the tideless Mediterranean, watched her children assimilating one more of the ineradicable impressions of childhood, and for herself laid up a curious store of memories.... She smiled once more at Muller, who was watching her with grave intent eyes, and followed her children down the steps of the Hotel.

Gwennie and David were waving vigorously, hanging out of the window. Olwen, sitting next to her mother, raised her hand once, and then sat motionless. Her face was serious, but not unhappy.

In a little while, thought Mary, the Michaelmas daisies would be out in the garden at home. She seemed actually to feel, for a passing moment, the fresh, damp air of her own hillside garden.

The heat-haze quivered round her, and she came back to the present.

The omnibus rattled down the hill, and Mary wondered whether the books that she had brought for the children would last through the long journey that lay ahead of them.

## (2)

"I'm sorry they've gone," Chrissie said. "I suppose there'll be quite a different lot of people here, by the time I get back."

"You're going away?" Mr. Bolham enquired.

"To Italy, for a week. I think I shall go tomorrow, if I find that I can get rooms. Shall you still be here when I come back?"

"I hope so. But it's possible that I may be back in London again, by then."

Chrissie heard him without much surprise. She had had a curious conviction that, if she went away, Denis would be gone on her return.

On the whole, it would be a very good thing. Nothing remained now except disappointment, and a sense of humiliation at having mistaken a passing impulse for an enduring reality. Denis was gazing at her with miserable eyes, and a feeling of mingled horror and compassion grew in her at the thought that it was she who was making him suffer.

The postman climbed up the steps laboriously carrying his canvas bag, and Mr. Bolham went into the hall to await his mail.

"I can stay until he's read his letters," said Denis. "I want to speak to you."

Without saying anything more they walked the length of the terrace. Denis had been sitting at the furthest table of all. His

cup was empty, but his roll and butter lay uneaten. Chrissie was for a moment touched until he said, indicating the plate:

"I'm afraid I haven't been able to do much in the way of breakfast this morning. In fact, I haven't eaten anything at all."

"It's too hot to eat, isn't it?" said Chrissie coldly. Denis turned and faced her with his air of a hunted animal at bay:

"Why are you so beastly to me, nowadays?"

Chrissie, contemptuous of the appeal and made nervous by the thought of hurting him still further, lost control of herself.

She said clearly. "I'm sick of humbug. You do nothing but pose, and pretend, and feel sorry for yourself. I don't know what's the matter with you, Denis, but I do know that I can't do anything to help you. No one can, except yourself, and you—you've just not got the guts to do it."

Denis became perfectly white. He tried to speak and failed. Chrissie faced him unflinchingly.

An emotional scene was definitely stimulating to her, and she scarcely realised that to Denis it might be a more unnerving experience.

At last he spoke, in a voice hoarse and shaken with anger.

"You dare to speak to me like that because you don't understand the very first thing about me. I've had a much harder life than you know anything about. Ever since I was a child I've been alone, I've had no one to help me, I've had to fight for my own hand. I never thought I should have to earn my own living. I was brought up to believe I should be heir to a property—as I ought to be. Since I was eighteen years old I've worked, and I've—I've kept my end up—I've been through things that I couldn't even tell you about—I've nearly starved sometimes——"

Chrissie's voice cut like a knife across his torrent of self-pity.

"You've been through nothing at all that hundreds and thousands of others haven't been through. The difference between you and them is simply that you've never, for one single instant, stopped thinking about yourself, and dramatising yourself, and lying to yourself and to everybody else. I don't know what's made you what you are, but I do know that if you don't pull up while you can still do it—if you can, that is to say—you're never going to be anything but what you are now—a neurotic, self-conscious, cowardly little liar—and everybody's going to know it. You'll mind that, because you're afraid of what people think. That's the only standard you've got—what people are going to think about you. Well, now you know."

Denis stared at her wildly, choked, and put both hands up to his throat.

"I know I'm being brutal. I don't care. I believe it's your one chance. You're not a fool, Denis, although you generally behave like one, and you're possibly worth saving. I don't suppose I shall see you again after to-day, but at least I've told you the truth about yourself."

"I hope to God you never will see me again after to-day," said Denis passionately. "I didn't know that any human being could be as cruel to another as you've been to me. Do you realise what you've done to me? You pretended to be my friend, and to have an affection for me, you won my confidence—I spoke to you more intimately than I've ever done to anybody else in the world—and then you suddenly turn round on me and insult me, and mock at me, and tell me that you utterly despise me."

Chrissie, a cold anger invading her, stopped him with a quick movement.

"As usual, you're not speaking more than a quarter of the truth. You've got one grievance against me, and one only. I was taken in by you, when I first met you, and I offered you something that, because it was real, was killed by your own insincerity and pretence. I agree with you that I gave you my friendship and then took it away again. And if that's hurt you, I'm glad of it. D'you hear, Denis, *I'm glad*. Any single thing that can make you feel a real emotion, and not a fake one, is your best chance of one day becoming a man, instead of the abject *thing* that you are now."

"Stop," said Denis.

"I won't. You're going to face the truth for once in your life, if you never have before. Everything I've said to you is true,

and however much you may deny it you'll always remember it, and then perhaps some day you'll really take it in, with your whole consciousness—and *then* there'll be some hope for you."

Chrissie leant back in her chair, shaking.

She could see the sweat forming in beads on Denis's narrow forehead and rolling down his temples. His hands were trembling.

"When I came out here to-day," he began slowly, "I had decided to do the bravest thing that I have ever done in my life. I was going to tell you something about myself that I've never told you or anybody. Something that might have made all the difference to what I believed to be our friendship. It cost me far, far more than I can ever explain to you, to come to that decision."

He paused.

"It's a little ironical, that you should have chosen this very time to tell me that I'm a coward and a liar."

"You are a coward and a liar," repeated Chrissie remorselessly. "I don't care what you were going to tell me; it alters nothing. Even if you'd told me something about yourself that was disgraceful, or shameful, you'd have twisted it in some way so as to make it sound different. You would only have told it to me either to excite my interest, or to make me feel sorry for you, not for any other reason. Unless"—she watched him narrowly—"because you thought I should have found it out anyhow. I suppose that was it. Mr. Bolham or somebody has found out something about you, and you thought I should hear it anyway, and wanted to get your story in first. That would be like you, Denis. I don't care what it is. Of course I've always known that you had things you wanted to hide. Half the things you've told me about your life haven't tallied with the other half. You've made a frightful mess of your lies, as well as of everything else."

"Chrissie!" His voice was frantic.

"I won't go on," she said. "I know I've been brutal. I'd have helped you, Denis, if you could have been decently honest with me. Oh, I don't mean just making some sensational confession, like saying you've been in prison, or lived with another man's wife, or given some wretched girl an illegitimate baby. I shouldn't have minded any of those things, and you know it. But it's your evasions, and half-truths, and pretences, that make everything impossible. I once told you nothing would make any difference—but I was wrong. When I said that, I thought you were a real person. Now I know that you're not."

A shadow fell across the table.

Chrissie, dazed and exhausted, looked up.

Courteney stood beside them, his flashy good looks seeming rather more saturnine than usual, and he held a letter in his hand.

He laid it on the table.

"Do forgive me if I'm interrupting anything, Miss Challoner. I know Waller sets great store by his daily letter, and this one happens to be marked 'Immediate.' So I brought it out."

Denis remained motionless, his sick gaze fixed on the cheap little mauve envelope lying on the table with the address sloping downwards into a corner. Chrissie's acute perceptions leapt instantly to awareness of the profound hostility vibrating between the two men.

She glanced up at Courteney, vaguely apprehensive.

"Mrs. Waller's home in London, by an odd coincidence," Courteney observed pleasantly, "is exactly opposite to mine."

The pause that followed was infinitesimal.

Then Chrissie said, in a level voice:

"Yes. So Mr. Waller has already told me."

"Has he indeed?" Courteney returned, with the same intonation of superficial pleasantness.

His gaze held Chrissie's for a moment, then he smiled slightly and turned away.

Denis, his face hidden in his hands, shuddered violently. Chrissie stood up. She hesitated, and then touched Denis on the shoulder.

Her anger had spent itself, and she felt sorry for him.

"Denis, Denis—it doesn't matter about *this*. I don't want you to tell me anything—Courteney's a cad, whatever he meant."

But Denis drew back quickly from the touch of her hand. He uncovered his haggard face, ravaged by pain and humiliation and fear.

"I can explain——" he began hoarsely.

Involuntarily, she felt the quick message of disbelief flash from her mind into her face. She knew that Denis saw it there.

"It isn't any use for me to say anything, is it?" he asked bitterly.

"No use at all, Denis."

She saw him struggling to find words, and guessed that he was still blindly and instinctively searching for self-justification.

"Good-bye, Denis," she said swiftly. "I'm going now. Don't say anything. I know I've hurt you, and I'm sorry, though I don't suppose you believe it. Remember you can still save your soul alive, if you want to. It isn't too late."

She turned and went away quickly.

Panic seized upon Denis.

His conscious mind had not taken the full impact of Chrissie's words. He only knew that he had been unbearably hurt and humiliated, and that, far down within him, something shrank and cowered in terrified apprehension of the moment when, unless he could find some way of escape, he must needs face himself. His quivering soul sought, and found, a temporary means of evasion.

Courteney—his wicked malignant enemy, Courteney—must somehow be circumvented. Otherwise, Denis told himself—instantly accepting imagination as proven fact—otherwise Courteney would go to Mr. Bolham, and so present his information that Denis would be ignominiously deprived of his post.

He would have to go back to Cicely Road again—to tell Phyllis that he had lost another job, and suffer the humiliation of her indignant pity.

Driven into impulsive action by the growing fear of finding himself forced to think, Denis sprang to his feet. The mauve envelope, with "Immediate" written across one corner in Phyllis's neat clerkly hand, lay on the table. He knew exactly why she had written "Immediate." She did that quite often. It meant that he had left her without a letter for several days, and that she was anxious about him. "Immediate" was her little pretence at thinking that a letter might somehow have missed him, or failed to be delivered, because she did not want to believe that he would willingly leave her without those written assurances of affection which were all that his letters meant to her. She was still in love with him, and the daily correspondence that Denis found such a strain had apparently remained essential to Phyllis.

He reflected dully that he knew just what the sheets inside the envelope would contain: the small platitudinous comments on public events, the carefully worded hopes, shorn of any tinge of envy or regret, that he was enjoying the sun and the sea, the allusions, between inverted commas, to little jokes shared by themselves and long since grown tedious to Denis—and at the end, the row of crosses beneath the signature: Ever, dear, your own wife, Phyllis.

He felt a spasm of hatred, directed against himself, at his own weariness of his wife's uninspired devotion.

He picked up the letter distastefully, and felt unable to open it.

Still holding to surface preoccupations, he wondered what method Courteney would have found of betraying him if Phyllis had not put "Immediate" on the outside of her envelope. Slowly, an idea took possession of his exhausted mind.

Could he tell Mr. Bolham that he had been summoned back to London upon urgent private business? He could go then without the disgrace of dismissal.

Taking the letter with him he went indoors.

### (3)

Mr. Bolham, in his large room, sat waiting for his secretary. When a knock sounded at the door he curtly exclaimed, "Come in!" and prepared to add a short but significant reference to the importance of his time.

Then his eye—an experienced, habitually incredulous eye—fell upon Denis Waller's face.

Mr. Bolham recognised, with aversion, the signs of a genuine psychic disturbance.

There passed through his mind, only to be rejected, the vague possibility of being kind, of asking a question, and listening compassionately to the reply.

But life had taught him the futility of paying any attention to these transient impulses.

He was, in fact, barely aware of their existence, so swiftly did he dismiss them.

He merely perceived that he must put into effect a resolution that had been growing within him for some time, and that he must do so instantly, for he saw that Denis was preparing to make a statement of an emotional nature, and this Mr. Bolham felt must be avoided, at whatever cost to Denis. Even, if necessary, at some cost to himself.

"Waller," he said immediately, "I find that I shall not require your services much longer. In fact, I propose to dispense with them after to-day. I need hardly say that this reflects no discredit whatever on the work that you've already done for me. I shall be quite ready to give you a testimonial as to your abilities. Draw yourself a cheque for two months' salary in lieu of notice. I think you have a return ticket to London already?"

Mr. Bolham did not look at Denis as he uttered these brief pronouncements. He knew without looking that Denis had become stiff with dismay.

"May I ask—I certainly didn't expect such a very sudden end to the appointment—I hope I've done nothing that——?"

"Nothing whatever," said Mr. Bolham firmly. "Merely a change of plans on my part. Now, if you will be good enough to take down the following——"

He hoped that any semblance of a scene had been precluded by his own determination, but next moment knew, with horror rather than surprise, that the hope had failed.

"You needn't think," said Denis in a wild quivering voice, "that I don't know what's happened. I think Courteney must be a devil—not a human being at all. I knew he meant to lose me my job, and he's done it. I don't know what he's told you, nor why you're dismissing me like this without even waiting to hear my explanation. In fact, I don't know why my private affairs should concern anybody at all except myself. They don't interfere with my work, and if——"

The astonished Mr. Bolham held up one hand, in a gesture that he instantly felt to be much too reminiscent of a policeman controlling traffic.

"I haven't the least idea what you're talking about. I don't wish to know anything whatever about your private affairs."

"Then why did you listen to Courteney?" demanded Denis furiously.

Mr. Bolham surveyed him with a cold dislike.

He saw that Denis was firmly under the impression that Courteney, of whom he was evidently in terror, had repeated to Mr. Bolham something that was, or that he thought to be, greatly to the discredit of Denis Waller. Mr. Bolham was in no hurry to disabuse him of the idea. His mildly sadistic feelings towards Denis were deriving a certain gratification from

this abstention, and—much more strongly—he was moved by the thought that so long as he was supposed to know the secret, whatever it was, Denis could be stopped from revealing it in a welter of prevarications, explanations, and self-justifications.

It had never been difficult to overrule Denis, and Mr. Bolham was fully prepared to do so again.

"I think we had better start our morning's work, Waller, unless you wish to see to your preparations for leaving. Are you ready?"

"I can't—I—will you give me a chance to explain myself, sir?" said Denis.

If he had stopped there, Mr. Bolham afterwards reflected, one might have agreed to listen to him. But instead, he threw upon the table a small mauve envelope that Mr. Bolham felt, with an inward recoil, to have been addressed by a young woman, and began to bluster.

"I think I may say that you owe it to me, sir, to hear what I have to say. In treating me like this, at a moment when I am in very serious private trouble of my own, you may be driving me to any lengths. There may be only one alternative left to me, if you refuse to listen. I'm not a man who cares to say a very great deal——"

"And I," said Mr. Bolham sharply, "am not a man who cares to hear a very great deal. In fact in this case I decline to hear anything whatever. *Take this down, please.*"

And he began to dictate with so much fluency that most of his notes eventually proved useless and had to be re-written with greater care and reflection.

#### (4)

In a train that rushed and rocked between the olive-clad slopes of Italy, Buckland and Angie lay locked in one another's arms.

They had left the Hôtel d'Azur together very early in the morning. Even the *concierge* had been unaware of their departure.

They spoke very little.

Once Angie said, with a soft laugh:

"I'd like to see what your old Coral looks like when she finds out you're gone."

"I'm sorry for the next person she meets, that's all," Buck answered. "She's got a filthy temper, but it's soon over. I suppose the boy will have to suffer for it, poor devil."

"*He* won't mind losing you, Buck."

"Not a bit. Besides, he'll be able to drive the Buick now."

"I wish we could have taken the car. Buck, we'll have to get a car somehow."

Buckland, who knew well that sixty pounds, which was all that he now had in the world, must keep himself and Angie for as long as they remained together, for sole reply began to kiss her again.

#### (5)

The Morgans had gone.

Patrick remained on the terrace sitting upon the stone coping looking thoughtfully after the omnibus as it rattled away, appearing and disappearing round the sharp curves of the avenue.

He had, he knew, been waiting for them to go. He hadn't wanted anything to happen whilst they were at the Hotel that might spoil their holiday. He thought that would be a shame, when they were so nice, and had been so decent to him.

The terrace was empty again now. The waiters were clearing away. Patrick had a sudden queer, sentimental vision of Gwennie Morgan, square and sunburnt, in her blue bathing-drawers and cretonne hat, running in and out between the tables. For a moment, it seemed quite real, as though she were really there. Surprised, he stood up and looked round.

Mr. Muller sat by himself, as usual, and read a voluminous American newspaper. His customary glass of orange-juice stood, half empty, on the table beside him.

Dulcie Courteney had disappeared indoors again, so had her father.

Miss Challoner and Denis Waller were at the far end of the terrace, talking.

There was nobody else.

Well, thought Patrick vaguely, there was nothing more to wait for. His plan had been made quite clearly the day before, but now all his perceptions seemed to be half asleep. He was acting in a dull, dreamy way, as though he could only follow instructions, understood and assimilated a long time ago, almost mechanically.

As he walked to the garage he glanced up at his mother's window. The shutters were closed. Her bright emerald-green bathing-dress hung out beneath them.

Patrick looked away again.

Outside the garage a man in a holland blouse was manipulating a hose. Streams of water ran over the cement pavement and down the slope.

"*Bonjour, m'sieur.*"

"*Bonjour,*" said Patrick shyly, smiling at him. The man said something else, that Patrick guessed to be an enquiry as to whether he wanted the car, and with much vigorous gesticulation moved the hose-pipe out of his way.

"*Merci,*" said Patrick.

"*De rien, m'sieur.*"

The Buick, shining and beautiful, stood near the door. She started up easily, and Patrick backed her slowly out of the garage.

Then he swung her half round, changed gear and felt her moving smoothly and swiftly down the avenue.

He loved driving, and had done so little that it still held the charm of novelty. Since coming to France he hadn't been allowed to drive at all, because Buck had pretended to think that it wasn't safe.

Well, he was driving now.

At the bottom of the hill Patrick took the sharp left-handed turn out of the main road, changed into third gear and accelerated.

The Buick shot over the highly cambered surface of the road, taking the steep curves easily. Patrick held the wheel lightly. His eye caught the succession of little white or blue villas, green-shuttered, set in cypresses, of which the outlines had become familiar in the last week or two. On the other side of the road lay the glittering blue of the Mediterranean.

He passed the *plage*, and the raft, and the rocks from which the Hôtel d'Azur visitors had preferred to bathe.

The car was headed towards Cannes.

Soon, Patrick could not longer recognise the shapes of the red rocks and the small distant islands. The bays were unfamiliar.

But he quite clearly remembered one especial bend of the Cannes road, where two cars had almost collided on the day of the expedition to Monte Carlo. He had seen then the sheer drop below, on to a mass of jagged red rock. He felt certain that he would know the place again the moment he saw it. It must, he thought, be very near now. A moment later, he saw

that he had reached it.

The car shot round the curve, and Patrick wrenched at the wheel, swinging her outwards.

At the same instant a bird rose from a bush and flew, startled, into the air, with whirring wings.

Patrick's last conscious thought was one of surprised pleasure.

There *were* birds on the coast, after all....

## (6)

Just before midday Coral Romaine came downstairs. Her face, in spite of careful make-up, still showed the sodden traces of heavy sleep prolonged far into the morning. She wore a new dress, of pale blue washing-silk, sleeveless and cut very low, called a sunbathing beach-frock. She was very pleased with it, and felt that it showed off her slim hips and long lines to the greatest possible advantage.

Downstairs, there was nobody to be seen except as usual Madame in her little office, and the *concierge* reading his newspaper at his desk. He stood up as Mrs. Romaine passed, but without ceasing to read. Only for his own compatriots, the rich Americans, and Mr. Bolham, did the *concierge* ever willingly remove his eyes from his *Petit Marseillais*.

Coral strolled out into the blazing heat.

She wondered where on earth Buck had got to, and supposed that he had taken Patrick to bathe.

"*Garçon!*"

Henri, less apathetic than the *concierge*, came forward, his napkin over his arm.

Coral ordered a gin and Italian vermouth, and lit a cigarette. As she sat and sipped her drink her thoughts wandered agreeably.

She'd got Buck where she wanted him.

It was marvellous, to have a lover by whom she was so strongly attracted, at her age.

He'll be the last, she thought. I want to keep him as long as I can.

It was not in her temperament to make plans for the future. Her dread of every passing year was too great to allow her to look ahead. She only envisaged an immediate future of new and becoming clothes, motor expeditions, food and drink and parties, with Buckland always in close attendance on herself. Why the hell didn't he hurry up and come?

A step on the gravel made her look up, but it was only Courteney.

He came and spoke to her, then sat down and invited her to have another drink.

"Thanks," said Coral. "Where's everybody this morning?"

"The Morgans left early. And Moon has gone off to Marseilles—he says to see a man who's sailing for America."

"Hasn't *she* gone too?" Coral asked quickly.

Courteney lit a cigarette very carefully, intent on shielding the light with his hand.

"No," he said at last. "At least, she didn't go off with him. I saw him start. He was by himself."

"Then where's Angie?" demanded Coral, an angry, unformulated suspicion rising in her mind.

"As a matter of fact, Madame called me into the office this morning. She was a good deal upset. Moon paid up his bill all right, but Mrs. Moon has cleared out. Nobody quite knows when."

"How could she? I mean, without letting anybody know. I bet she didn't leave her luggage behind."

"She didn't. Someone carried her cases down the avenue for her, to the garage at the bottom of the hill."

"Who was it?" said Coral hoarsely.

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Romaine, it was your boy's tutor. I was wondering whether, perhaps, he'd left a note for you, or any kind of explanation."

"But he can't have *gone*," said Coral. "He'll come back. He's taken her part of the way. He wouldn't play me a dirty trick like that. When's the next 'bus from St. Raphael?"

She sprang to her feet. Her face was mottled, and her eyes starting.

"He's bound to turn up again," she repeated. "Can't we telephone, or do something? Where's Patrick?"

"I haven't seen him since the Morgans went off. He may have gone down to bathe. I'm afraid this is a bit of a shock, Mrs. Romaine."

He pushed her glass towards her, and she drank from it mechanically.

A car came suddenly into view, travelling almost soundlessly, and drew up before the door. Courteney's eyebrows went up at the sight of it, and he made a scarcely perceptible movement, as if to rise. Coral noticed nothing.

Her muscles had relaxed all at once, she felt sick and old, and dropped back heavily into her chair.

Courteney stared at the two police-officers who had descended from the car and gone quickly up the steps.

"The bastard," muttered Coral, "the dirty bastard! I've been a damn sight too generous with him all along. Old Gush told me I was a fool, and she was right. And that's what he does in return. Why, I tell you it was my money he was playing with at the Rooms when he won the other day—the——"

Abuse poured from her lips.

## (7)

Courteney remained where he was, standing in silence beside her. His gaze was still fixed on the entrance to the Hotel.

He felt an odd certainty that he would presently be summoned. Dulcie would come out, her face pale and swollen with tears as he had seen it that morning, and pipe out shrilly that Madame would be glad if he could spare her a moment. (Dulcie must go to school. He'd send her to some cheap place outside London, this very September.)

The police....

It might mean nothing at all, or it might mean something quite serious. His thoughts hovered for a moment round the Hotel visitors.

Buckland? He wasn't the kind that went outside the law. Too much horse-sense.

Denis Waller was a rotter, if ever there was one, but he hadn't the guts to have got himself into trouble with the French police and kept quiet about it. He'd have betrayed himself long ago.

It was Hilary Moon, if it was anybody.

Mrs. Romaine's ugly voice, uttering ugly words, was going on and on. What a woman!

Courteney uttered sympathetic ejaculations, and heartily longed to see the brown-clad figure of the *chasseur* coming leisurely out to look for him.

But it was not the *chasseur* who came for Courteney. It was the supercilious *concierge*, hurrying in the blazing noonday heat, his face green and his hands shaking.

"*Venez, venez vite. Madame vous demande. Le sous-préfet de police est là. Sur la route de Cannes—on a trouvé——*"

The two men hurried into the Hôtel d'Azur, leaving Coral Romaine on the terrace, and went to the office where Madame, distraught, awaited them.

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# CHAPTER XVI

## (1)

The Duvals were arguing, fiercely and yet amiably.

They sat on the terrace, clad in their tight swimming-suits, and sipped *siróp*, and handed to one another little wafer-biscuits that had mottoes embossed upon their crisp surface:

"*J'aime mieux les brunes.*"

"*Faites-moi vite danser.*"

"*Méfiez-vous de celui-lá.*"

Every now and then they exchanged a word of abuse, followed by a smart tap from her husband on Marcelle Duval's plump brown arm.

Then they both screamed with laughter.

The afternoon siesta was over.

On the balcony below the room of the Duvals, two young girls sat smoking and chattering. They had arrived the day before, and were sharing room number sixteen.

The elder one was expecting a young man to join her from Antibes, and did not know how to explain this to her companion.

The other girl had guessed, and was secretly miserable. She was not attractive to men, and all her emotional life was centred in her companion. She wondered how she could bear it....

An American couple came down the steps. They were both self-conscious, in smart new bathing-suits and coloured cloaks. They talked to one another in high-pitched voices about the sun and the coast.

The man, who was much older than his wife, was wondering whether she would agree to a divorce. He was desperately in love with a Frenchwoman.

Two middle-aged Englishwomen sat on the terrace and waited patiently for the tea they had timorously ordered. Every now and then they smiled at one another, mutually seeking and giving reassurance. Each was thinking of expense and illness and the criticism of relatives. Their smiles only became genuine when a string of children, screaming and laughing, rushed across the terrace and then disappeared out of view round the corner of the Hotel.

The omnibus rattled up the avenue, and drew up noisily at the steps. The *chasseur* opened the door, and the new arrivals got out.

Men and women, posturing and chattering, and each one the repository of a secret and complicated history.

*Sept. 19, 1932*

*June 26, 1933.*

**THE END**

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