ALDOUS HUXLEY

AFTER MANY A SUMMER

A NOVEL

PENGUIN BOOKS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH CHATTO AND WINDUS

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The woods decay, the woods decay and fall
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan

TENNYSON

PART ONE

Chapter One

It had all been arranged by telegram, Jeremy Pordage was to look out for a coloured chauffeur in a grey uniform with a carnation in his button hole, and the coloured chauffeur was to look out for a middle-aged Englishman carrying the Poetical Works of Wordsworth In spite of the crowds at the station, they found one another without difficulty

'Mr Stoyte s chauffeur?'

Mr Pordage, sah?'

Jeremy nodded and, his Wordsworth in one hand, his umbrella in the other, half extended his arms in the gesture of a self-deprecatory mannequin exhibiting with a full and humorous consciousness of their defects, a deplorable figure accentuated by the most ridiculous clothes 'A poor thing,' he seemed to be implying, 'but myself A defensive and, so to say, prophylactic disparagement had become a habit with him He resorted to it on every sort of occasion Suddenly a new idea came into his head Anxiously he began to wonder whether, in this democratic Far West of theirs, one shook hands with the chauffeur – particularly if he happened to be a blackamoor, just to demonstrate that one wasn t a pukka sahib even if one s country did happen to be bearing the White Man s burden In the end he decided to do nothing Or, to be more accurate, the decision was forced upon him – as usual, he said to himself, deriving a curious wry pleasure from the recognition of his own shortcomings While he was hesitating what to do, the chauffeur took off his cap and, slightly over-acting the part of an old world Negro retainer, bowed, smiled toothily and said, 'Welcome to Los Angeles, Mr Pordage sah! Then, changing the tone of his chanting drawl from the dramatic to the confidential, 'I should have knowed you by your voice, Mr Pordage,' he went on, *even without the book.*'

Jeremy laughed a little uncomfortably A week in America had made him self-conscious about that voice of his. A product of Trinity College Cambridge, ten years before the War, it was a small, fluty voice, suggestive of evensong in an English cathedral

them as they advanced, lit up each building, each skyscraper and billboard, as though with a spotlight, as though on purpose to show the new arrival all the sights.

EATS. COCKTAILS. OPEN NITES.

JUMBO MALTS

DO THINGS, GO PLACES WITH CONSOL SUPER GAS!

AT BEVERLY PANTHEON FINE FUNERALS ARE NOT EXPENSIVE

The car sped onwards, and here in the middle of a vacant lot was a restaurant in the form of a seated bulldog, the entrance between the front paws, the eyes illuminated.

'Zoomorph,' Jeremy Pordage murmured to himself, and again, 'zoomorph.' He had the scholar's taste for words. The bulldog shot back into the past

ASTROLOGY, NUMEROLOGY, PSYCHIC READINGS

DRIVE IN FOR NUTBERGERS – whatever they were. He resolved at the earliest opportunity to have one. A nutberger and a jumbo malt.

STOP HERE FOR CONSOL SUPER GAS

Surprisingly, the chauffeur stopped. 'Ten gallons of Super-Super,' he ordered, then, turning back to Jeremy, 'This is our company,' he added. 'Mr Stoyte, he's the president.' He pointed to a billboard across the street. CASH LOANS IN FIFTEEN MINUTES, Jeremy read, CONSULT COMMUNITY SERVICE FINANCE CORPORATION. 'That's another of ours,' said the chauffeur proudly.

They drove on. The face of a beautiful young woman, distorted, like a Magdalene's, with grief, stared out of a giant billboard. BROKEN ROMANCE, proclaimed the caption. SCIENCE PROVES THAT 73 PER CENT OF ALL ADULTS HAVE HALITOSIS

IN TIME OF SORROW LET BEVERLY PANTHEON BE YOUR FRIEND

FACIALS, PERMANENTS, MANICURES.

BETTY'S BEAUTY SHOPPE.

Next door to the beauty shoppe was a Union office. That cable to his mother. Heavens, I Jeremy leaned forward and, in the apol when speaking to servants, asked the moment. The car came to a halt. With on his mild rabbit like face, Jeremy the pavement, into the office.

At home, when he used it, nobody pa d any particular
He had never had to make jokes about it, as he had done in protection, about his appearance for example, or his age Here, America, th ngs were different He had only to order a cup of coffee or ask the way to the lavatory (which anyhow wasn't called the lavatory in this disconcerning country) for people to stare at him with an amused and attentive curiosity as though he were a freak on show in an amusement park. It had not been at all agreeable

'Where's my porter? he said fussily in order to change the subject.

A few minutes later they were on their way Cradled in the back seat of the car, out of range, he hoped, of the chauffeur s conversation, Jeremy Pordage abandoned himself to the pleasure of merely looking Southern Cal fornia rolled past the windows, all he had to do was to keep his eyes open.

The first thing to present itself was a slum of Africans and Filipinos, Japanese, and Mexicans. And what permutations and combinations of black, yellow and brown! What complex bastardies! And the girls – how beautiful in their artificial silk! 'And Negro ladies in white muslin gowns' His favourite line in *The Prelude*. He smiled to himself And meanwhile the slum had given place to the tall bu ldings of a business district.

The population took on a more Caucasian tinge. At every corner there was a drug-store The newspaper boys were selling h eadl nes about Franco s drive on Barcelona Most of the girls, as they walked along, seemed to be absorbed in silent prayer, but I e supposed, on second thoughts, it was only gum that they were thus incessantly ruminating Gum, not God. Then suddenly the car plunged into a tunnel and emerged into another world, a vast, untidy, suburban world of filling stations and b llboards, of low houses in gardens, of vacant lots and waste-paper, of occas onal shops and office buildings and churches – Primitive Methodist churches bu lt, surprisingly enough, in the style of the Cartuja at Granada, Catholic churches like Canterbury Cathedral, synagogues disguised as Hagia Sophia, Christian Science churches w th pillars and pediments like banks It was a winter day and early in the morning, but the sun shone brilliantly, th e sky was without a cloud. The car was travelling westwards, and th e sunshine, slanting from behind

them as they advanced, lit up each building, each skysign and billboard, as though with a spot light, as though on purpose to show the new arrival all the sights.

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Next door to the beauty shoppe was a Western Union office. That cable to his mother . Heavens, he had almost forgotten! Jeremy leaned forward and, in the apologetic tone he always used when speaking to servants, asked the chauffeur to stop for a moment The car came to a halt With a preoccupied expression on his mild, rabbit like face, Jeremy got out and hurried across the pavement, into the office.

'Mrs Pordage, The Araucarias, Woking, England,' he wrote, smiling a little as he did so. The exquisite absurdity of that address was a standing source of amusement. 'The Araucarias, Woking.' His mother, when she bought the house, had wanted to change the name, as being too ingenuously middle-class, too much like a joke by Hilaire Belloc. 'But that's the beauty of it,' he had protested. 'That's the charm.' And he had tried to make her see how utterly right it would be for them to live at such an address. The deliciously comic incongruity between the name of the house, and the nature of its occupants! And what a beautiful, topsy-turvy appositeness in the fact that Oscar Wilde's old friend, the witty and cultured Mrs Pordage, should write her sparkling letters from The Araucarias, and that from these same Araucarias, these Araucarias, mark you, at *Woking*, should come the works of mingled scholarship and curiously rarefied wit for which her son had gained his reputation. Mrs Pordage had almost instantly seen what he was driving at. No need, thank goodness, to labour your points where she was concerned. You could talk entirely in hints and anacoluthons: she could be relied on to understand. The Araucarias had remained The Araucarias.

Having written the address, Jeremy paused, pensively frowned and imitated the familiar gesture of biting his pencil – only to find, disconcertingly, that this particular pencil was tipped with brass and fastened to a chain. Mrs Pordage, The Araucarias, Woking, England, he read out aloud, in the hope that the words would inspire him to compose the right, the perfect message – the message his mother expected of him, at once tender and witty, charged with a genuine devotion ironically worded, acknowledging her maternal domination, but at the same time making fun of it, so that the old lady could salve her conscience by pretending that her son was entirely free, and herself the least tyrannical of mothers. It wasn't easy – particularly with this pencil on a chain. After several abortive essays he decided, though it was definitely unsatisfactory, on: Climate being subtropical shall break vow re underclothes stop Wish you were here my sake not yours as you would scarcely appreciate this unfinished Bournemouth indefinitely magnified stop.'

Unfinished what?' questioned the young woman on the further side of the counter.

B o-u r n-e-m-o-u t h,' Jeremy spelled out. He smiled, behind the bi focal lenses of his spectacles his blue eyes twinkled, and, with a gesture of which he was quite unconscious, but which he always, automatically, made when he was about to utter one of his little jokes, he stroked the smooth bald spot on the top of his head. 'You know,' he said, in a particularly fluty tone, 'the bourne to which no traveller goes, if he can possibly l elp it'

The girl looked at him blankly, then, inferring from his expression that something funny had been said, and remembering that Courteous Service was Western Union s slogan, gave the bright smile for which the poor old chump was evidently asking and went on reading' Hope you have fun at Grasse stop Tendresses Jeremy'

It was an expensive message, but, luckily, he reflected, as he took out his pocket book, luckily Mr Stoyte was grossly overpaying him Three months' work, six thousand dollars So damn the expense.

He returned to the car and they drove on. Mile after mile they went, and the suburban houses, the gas stations, the vacant lots, the churches, the shops went along with them, interminably To right and left, between palms, or pepper trees, or acacias, the streets of the enormous residential quarter receded to the vanishing point.

CLASSY EATS MILE HIGH CONES

JESUS SAVES

HAMBURGERS

Yet once more the traffic lights turned red. A paper boy came to the window Franco claims gains in Catalonia,' Jeremy read, and turned away The frightfulness of the world had reached a point at which it had become for him merely boring From the halted car in front of them, two elderly ladies, both with permanently waved hair and both wearing crimson trousers, descended, each carrying a Yorkshire terrier The dogs were set down at the foot of the traffic signal Before the animals could make up their minds to use the convenience, the lights had changed. The Negro shifted into first, and the car swerved forward, into the future. Jeremy was thinking of his mother Disquietingly enough she too had a Yorkshire terrier

FINE LIQUORS

TURKEY SANDWICHES

GO TO CHURCH AND FEEL BETTER ALL THE WEEK

WHAT IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS IS GOOD FOR YOU

Another zoomorph presented itself this time a real estate office in the form of an Egyptian sphinx

JESUS IS COMING SOON

YOU TOO CAN HAVE ABIDING YOUTH WITH BRASSIÈRES

BEVERLY PANTHEON, THE CEMETERY THAT IS DIFFERENT

With the triumphant expression of Puss-in-Boots enumerating the possessions of the Marquis of Carabas, the Negro shot a glance over his shoulder at Jeremy, waved his hand towards the billboard, and said, 'That's yours too.'

'You mean, the Beverly Pantheon?'

The man nodded. 'Finest cemetery in the world, I guess,' he said and added, after a moment's pause, 'Maybe you'd like to see it. It wouldn't hardly be out of our way.'

'That would be very nice,' said Jeremy with upper-class English graciousness. Then feeling that he ought to express his acceptance rather more warmly and democratically, he cleared his throat and, with a conscious effort to reproduce the local vernacular, added that it would be *swell*. Pronounced in his Trinity College-Cambridge voice the word sounded so unnatural that he began to blush with embarrassment. Fortunately, the chauffeur was too busy with the traffic to notice.

They turned to the right, sped past a Rosicrucian Temple, past two cat and dog hospitals, past a School for Drum Majorettes and two more advertisements of the Beverly Pantheon. As they turned to the left on Sunset Boulevard, Jeremy had a glimpse of a young woman who was doing her shopping in a hydrangea-blue strapless bathing-suit, platinum curls and a black fur jacket. Then she too was whirled back into the past.

The present was a road at the foot of a line of steep hills, a road flanked by small, expensive-looking shops, by restaurants, by night-clubs shuttered against the sunlight, by offices and apartment houses. Then they too had taken their places in the irrevocable. A sign proclaimed that they were crossing the city limits of Beverly Hills. The surroundings changed. The road was flanked by the gardens of a rich residential quarter. Through trees, Jeremy

saw the façades of houses, all new, almost all in good taste – elegant and witty pastiches of Lutyens manor houses, of Little Trianons, of Monticellos light hearted parodies of Le Corbusier s solemn machines-for living in, fantastic Mexican adaptations of Mexican haciendas and New England farms

They turned to the right Enormous palm trees lined the road. In the sunlight, masses of mesembryanthemums blazed with an intense magenta glare The houses succeeded one another, like the pavilions at some endless international exhibition Gloucestershire followed Andalusia and gave place in turn to Touraine and Oaxaca, Düsseldorf and Massachusetts

That s Harold Lloyd s place, said the chauffeur indicating a kind of Boboli And that s Charlie Chaplin s And that's Pickfair'

The road began to mount, ver tiginously The chauffeur pointed across an intervening gulf of shadow at what seemed a Tibetan Lamasery on the opposite hill 'That s where Ginger Rogers lives. Yes, sir,' he nodded triumphantly, as he twirled the steering wheel

Five or six more turns brought the car to the top of the hill Below and behind lay the plain, with the city like a map extending indefinitely into a pink haze.

Before and to either hand were mountains – ridge after ridge as far as the eye could reach, a desiccated Scotland, empty under the blue desert sky

The car turned a shoulder of orange rock, and there all at once, on a summit hitherto concealed from view, was a huge sky sign with the words BEVERLY PANTHEON, THE PERSONALITY CEMETERY, in six foot neon tubes and above it, on the very crest, a full scale reproduction of the Leaning Tower of Pisa – only this one didn t lean.

See that? said the Negro impressively 'That s the Tower of Resurrection. Two hundred thousand dollars, that s what it cost Yes sir He spoke with an emphatic solemnity One was made to feel that the money had all come out of his own pocket.

Chapter Two

An hour later, they were on their way again, having seen thing Everyth ng The sloping lawns, like a green oasis in mountain desolation The groves of trees The tombstones in grass. The Pets Cemetery, with its marble group after Landseer's D gn ty and Impudence The tiny Church of the Poet – a miniature reproduction of Holy Trinity at Stratford-on Avon complete with Shakespeare's tomb and a twenty four hour service of organ music played automatically by the Perpetual Wur l tzer and broadcast by concealed loudspeakers all over the cemetery

Then leading out of the vestry, the Bride's Apartment (for one was married at the Tiny Church as well as buried from it) – the Bride's Apartment that had just been re-decorated said the chauffeur, in the style of Norma Shearer's boudoir in *Marie Antoinette* And, next to the Bride's Apartment, the exquisite black marble Vestibule of Ashes, leading to the Crematorium, where three super modern oil burning mortuary furnaces were always under heat and ready for any emergency

Accompanied wherever they went by the tremolos of the Per petual W url tzer, they had driven next to look at the Tower of Resurrection – from the outside only, for it housed the executive offices of the West Coast Cemeteries Corporation. Then the Children's Corner with its statues of Peter Pan and the Infant Jesus, its groups of alabaster babies playing with bronze rabbits, its l ly pool and an apparatus labelled The Fountain of Rainbow Music, from wh ch th ere spouted simultaneously water, coloured l ghts and the inescapable strains of the Perpetual Wurlitzer Then, in rap d success on, the Garden of Qu et, the Tiny Taj Mahal, the Old World Mortuary And reserved by the chauffeur to the last, as the final and crowning proof of his employer's glory, the Pantheon itself

Was it possible, Jeremy asked himself, that such an object ex sted? It was certainly not probable The Beverly Pantheon lacked all verisimilitude, was something entirely beyond his powers to

invert. The fact that the idea of it was now in his mind proved, therefore, that he must really have seen it He shut his eyes against the landscape and recalled to his memory the details of that incredible reality The external architecture, modelled on that of Boecklin's 'Totenmsel'. The circular vestibule. The replica of Rodin's 'Le Baiser', illuminated by concealed pink floodlights. With its flights of black marble stairs The seven story columbarium, the endless galleries, its tiers on tiers of slab sealed tombs The bronze and silver urns of the cremated, like athletic trophies. The stained glass windows after Burne-Jones The texts inscribed on marble scrolls The Perpetual Wurlitzer crooning on every floor. The sculpture . . .

That was the hardest to believe, Jeremy reflected, behind closed eyelids Sculpture almost as ubiquitous as the Wurlitzer Statues wherever you turned your eyes Hundreds of them, bought wholesale, one would guess, from some monumental masonry concern at Carrara or Pietrasanta. All nudes, all female, all exuberantly nubile The sort of statues one would expect to see in the reception-room of a high-class brothel in Rio de Janeiro 'Oh, Death,' demanded a marble scroll at the entrance to every gallery, 'where is thy sting?' Purely, but eloquently, the statues gave their reassuring reply Statues of young ladies in nothing but a very tight belt imbedded, with Bernini like realism, in the Parian flesh Statues of young ladies crouching, young ladies using both hands to be modest, young ladies stretching, writhing callipygously stooping to tie their sandals, reclining Young ladies with doves, with panthers, with other young ladies, with upturned eyes expressive of the soul's awakening 'I am the Resurrection and the Life,' proclaimed the scrolls 'The Lord is my shepherd, therefore shall I want nothing' Nothing, not even Wurlitzer, not even girls in tightly buckled belts 'Death is swallowed up in victory' – the victory no longer of the spirit but of the body, the well fed body, for ever youthful, immortally athletic, indefatigably sexy The Moslem paradise had had copulations six centuries long In this new Christian heaven, progress, no doubt, would have stepped up the period to a millennium and added the joys of everlasting tennis, eternal golf, and swimming

All at once the car began to descend Jeremy opened his eyes

again, and saw that they had reached the further edge of the of hills, among which the Pantheon was built.

Below lay a great tawny plain, chequered with patches and dotted with white houses. On its further side, fifteen or miles away, ranges of pinkish mountains fretted the horizon.

'What's this?' Jeremy asked.

'The San Fernando Valley,' said the chauffeur. He pointed the middle distance. 'That's where Groucho Marx has his pl he said. 'Yes, sir.'

At the bottom of the hill the car turned to the left along a wide road that ran, a ribbon of concrete and suburban buildings, through the plain. The chauffeur put on speed, sign succeeded sign with bewildering rapidity. MALTS CABIN DINE AND DANCE AT THE CHÂTEAU HONOLULU SPIRITUAL HEALING AND COLONIC IRRIGATION BLOCKLONG HOT DOGS BUY YOUR DREAM HOME *NOW*. And behind the signs the mathematically planted rows of apricot and walnut trees flicked past – a succession of glimpsed perspectives preceded and followed every time by fan-like approaches and retirements.

Dark-green and gold, enormous orange orchards manœuvred, each one a mile-square regiment glittering in the sunlight. Far off, the mountains traced their uninterpretable graph of boom and slump.

'Tarzana,' said the chauffeur startlingly, there, sure enough, was the name suspended, in white letters, across the road. 'There's Tarzana College,' the man went on, pointing to a group of Spanish-Colonial palaces clustering round a Romanesque basilica. 'Mr Stoyte, he's just given them an auditorium.'

They turned to the right along a less important road. The groves gave place for a few miles to huge fields of alfalfa and fusty grass, then returned again more luxuriant than ever. Meanwhile the mountains on the northern edge of the valley were approaching and, slanting in from the west, another range was looming up to the left. They drove on. The road took a sudden turn, aiming, it seemed, at the point where the two ranges must come together. All at once, through a gap between two orchards, Jeremy Pordage saw a most surprising sight. About half a mile from the foot of the mountains, like an island off a cliff bound coast, a rocky hill rose abruptly, in places almost precipitously, from the plain. On the

summit of the bluff and as though growing out of it in a kind of efflorescence, stood a castle But what a castle! The donjon was like a skyscraper, the bastions plunged headlong with the effortless swoop of concrete dams. The thing was Gothic, mediaeval, baronial – doubly baronial, Gothic with a Gothicry raised, so to speak, *to a higher power, more mediaeval than any building of the* thirteenth century For this this Object as Jeremy was reduced to calling it, was mediaeval, not out of vulgar historical necessity, *like Coucy, say, or Alnwick, but out of pure fun and wantonness,* platonically, one might say It was mediaeval as only a witty and irresponsible modern architect would wish to be mediaeval, as only *the most competent modern engineers are technically equipped to* be.

Jeremy was startled into speech 'What on earth is that?' he asked *pointing at the nightmare on the hill top*

'Why, that's Mr Stoyte's place,' said the retainer; and smiling yet once more with the pride of vicarious ownership, he added 'It's a pretty fine home, I guess.'

The orange groves closed in again, leaning back in his seat, Jeremy Pordage began to wonder, rather apprehensively, what he had let himself in for when he accepted Mr Stoyte's offer The pay was princely, *the work, which was to catalogue the almost legendary* Hauberk Papers, would be delightful But that cemetery, this Object – Jeremy shook his head. He had known, of course, that Mr Stoyte was rich, collected pictures, owned a show place in California But no one had ever led him to expect *this* The humorous puritanism of his good taste was shocked, he was appalled at *the prospect of meeting the person capable of committing such an* enormity Between that person and oneself, what contact, what community of thought or feeling could possibly exist? Why had he sent for one? For it was obvious that he couldn't conceivably like one's books But had he even read one's books? Did he have the faintest idea of what one was like? Would he be capable, for example, of understanding why one had insisted on the name of The Araucarias remaining unchanged? Would he appreciate one's point of view about ?

These anxious questionings were interrupted by the noise of the horn, *which the chauffeur was sounding with a loud and offensive*

Insistence Jeremy looked up Fifty yards ahead, an ancient T was creeping tremulously along the road It carried, lashed curely to roof and running boards and luggage-rack, a cargo of household goods – rolls of bedding, an old iron stove, a crate of pots and pans, a folded tent, a tin bath As they flashed past, Jeremy had a glimpse of three dull-eyed, anaemic children, of a woman with a piece of sacking wrapped round her shoulders, of a haggard, unshaved man.

'Transients,' the chauffeur explained in a tone of contempt.

'What s that? Jeremy asked

'Why, *transients*,' the Negro repeated, as though the emphasis were an explanation 'Guess that lot s from the dust bowl Kansas licence plate Come to pick our navels '

'Come to pick your navels?' Jeremy echoed incredulously

'Navel oranges,' said the chauffeur 'It's the season. Pretty good year for nivels I guess '

They emerged once more into the open, and there once more was the Object larger than ever Jeremy had time to study the details of its construction. A wall with towers encircled the base of the hills, and there was a second line of defence, in the most approved post Crusades manner, half way up On the summit stood the square keep, surrounded by subsidiary buildings.

From the donjon, Jeremy s eyes travelled down to a group of buildings in the plain, not far from the foot of the hill Across the façade of the largest of them the words, 'Stoyte s Home for Sick Children , were written in gilded letters Two flags, one the stars and stripes, the other a white banner with the letter S in scarlet, fluttered in the breeze Then a grove of leafless walnut trees shut out the view once again Almost at the same moment the chauffeur threw his engine out of gear and put on the brakes. The car came gently to a halt beside a man who was walking at a brisk pace along the grassy verge of the road

'Want a ride, Mr Propter?' the Negro called.

The stranger turned his head, gave the man a smile of recognition and came to the window of the car He was a large man, broad-shouldered, but rather stooping with brown hair turning grey and a face, Jeremy thought, like the face of one of those statues which Gothic sculptors carved for a place high up on a

West front – a face of sudden prominences and deeply shadowed folds and hollows, emphatically rough hewn so as to be expressive even at a distance But this particular face, he went on to notice, was not merely emphatic, not only for the distance, it was a face also for the near point, also for intimacy, a subtle face, in which there were the signs of sensibility and intelligence as well as of power, of a gentle and humorous serenity no less than of energy and strength

'Hullo, George' the stranger said, addressing the chauffeur, 'nice of you to stop for me'

'Well, I'm sure glad to see you, Mr Propter,' said the Negro cordially Then he half turned in his seat, waved a hand towards Jeremy, and with a florid formality of tone and manner said 'I'd like to have you meet Mr Pordage of England Mr Pordage, this is Mr Propter'

The two men shook hands, and, after an exchange of courtesies, Mr Propter got into the car

'You're visiting with Mr Stoyte?' he asked, as the chauffeur drove on

Jeremy shook his head He was here on business had come to look at some manuscripts – the Hauberk Papers, to be precise.

Mr Propter listened attentively, nodded from time to time and, when Jeremy had finished sat for a moment in silence

'Take a decayed Christian,' he said at last in a meditative tone, 'and the remains of a Stoic, mix thoroughly with good manners, a bit of money and an old fashioned education simmer for several years in a university Result a scholar and a gentleman Well, there were worse types of human being' He uttered a little laugh 'I might almost claim to have been one myself, once, long ago'

Jeremy looked at him inquiringly 'You're not *William* Propter, are you?' he asked 'Not *Short Studies in the Counter Reformation*, by any chance?

The other inclined his head

Jeremy looked at him in amazement and delight. Was it possible? he asked himself Those *Short Studies* had been one of his favourite books – a model he had always thought of their kind

'Well, I'm j ggered!' he said aloud, using the schoolboyish locution deliberately and as though between inverted commas 'He

insistence. Jeremy looked up. Fifty yards ahead, an ancient Ford was creeping tremulously along the road It carried, lashed insecurely to roof and running boards and luggage-rack, a squalid cargo of household goods – rolls of bedding, an old iron stove, a crate of pots and pans, a folded tent, a tin bath. As they flashed past, Jeremy had a glimpse of three dull-eyed, anaemic children, of a woman with a piece of sacking wrapped round her shoulders, of a haggard, unshaved man.

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West front – a face of sudden prominences and deeply shadowed folds and hollows, emphatically rough hewn so as to be expressive even at a distance. But this particular face, he went on to notice, was not merely emphatic, not only for the distance, it was a face also for the near point, also for intimacy, a subtle face, in which there were the signs of sensibility and intelligence as well as of power of a gentle and humorous serenity no less than of energy and strength.

'Hullo, George,' the stranger said, addressing the chauffeur, 'no ce of you to stop for me.'

Well, I m sure glad to see you, Mr Propter,' said the Negro cordially Then he half-turned in his seat, waved a hand towards Jeremy, and with a florid formality of tone and manner said, *I d* like to have you meet Mr Pordage of England. Mr Pordage, *this is* Mr Propter'

The two men shook hands, and, after an exchange of courtesies, Mr Propter got into the car

You re visiting with Mr Stoyte? he asked, as the *chauffeur* drove on

had found that, both in writing and in conversation, the exquisite effects to be obtained by the judicious employ, solemn or cultural context, of a phrase of slang a piece of profanity or obscenity 'I'll be damned!' he exploded again, his consciousness of the intentional sillness of the words made stroke his bald head and cough

There was another moment of silence Then instead of talking as Jeremy had expected, about the *Short Studies*, Mr Propter merely shook his head and said, 'We mostly are'

'Mostly are what?' asked Jeremy

Juggered Mr Propter answered 'Damned In the psychological sense of the word, he added.

The walnut trees came to an end, and there once more, on the starboard bow, was the Object. Mr Propter pointed in its direction. 'Poor Jo Stoyte!' he said 'Think of having *that* millstone round one's neck. Not to mention, of course, all the other millstones that go with it. What luck we've had, don't you think? – we who've never been given the opportunity of being anything much worse than scholars and gentlemen! After another little silence, 'Poor Jo,' he went on with a smile, 'he isn't either of them You'll find him a bit trying Because of course he'll want to bully you, just because tradition says that your type is superior to his type Not to mention the fact,' he added, looking into Jeremy's face with an expression of mingled amusement and sympathy, 'that you're probably the sort of person that invites persecution. A bit of a murderee, I'm afraid as well as a scholar and gentleman.'

Feeling simultaneously annoyed by the man's indiscretion and touched by his friendliness, Jeremy smiled rather nervously and nodded his head

'Maybe, Mr Propter went on, 'maybe it would help you to be less of a murderee towards Jo Stoyte if you knew what gave him the original impulsion to get damned in just *that* way – and he pointed again towards the Object. 'We were at school together, Jo and I – only nobody called him Jo in those days We called him Slob, or Jelly Belly Because, you see, poor Jo was the local fat-boy, the only fat boy in the school during those years.' He paused for a moment, then went on in another tone, 'I've often wondered why people have always made fun of fatness. Perhaps there's some-

thing intrinsically wrong with fat. For example, there isn't a single fat saint – except, of course, old Thomas Aquinas, and I cannot see any reason to suppose that he was a real saint, a saint in the popular sense of the word, which happens to be the true sense. If Thomas is a saint, then Vincent de Paul isn't. And if Vincent's a saint, which he obviously is, then Thomas isn't. And perhaps that enormous belly of his had something to do with it. Who knows? But anyhow, that's by the way. We're talking about Jo Stoyte. And poor Jo, as I say, was a fat boy and, being fat, was fair game for the rest of us. God, how we punished him for his glandular deficiencies! And how disastrously he reacted to that punishment! Over-compensation.... But here I am at home,' he added, looking out of the window as the car slackened speed and came to a halt in front of a small white bungalow set in the midst of a clump of eucalyptus trees. 'We'll go on with this another time. But remember, if poor Jo gets too offensive, think of what he was at school and be sorry for him – and don't be sorry for yourself.' He got out of the car, closed the door behind him and, waving a hand to the chauffeur, walked quickly up the path and entered the little house.

The car rolled on again. At once bewildered and reassured by his encounter with the author of the *Short Studies*, Jeremy sat inertly looking out of the window. They were very near the Object now, and suddenly he noticed, for the first time, that the castle hill was surrounded by a moat. Some few hundred yards from the water's edge the car passed between two pillars, topped by heraldic lions. Its passage, it was evident, interrupted a beam of invisible light directed on a photo-electric cell; for no sooner were they past the lions than a drawbridge began to descend. Five seconds before they reached the moat, it was in place, the car rolled smoothly across and came to a halt in front of the main gateway of the castle's outer walls. The chauffeur got out and, speaking into a telephone receiver concealed in a convenient loophole, announced his presence. The chromium plated portcullis rose noiselessly, the double doors of stainless steel swung back. They drove in. The car began to climb. The second line of walls was pierced by another gate, which opened automatically as they approached. Between the inner side of this second wall and the slope of the hill a ferro-concrete bridge had been constructed, large enough to

accommodate a tennis-court. In the shadowy space beneath, ' caught sight of something familiar An instant later he ' nized it as a replica of the grotto of Lourdes

'Miss Maunciple, she's a Catholic,' remarked the jerking his thumb in the direction of the grotto 'That's why had it made for her We's Presbyterians in *our* family,' he

'And who is Miss Maunciple?'

The chauffeur hesitated for a moment. 'Well, she's a young' Mr Stoyte's kind of friendly with,' he explained at last, then changed the subject.

The car climbed on. Beyond the grotto all the hill side was a cactus garden Then the road swung round to the northern sl of the bluff, and the cactuses gave place to grass and shrubs. On a little terrace, over-elegant like a fashion plate from some mythological *Vogue* for goddesses, a bronze nymph by Giambologna spouted two streams of water from her deliciously polisl ed breasts A little farther on, behind wire netting, a group of baboons squatted among the rocks or paraded the obscenity of their hairless rumps.

Still cl mbing, the car turned again and finally drew up on a circular concrete platform, carried out on cantilevers over a preci pice Once more the old fashioned retainer, the chauffeur taking off his cap, did a final impersonation of himself welcoming the young master home to the plantation, then set to work to unload the luggage

Jeremy Pordage walked to the balustrade and looked over The ground fell almost sheer for about a hundred feet, then sloped steeply to the inner circle of walls and, below them, to the outer fortifications. Beyond lay the moat, and on the farther side of the moat stretched the orange orchards *'Im dunklen Laub die goldn' Orangen gluhen* he murmured to himself, and then He hangs in shades the orange bright. Like golden lamps in a green night.' Marvell s rendering he decided, was better than Goethe s. And, meanwhile the oranges seemed to have become brighter and more significant. For Jeremy, direct, unmediated experience was always hard to take in, always more or less disquieting Life became safe, things assumed meaning, only when they had been translated into words and confined between the covers of a book. The oranges

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were beautifully pigeon holed, but what about the castle? He turned round and, leaning back against the parapet, looked up The Object impended, insolently enormous Nobody had dealt poetically with that Not Childe Roland, not the King of Thule not Marmion, not the Lady of Shalott, not Sir Leoline. Sir Leoline, he repeated to himself with a connoisseur's appreciation of romantic absurdity, Sir Leoline, the baron rich who had – what? A toothless mastiff bitch But Mr Stoyte had baboons and a sacred grotto, Mr Stoyte had a chromium portcullis and the Hauberk Papers, Mr Stoyte had a cemetery like an amusement park and a donjon like

There was a sudden rumbling sound, the great nail studded doors of the Early English entrance porch rolled back, and from between them, as though propelled by a hurricane a small, thick set man, with a red face and a mass of snow white hair, darted out on to the terrace and bore down upon Jeremy His expression, as he advanced, did not change The face wore that shut, unsmiling mask which American workmen tend to put on in their dealing with strangers – in order to prove, by not making the ingratiating grimaces of courtesy, that theirs is a free country and you're not going to come it over them.

Not having been brought up in a free country, Jeremy had automatically begun to smile as this person, whom he guessed to be his host and employer, came hurrying towards him Confronted by the unwavering grimness of the other's face, he suddenly became conscious of this smile – conscious that it was out of place, that it must be making him look a fool Profoundly embarrassed, he tried to readjust his face

Mr Pordage? said the stranger in a harsh, barking voice. Pleased to meet you My name's Stoyte' As they shook hands, he peered, still unsmiling, into Jeremy's face You're older than I thought,' he added

For the second time that morning Jeremy made his mannequin's gesture of apologetic self-exhibition

The sere and withered leaf, he said. 'One's sinking into senility One's '

Mr Stoyte cut him short What's your age? he asked in a loud peremptory tone, like that of a police sergeant interrogating a captured thief

'Fifty four'

'Only fifty four? Mr Stoyte shook his head Ought to pep at fifty four How s your sex life? he added certainly

Jeremy tried to laugh off his embarrassment He patted his bald head 'Mon beau printemps et mon été ont per la fenêtre, he quoted.

What s that? said Mr Stoyte, frowning 'No use talking languages to me I never had any education' He braying of laughter I m head of an oil-company here,' he said 'Got two thousand filling-stations in Cal fornia alone And not one man in any of those filling-stations that isn t a college graduate! He brayed again triumphantly Go and talk foreign languages to them He was silent for a moment, then, pursuing an unexplicit association of ideas, My agent in London, he went on, 'the man who picks up things for me there – he gave me your name. Told me you were the right man for those – what do you call them? You know, those papers I bought this summer Roebuck? Hobuck?

Hauberk,' said Jeremy, and with a gloomy satisfaction noted that he had been quite right. The man had never read one s books. never even heard of one s existence. Still one had to remember that e had been called Jelly Belly when he was young.

Hauberk, Mr Stoyte repeated with a contemptuous impatience. nyhow he said you were the man.' Then, without pause or nsition What was it you were saying about your sex life, when u started that foreign stuff on me?

Jeremy laughed uncomfortably One was implying that it was mal for one s age'

What do you know about what s normal at your age? said Mr te Go and talk to Dr Obispo about it. It won t cost you any- Obispo s on salary He s the house physician.' Abruptly ging the subject, Would you like to see the castle he asked. ake you not '

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picion suspicion turned suddenly to anger 'What the hell do you mean?' he shouted.

Quailing before his fury, Jeremy stammered something about the Beverly Pantheon and that he had understood from the chauffeur that Mr Stoyte had a financial interest in the company

I see,' said the other, somewhat mollified, but still frowning 'I thought you meant Stoyte broke off in the middle of the sentence, leaving the bewildered Jeremy to guess what he had thought. 'Come on,' he barked, and, bursting into movement, he hurried towards the entrance to the house.

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'Only fifty four?' Mr Stoyte shook his head. 'Ought to be full of pep at fifty four. How's your sex life?' he added disconcertingly.

Jeremy tried to laugh off his embarrassment. He twinkled, he parted his bald head. '*Mon beau printemps et mon été ont fait le saut par la fenêtre*,' he quoted.

'What's that?' said Mr Stoyte, frowning. 'No use talking foreign languages to me. I never had any education.' He broke into sudden braying of laughter. 'I'm head of an oil-company here,' he said. 'Got two thousand filling-stations in California alone. And not one man in any of those filling-stations that isn't a college graduate!' He brayed again, triumphantly. 'Go and talk foreign languages to *them*.' He was silent for a moment, then, pursuing an unexplicit association of ideas, 'My agent in London,' he went on, 'the man who picks up things for me there – he gave me your name. Told me you were the right man for those – what do you call them? You know, those papers I bought this summer. Roebuck? Hobuck?'

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'What do *you* know about what's normal at your age?' said Mr Stoyte. 'Go and talk to Dr Obispo about it. It won't cost you anything. Obispo's on salary. He's the house physician.' Abruptly changing the subject, 'Would you like to see the castle?' he asked. 'I'll take you round.'

'Oh, that's very kind of you,' said Jeremy effusively. And, for the sake of making a little polite conversation, he added 'I've already seen your burial-ground.'

'Seen my burial-ground?' Mr Stoyte repeated in

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Chapter Three

THERE was silence in Ward Sixteen of the Stoyte Home for Sick Children, silence and the luminous twilight of drawn venetian blinds It was the mid morning rest period Three of the five small convalescents were asleep A fourth lay staring at the ceiling pensively picking his nose The fifth, a little girl, was whispering to a doll as curly and Aryan as herself Seated by one of the windows, a young nurse was absorbed in the latest issue of *True Confessions*

His heart gave a lurch' she read. With a strangled cry he pressed me closer For months we'd been fighting against just this, but the magnet of our passion was too strong for us The clamorous pressure of his lips had struck an answering spark within my melting body

' Germaine,' he whispered Don't make me wait. Won't you be good to me now, darling?'

He was so gentle, but so ruthless too – as a girl in love wants a man to be ruthless I felt myself swept away by the rising tide of '

There was a noise outside in the corridor The door of the ward flew open, as though before the blast of a hurricane, and someone came rushing into the room.

The nurse looked up with a start of surprise which the completeness of her absorption in 'The Price of a Thrill rendered positively agonizing Her almost immediate reaction to the shock was one of anger

What's the idea?' she began indignantly, then she recognized the intruder and her expression changed Why, Mr Stoyte!

Disturbed by the noise, the young nose-picker dropped his eyes from the ceiling the little girl turned away from her doll

Uncle Jo! they shouted simultaneously 'Uncle Jo!'

Starting out of sleep the others took up the cry

'Uncle Jo! Uncle Jo!

Mr Stoyte was touched by the warmth of his reception The face which Jeremy had found so disquietingly grim relaxed into a smile. In mock protest he covered his ears with his hands. You'll

make me deaf,' he cried Then, in an aside to the nurse, 'Poor kids! he murmured. 'Makes me feel I d kind of like to cry ' His voice became husky with sentiment. 'And when one thinks how sick they've been .' He shook his head, leaving the sentence unfinished, then, in another tone, By the way,' he added, waving a large square hand in the direction of Jeremy Pordage, who had followed him into the ward and was standing near the door, wearing an expression of bewildered embarrassment, 'this is Mr .. Mr Hell! I ve forgotten your name '

'Pordage,' said Jeremy, and reminded himself that Mr Stoyte's name had once been Slob

'Pordage, that's it. Ask him about history and literature,' he added derisively to the nurse 'He knows it all '

Jeremy was modestly protesting that his period was only from the invention of Ossian to the death of Keats, when Mr Stoyte turned back to the children and in a voice that drowned the other's faintly fluted disclaimers, shouted 'Guess what Uncle Jo's brought you!

They guessed. Candies, bubble gum, balloons, guinea pigs Mr Stoyte continued triumphantly to shake his head Finally, when the children had exhausted their power of imagination, he dipped into the pocket of his old tweed jacket and produced, first a whistle, then a mouth-organ, then a small musical box, then a trumpet, then a wooden rattle, then an automatic pistol. This, however, he hastily put back.

'Now play,' he said, when he had distributed the instruments 'All together One, two, three.' And, beating time with both arms, he began to sing, 'Way down upon the Swanee River '

At this latest in a long series of shocks and surprises, Jeremy's mild face took on an expression of intenser bewilderment

What a morning! The arrival at dawn. The Negro retainer The interminable suburb. The Beverly Pantheon The Object among the orange trees, and his meeting with William Propter and this really dreadful Stoyte. Then, inside the castle, the Rubens and the great El Greco in the hall, the Vermeer in the elevator, the Rembrandt etchings along the corridors, the Winterhalter in the butler's pantry

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Then Miss Maunciple's Louis XV boudoir, with the and the two Lancrets and the fully equipped soda-fountain in rococo embrasure, and Miss Maunciple herself, in an kimono, drinking a raspberry and peppermint ice-cream soda at own counter He had been introduced, had refused the offer of sundae and been hurried on again always at top speed, always as though on the wings of a tornado, to see the other sights of the castle The Rumpus Room, for example, with frescoes of elephants by Sert. The library, with its woodwork by Grinling Gibbons, but with no books, because Mr Stoyte had not yet brought himself to buy any The small dining room, with its Fra Angelico and its furniture from Brighton Pavilion The large dining room, modelled on the interior of the mosque at Fatehpur Sikri The ballroom, with its mirrors and coffered ceiling The thirteenth-century stained glass in the eleventh floor W C. The morning room, with Boucher's picture of La Petite Morphil bottom upwards on a pink satin sofa The chapel, imported in fragments from Goa, with the walnut confessional used by St François de Sales at Annecy The functional billiard room. The indoor swimming pool The Second Empire bar, with its nudes by Ingres The two gymnasiums. The Christian Science Reading Room dedicated to the memory of the late Mrs Stoyte The dentist's office. The Turkish bath. Then down, with Vermeer, into the bowels of the hill, to look at the cellar in which the Hauberk Papers had been stored Down again yet deeper to the safe-deposit vaults, the power house, the air-conditioning plant, the well and pumping station Then up once more to ground level and the kitchens, where the Chinese chef had shown Mr Stoyte the newly arrived consignment of turtles from the Caribbean. Up again to the fourteenth, to the bedroom which Jeremy was to occupy during his stay Then up another six stories to the business office, where Mr Stoyte gave orders to his secretary, dictated a couple of letters and had a long telephone conversation with his brokers in Amsterdam. And when that was finished, it had been time to go to the hospital

Meanwhile, in Ward Sixteen, a group of nurses had collected and were watching Uncle Jo, his white hair flying like Stokowski's, frantically spurring his orchestra to yet louder crescendos of cacophony

'He's like a great big kid himself,' said one of them in a tone of almost tender amusement

Another, evidently with literary leanings, declared that it was like something in Dickens 'Don't you think so?' she insisted to Jeremy

He smiled nervously and nodded a vague and non-committal assent.

More practical, a third wished she had her Kodak with her 'Candid Camera portrait of the President of Consol Oil, California Land and Minerals Corporation. Bank of the Pacific, West Coast Cemeteries, etc., etc. . . .' She reeled off the names of Mr Stoyte's chief companies, mock heroically, indeed, but with admiring gusto, as a convinced legitimist with a sense of humour might enumerate the titles of a grandee of Spain 'The papers would pay you good money for a snap like that,' she insisted And to prove that what she was saying was true, she went on to explain that she had a boy friend who worked with an advertising firm, so that he ought to know, and only the week before he had told her that . .

Mr Stoyte's knobbed face, as he left the hospital, was still illuminated with benevolence and happiness

'Makes you feel kind of good, playing with those poor kids,' he kept repeating to Jeremy

A wide flight of steps led down from the hospital entrance to the roadway At the foot of these steps Mr Stoyte's blue Cadillac was waiting Behind it stood another, smaller car which had not been there when they arrived. A look of suspicion clouded Mr Stoyte's beaming face as he caught sight of it. Kidnappers, blackmailers – one never knew His hand went to the pocket of his coat. 'Who's there?' he shouted in a tone of such loud fury that Jeremy thought for a moment that the man must have suddenly gone mad

Moon like, a large, snub-featured face appeared at the car window, smiling round the chewed butt of a cigar.

'Oh, it's you, Clancy,' said Mr Stoyte 'Why didn't they tell me you were here?' he went on. His face had flushed darkly, he was frowning and a muscle in his cheek had begun to twitch 'I don't like having strange cars around Do you hear, Peters?' he almost screamed at his chauffeur – not because it was the man's business, of course, simply because he happened to be there, available. Do you

hear I say? Then, suddenly, he remembered what Dr L said to h m that time he had lost his temper with the fellow you really *want* to shorten your life, Mr Stoyte?' The doctor had been one of cool amusement, he of politely sarcastic indulgence. 'Are you absolutely *bent* on a stroke? A second stroke, remember, and you won't get lightly next time Well, if so, then go on behaving as you re doing now Go on' With an enormous effort of will Mr Stoyte swallowed his anger God is love, he said to himself 'There is no death.' The late Prudence McGladdery Stoyte had been a Christian Scientist God is love' he said again, and reflected that if people would only stop being so exasperating he would never have to lose his temper God is love' It was all their fault.

Clancy, meanwhile, had left his car and, grotesquely pot bell ed over spindly legs, was coming up the steps, mysteriously smiling and winking as he approached.

What is it? Mr Stoyte inquired, and wished to God the man wouldn t make those faces Oh, by the way,' he added, 'this is Mr Mr '

Pordage sa d Jeremy

Clancy was pleased to meet him. The hand he gave to Jeremy was d sagreeably sw eary

I got some news for you,' said Clancy in a hoarse conspiratorial whisper, and, speaking behind his hand, so that his words and the smell of cigar sl ould be for Mr Stoyte alone, 'You remember Tittelbaum?' he added

'That chap in the City Engineer's Department?'

Clancy nodded One of the boys,' he affirmed enigmatically nd again winked

'Well, what about him?' asked Mr Stoyte and in spite of God s eing love, t ere was a note in his voice of renascent exasperation.

Clancy shot a glance at Jeremy Pordage then, with the elaborate y play of Guy Fawkes talking to Catesby on the stage of a rovincial theatre, he took Mr Stoyte by the arm and led him a w feet aw ay up the steps Do you know what Tittelbaum told e today?' I e asked rhetorically

'How the devil should I know?' (But no, God is love. There is death.)

Undeterred by the signs of Mr Stoyte's irritation, Clancy went on with his performance 'He told me what they've decided about . . .' – he lowered his voice still further – 'about the San Felipe Valley.'

'Well, what *have* they decided?' Once more Mr Stoyte was at the limits of his patience

Before answering, Clancy removed the cigar butt from his mouth, threw it away, produced another cigar out of his waistcoat pocket, tore off the cellophane wrapping and stuck it, unlighted, in the place occupied by the old one.

'They've decided,' he said very slowly, so as to give each word its full dramatic effect, 'they've decided to pipe the water into it.'

Mr Stoyte's expression of exasperation gave place at last to one of interest 'Enough to irrigate the whole valley?' he asked.

'Enough to irrigate the whole valley,' Clancy repeated with solemnity.

Mr Stoyte was silent for a moment. 'How much time have we got?' he asked at last

'Tittelbaum thought the news wouldn't break for another six weeks'

'Six weeks?' Mr Stoyte hesitated for a moment, then made his decision. 'All right Get busy at once,' he said with the peremptory manners of one accustomed to command 'Go down yourself and take a few of the other boys along with you Independent purchasers – interested in cattle-raising, want to start a Dude Ranch. Buy all you can What's the price, by the way?'

'Averages twelve dollars an acre'

'Twelve,' Mr Stoyte repeated, and reflected that it would go to a hundred as soon as they started laying the pipe 'How many acres do you figure you can get?' he asked.

'Maybe thirty thousand'

Mr Stoyte's face beamed with satisfaction 'Good,' he said briskly. 'Very good No mention of my name, of course,' he added, and then, without pause or transition 'What's Tittelbaum going to cost?'

Clancy smiled contemptuously. 'Oh, I'll give him four hundred bucks'

'Three?'

The other nodded 'Tittelbaum's in the bargain basement,' said 'Can't afford to ask any fancy prices. He needs the money needs it awful bad.'

'What for?' asked Mr Stoyte, who had a professional interest in human nature 'Gambling? Women?

Clancy shook his head. 'Doctors,' he explained 'He's got a kid that's paralysed'

'Paralysed?' Mr Stoyte echoed in a tone of genuine sympathy 'That's too bad.' He hesitated for a moment, then, in a sudden burst of generosity, 'Tell him to send the kid here,' he went on, making a large gesture towards the hospital. 'Best place in the State for infantile paralysis, and it won't cost him anything Not a red cent'

'Hell, that's kind of you, Mr Stoyte,' said Clancy admiringly 'That's real kind.'

'Oh, it's nothing,' said Mr Stoyte, as he moved towards his car 'I'm glad to be able to do it Remember what it says in the Bible about children. You know,' he added, 'I get a real kick out of being with those poor kids in there Makes you feel kind of warm inside' He patted the barrel of his chest. 'Tell Tittelbaum to send in an application for the kid Send it to me personally I'll see that it goes through at once' He climbed into the car and shut the door after him, then, catching sight of Jeremy, opened it again without a word Mumbling apologetically, Jeremy scrambled in. Mr Stoyte slammed the door once more, lowered the glass and looked out 'So long,' he said 'And don't lose any time about that San Felipe business. Make a good job of it, Clancy, and I'll let you have ten per cent of all the acreage over twenty thousand.' He raised the window and signalled to the chauffeur to start. The car swung out of the drive and headed towards the castle Leaning back in his seat, Mr Stoyte thought of those poor kids and the money he would make out of the San Felipe business. 'God is love,' he said yet once more, with momentary conviction and in a whisper that was audible to his companion 'God is love.' Jeremy felt more uncomfortable than ever

The drawbridge came down as the blue Cadillac approached, the chromium portcullis went up, the gates of the inner rampart rolled back to let it pass. On the concrete tennis-court the seven children of the Chinese cook were roller-skating Below, in the

sacred grotto, a group of masons were at work At the sight of them, Mr Stoyte shouted to the chauffeur to stop

'They're putting up a tomb for some nuns,' he said to Jeremy as they got out of the car

'Some nuns?' Jeremy echoed in surprise.

Mr Stoyte nodded, and explained that his Spanish agents had bought some sculpture and iron work from the chapel of a convent that had been wrecked by the anarchists at the beginning of the civil war 'They sent some nuns along too,' he added. 'Embalmed, I guess Or maybe just sun-dried I don't know Anyhow, there they are. Luckily I happened to have something nice to put them in.' He pointed to the monument which the masons were in process of fixing to the south wall of the grotto On a marble shelf above a large Roman sarcophagus were the statues by some nameless Jacobean stonemason of a gentleman and lady, both in ruffs, kneeling, and behind them, in three rows of three, nine daughters diminishing from adolescence to infancy '*Hic jacet Carolus Franciscus Beals, Armiger* ' Jeremy began to read

'Bought it in England, two years ago,' said Mr Stoyte, interrupting him. Then, turning to the workmen, 'When will you boys be through?' he asked

'Tomorrow noon Maybe tonight.'

'That's all I wanted to know,' said Mr Stoyte, and turned away 'I must have those nuns taken out of storage,' he said, as they walked back to the car

They drove on Poised on the almost invisible vibration of its wings, a humming bird was drinking at the jet that spouted from the left nipple of Giambologna's nymph. From the enclosure of the baboons came the shrill noise of battle and copulation. Mr Stoyte shut his eyes God is love,' he repeated, trying deliberately to prolong the delightful condition of euphoria into which those poor kids and Clancy's good news had plunged him 'God is love. There is no death' He waited to feel that sense of inward warmth, like the after effect of whisky, which had followed his previous utterance of the words Instead, as though some immanent fiend were playing a practical joke on him, he found himself thinking of the shrunken leathery corpses of those nuns, and of his own and of judgement and the flames Prudence McGladd—

had been a Christian Scientist; but Joseph Budge Stoyte, his father, had been a Sandemanian; and Letitia Morgan, his maternal grandmother, had lived and died a Plymouth Sister. Over his cot in the attic room of the little framehouse in Nashville, Tennessee, had hung the text, in vivid orange on a black background: 'IT IS A TERRIBLE THING TO FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE LIVING GOD.' 'God is love,' Mr Stoyte desperately reaffirmed. 'There is no death.' But for sinners, such as himself, it was only the worm that never died.

'If you're always scared of dying,' Obispo had said, 'you'll surely die. Fear's a poison; and not such a slow poison either.'

Making another enormous effort, Mr Stoyte suddenly began to whistle. The tune was, 'I'm making hay in the moonlight in my Baby's arms', but the face which Jeremy Pordage saw and, as though from some horrible and indecent secret, immediately averted his eyes from, was the face of a man in a condemned cell.

'Old sour-puss,' the chauffeur muttered to himself as he watched his employer get out of the car and walk away.

Followed by Jeremy, Mr Stoyte hurried in silence through the Gothic portal, crossed a pillared Romanesque lobby like the Lady Chapel at Durham, and, his hat still pulled down over his eyes, stepped into the cathedral twilight of the great hall.

A hundred feet overhead, the sound of the two men's footsteps echoed in the vaulting. Like iron ghosts, the suits of armour stood immobile round the walls. Above them, sumptuously dim, the fifteenth-century tapestries opened windows upon a leafy world of phantasy. At one end of the cavernous room, lit by a hidden searchlight El Greco's 'Crucifixion of St Peter' blazed out in the darkness like the beautiful revelation of something incomprehensible and profoundly sinister. At the other, no less brilliantly illuminated, hung a full-length portrait of Hélène Fourment, dressed only in a bearskin cape. Jeremy looked from one to the other – from the ectoplasm of the inverted saint to the unequivocal skin and fat and muscle which Rubens had so loved to see and touch; from unearthly flesh-tints of green-white ochre and carmine, shadowed with transparent black, to the creams and warm pinks, the nacreous blues and greens of Flemish nudity. Two shining symbols, incom-

parably powerful and expressive – but of what, of what? That, of course, was the question

Mr Stoyte paid attention to none of his treasures, but strode across the hall, inwardly cursing his buried wife for having made him think about death by insisting that there wasn't any

The door of the elevator was in an embrasure between pillars *Mr Stoyte opened it, and the light came on, revealing* a Dutch lady in blue satin sitting at a harpsichord – sitting, Jeremy reflected, at the very heart of an equation, in a world where beauty and logic, painting and analytical geometry, had become one With what intention? To express, symbolically, what truths about the nature of things? Again, that was the question Where art was concerned, Jeremy said to himself, that was always the question.

'Shut the door,' Mr Stoyte ordered, then when it was done, 'We'll have a swim before lunch,' he added, and pressed the topmost of a long row of buttons

Chapter Four

More than a dozen families of transients were already at work in the orange grove, as the man from Kansas with his wife and his three children and his yellow dog, hurried down the line towards the trees which the overseer had assigned to him. They walked in silence, for they had nothing to say to one another and no energy to waste on words.

Only half a day, the man was thinking, only four hours till work would be stopped. They'd be lucky if they made as much as seventy five cents Seventy five cents Seventy five cents, and that right front tyre wasn t going to last much longer If they meant to get up to Fresno and then Salinas, they'd just have to get a better one But even the rottenest old second hand tyre cost money And money was food And did they eat! he thought with sudden resentment If he were alone, if he didn't have to drag the kids and Minnie around, then he could rent a little place somewhere. Near the highway, so that he could make a bit extra by selling eggs and fruit and things to the people that rode past in their automobiles, sell a lot cheaper than the markets and still make good money And then, maybe, he'd be able to buy a cow and a couple of hogs, and then he'd find a girl – one of those fat ones, he liked them rather fat fat and young with . .

His wife started coughing again, the dream was shattered. Did they eat! More than they were worth Three kids with no strength in them And Minnie going sick on you half the time so that you had to do her work as well as yours!

The dog had paused to sniff at a post. With sudden and surprising agility the man from Kansas took two quick steps forward and kicked the animal squarely in the ribs 'You goddam dog! he shouted 'Get out of the way! It ran off, yelping The man from Kansas turned his head in the hope of catching in his children's [illegible] an expression of disapproval or commiseration. But the [illegible] had learnt better than to give him an excuse for going on the dog to themselves Under the tousled hair, the three pale, [illegible] were entirely blank and vacant Disappointed, the man

turned away, grumbling indistinctly that he'd belt the hell out of them if they weren't careful. The mother did not even turn her head. She was feeling too sick and tired to do anything but walk straight on. Silence settled down again over the party.

Then, suddenly, the youngest of the three children let out a shrill cry. Look there! She pointed. In front of them was the castle. From the summit of its highest tower rose a spidery metal structure, carrying a succession of platforms to a height of twenty or thirty feet above the parapet. On the highest of these platforms, black against the shining sky, stood a tiny human figure. As they looked, the figure spread its arms and plunged head foremost out of sight behind the battlements. The children's shrill outcry of astonishment gave the man from Kansas the pretext which, a moment before, they had denied him. He turned on them furiously. 'Stop that yellin',' he yelled, then rushed at them, hitting out – a slap on the side of the head for each of them. With an enormous effort, the woman lifted herself from the abyss of fatigue into which she had fallen, she halted, she turned, she cried out protestingly, she caught her husband's arm. He pushed her away, so violently that she almost fell.

'You're as bad as the kids,' he shouted at her. 'Just layin' around and eatin'. Not worth a damn. I tell you, I'm just sick and tired of the whole lot of you. Sick and tired,' he repeated. 'So you keep your mouth shut, see!' He turned away and, feeling a good deal better for his outburst, walked briskly on, at a rate which he knew his wife would find exhausting, between the rows of loaded orange trees.

From that swimming pool at the top of the donjon the view was prodigious. Floating on the translucent water, one had only to turn one's head to see, between the battlements, successive vistas of plain and mountain, of green and tawny and violet and faint blue. One floated, one looked, and one thought, that is, if one were Jeremy Pordage, of that tower in *Epipsychidion*, that tower with its chambers

> Looking towards the golden Eastern air
> And level with the living winds.

Not so, however, if one were Miss Virginia Maunciple. Virginia

neither floated, nor looked, nor thought of *Epipsychidion*, but took another sip of whisky and soda, climbed to the highest platform of the diving tower, spread her arms, plunged, glided under water and, coming up immediately beneath the unsuspecting Pordage, caught him by the belt of his bathing pants and pulled him under

'You asked for it,' she said, as he came up again, gasping and spluttering, to the surface, lying there without moving, like a silly old Buddha' She smiled at him with an entirely good natured contempt

These people that Uncle Jo kept bringing to the castle. An Englishman with a monocle to look at the armour, a man with a stammer to clean the pictures, a man who couldn't speak anything but German to look at some silly old pots and plates, and today this other ridiculous Englishman with a face like a rabbit's and a voice like Songs without Words on the saxophone

Jeremy Pordage blinked the water out of his eyes and, dimly, since he was presbyopic and without his spectacles, saw the young laughing face very close to his own, the body foreshortened and wavering uncertainly through the water It was not often that he found himself in such proximity to such a being He swallowed his annoyance and smiled at her

Miss Maunciple stretched out a hand and patted the bald patch at the top of Jeremy's head 'Boy,' she said, 'does it shine Talk of billiard balls I know what I shall call you Ivory Good bye, Ivory' She turned, swam to the ladder, climbed out, walked to the table on which the bottles and glasses were standing, drank the rest of her whisky and soda, then went and sat down on the edge of the couch on which, in black spectacles and bathing-drawers, Mr Stoyte was taking his sun bath

'Well, Uncle Jo,' she said in a tone of affectionate playfulness, feeling kind of good?

'Feeling fine, Baby,' he answered It was true, the sun had melted away his dismal forebodings, he was living again in the present, that delightful present in which one brought happiness to sick children, in which there were Tittelbaums prepared, for five hundred bucks, to give one information worth at the very least a million, in which the sky was blue and the sunshine a caressing warmth upon the stomach, in which, finally, one stirred out of a delicious somnolence

to see little Virginia smiling down at one as though she really cared for her old Uncle Jo, and cared for him, what was more, not merely as an old uncle – no, *sir*, because, when all's said and done, a man is only as old as he feels and acts, and where his Baby was concerned did he feel young? did he *act* young? Yes, *sir* Mr Stoyte smiled to himself, a smile of triumphant self satisfaction.

'Well, Baby,' he said aloud, and laid a square-thick fingered hand on the young lady's bare knee

Through half-closed eyelids Miss Maunciple gave him a secret and somehow indecent look of understanding and complicity, then uttered a little laugh and stretched her arms 'Doesn't the sun feel good!' she said, and, closing her lids completely, she lowered her raised arms, clasped her hands behind her neck, and threw back her shoulders It was a pose that lifted the breasts, that emphasized the inward curve of the loins and the contrary swell of the buttocks – the sort of pose that a new arrival in the seraglio would be taught by the eunuchs to assume at her first interview with the Sultan, the very pose, Jeremy recognized, as he had chanced to look her way, of that quite particularly unsuitable statue on the third floor of the Beverly Pantheon

Through his dark glasses, Mr Stoyte looked up at her with an expression of possessiveness at once gluttonous and paternal. Virginia was his baby, not only figuratively and colloquially, but also in the literal sense of the word His sentiments were simultaneously those of the purest father love and the most violent eroticism

He looked up at her By contrast with the shiny white satin of her beach clout and brassière the sunburnt skin seemed more richly brown The planes of the young body flowed in smooth continuous curves, effortlessly solid, three-dimensional, without accent or abrupt transition. Mr Stoyte's regards travelled up to the auburn hair and came down by way of the rounded forehead, of the wide set eyes, and small, straight, impudent nose, to the mouth That mouth – it was her most striking feature For it was to the mouth's short upper lip that Virginia's face owed its characteristic expression of childlike innocence – an expression that persisted through all her moods, that was noticeable whatever she might be doing, whether it was telling smutty stories or making conversation with

or two away in the future. Even as a show girl, at eighteen a week, she had found it difficult to bother security and what would happen if [illegible] show your legs any more. Then Uncle Jo had come along, everything was there, as though it grew on trees – a tree, a cocktail tree, a Schiaparelli tree. You just had to read your hand and there it was, like an apple in the [illegible] in Oregon. So where did presents come in? Why should she anything? Besides, it was obvious that Uncle Jo got kick out of her not wanting things, and to be able to give h a kick always made her feel good. 'I tell you, Uncle Jo, [illegible] *anything*.'

'Don't you?' said a strange voice, startlingly close behind 'Well, I do.'

Dark haired and dapper, glossily Levantine, Dr [illegible] Obispo stepped briskly up to the side of the couch.

'To be precise,' he went on, 'I want to inject [illegible] cubic centimetres of testosterones into the great man's *gl medius*. So off you go, my angel,' he said to Virginia in a derision, but with a smile of unabashed desire. 'Hop!' [illegible] a familiar little pat on the shoulder, and another, when she to make room for him, on the white satin posterior.

Virginia turned round sharply, with the intention of [illegible] not to be fresh, then, as her glance travelled from that h[illegible] hairy flesh which was Mr Stoyte to the other's handsome [illegible] insultingly sarcastic and at the same time so flatteringly piscent, she changed her mind and, instead of telling him, just where he got off, she made a grimace and stuck out her at him. What was [illegible], before she [illegible] as the acquiesce[illegible] city the offender and thought, with a For a moment she was that

the Bishop, taking tea in Pasadena or getting tight with the boys, enjoying what she called 'a bit of yum yum' or attending Mass. Chronologically, Miss Maunciple was a young woman of twenty-two, but that abbreviated upper lip gave her, in all circumstances, an air of being hardly adolescent, of not having reached the age of consent For Mr Stoyte, at sixty, the curiously perverse contrast between childishness and maturity, between the appearance of innocence and the fact of experience, was intoxicatingly attractive. It was not only so far as he was concerned that Virginia was both kinds of a baby, she was also both kinds of baby objectively, in herself

Delicious creature! The hand that had lain inert, hitherto, upon her knee slowly contracted Between the broad spatulate thumb and the strong fingers, what smoothness, what a sumptuous and substantial resilience!

'Jinny,' he said 'My Baby!

The Baby opened her large blue eyes and dropped her arms to her sides The tense back relaxed, the lifted breasts moved downwards and forwards like soft living creatures sinking to repose. She smiled at him.

'What are you pinching me for, Uncle Jo?'

'I'd like to eat you,' her Uncle Jo replied in a tone of cannibalistic sentimentality

'I'm tough'

Mr Stoyte uttered a maudlin chuckle 'Little tough kid! he said

The tough kid stooped down and kissed him

Jeremy Pordage, who had been quietly looking at the panorama and continuing his silent recitation of *Epipsychidion*, happened at this moment to turn once more in the direction of the couch, and was so much embarrassed by what he saw that he began to sink and had to strike out violently with arms and legs to prevent himself from going under Turning round in the water, he swam to the ladder, climbed out and without waiting to dry himself, hurried to the elevator

'Really! he said to himself as he looked at the Vermeer *'Really!'*

'I did some business this morning,' said Mr Stoyte when the Baby had straightened herself up again.

'What sort of business?'

'Good business,' he answered 'Might make a lot of money. *Real* money,' he insisted

'How much?'

'Maybe half a million,' he said cautiously, understating his hopes, 'maybe a million, maybe even more'

'Uncle Jo,' she said, 'I think you're wonderful' Her voice had the ring of complete sincerity She genuinely did think him wonderful In the world in which she had lived it was axiomatic that a man who could make a million dollars must be wonderful Parents, friends, teachers, newspapers, radio, advertisements – explicitly or by implication, all were unanimous in proclaiming his wonderfulness And besides, Virginia was very fond of her Uncle Jo He had given her a wonderful time, and she was grateful Besides, she liked to like people if she possibly could, she liked to please them Pleasing them made her feel good – even when they were elderly, like Uncle Jo, and when some of the ways in which she was cal'ed upon to please them didn't happen to be very appetizing 'I think you're wonderful,' she repeated.

Her admiration gave him an intense satisfaction 'Oh, it's quite easy,' he said with hypocritical modesty, angling for more

Virginia gave it him. 'Easy, nothing! she said firmly 'I say you *are* wonderful. So just keep your mouth shut.'

Enchanted, Mr Stoyte took another handful of firm flesh and squeezed it affectionately 'I'll give you a present, if the deal goes through,' he said 'What would you like, Baby?'

'What would I like?' she repeated 'But I don't want anything'

Her disinterestedness was not assumed. For it was true, she never did want things this way, in cold blood. At the moment a want occurred, for an ice-cream soda, for example, for a bit of yum yum, for a mink coat seen in a shop-window – at such moments she did want things, and wanted them badly, couldn't wait to have them. But as for long-range wants, wants that had to be thought about in advance – no, she never had wanted like that. The best part of Virginia's life was spent in enjoying the successive instants of present contentment of which it was composed, and if ever circumstances forced her out of this mindless eternity into the world of time, it was a narrow little universe in which she found herself, a world whose farthest boundaries were never more than a week

or two away in the future. Even as a show girl, at eighteen dollars a week, she had found it difficult to bother much about money and security and what would happen if you had an accident and couldn't show your legs any more. Then Uncle Jo had come along, and everything was there, as though it grew on trees – a swimming pool tree, a cocktail tree, a Schiaparelli tree. You just had to reach out your hand and there it was, like an apple in the orchard back home in Oregon. So where did presents come in? Why should she want anything? Besides, it was obvious that Uncle Jo got a tremendous kick out of her not wanting things, and to be able to give Uncle Jo a kick always made her feel good. 'I tell you, Uncle Jo, I don't want *anything*.'

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Dark haired and dapper, glossily Levantine, Dr Sigmund Obispo stepped briskly up to the side of the couch.

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Virginia turned round sharply, with the intention of telling him not to be fresh, then, as her glance travelled from that barrel of hairy flesh which was Mr Stoyte to the other's handsome face, so insultingly sarcastic and at the same time so flatteringly concupiscent, she changed her mind and, instead of telling him, loudly, just where he got off, she made a grimace and stuck out her tongue at him. What was begun as a rebuke had ended, before she knew it, as the acquiescence in an impertinence, as an act of complicity with the offender and of disloyalty to Uncle Jo. Poor Uncle Jo! she thought, with a rush of affectionate pity for the old gentleman. For a moment she felt quite ashamed of herself. The trouble, of course, was that Dr Obispo was so handsome, that he made her laugh, that she liked his admiration, that it was fun to lead him on and see how he'd act. She even enjoyed getting mad at him, when he was rude, which he constantly was.

'I suppose you think you're Douglas Fairbanks Junior,' she said,

making an attempt to be scathing, then walked away with as much dignity as her two little strips of white satin would permit her to assume and, leaning against a battlement, looked down at the plain below Ant like figures moved among the orange trees She wondered idly what they were doing, then her mind wandered to other, more interesting and personal matters To Sig and the fact that she couldn't help feeling rather thrilled when he was around, even when he acted the way he had done just now Some day, maybe – some day, just to see what it was like and if things got a bit dull out here at the castle . . Poor Uncle Jo! she reflected. But then what could he expect – at his age and at hers? The unexpected thing was that, in all these months, she hadn t yet given him any reason for being jealous – unless, of course, you counted Enid and Mary Lou, which she didn't, because she really wasn't that way at all, and when it did happen, it was nothing more than a kind of little accident, nice, but not a bit important Whereas with Sig, if it ever happened, the thing would be different, even though it weren't very serious, which it wouldn't be – not like with Walt, for example, or even with little Buster back in Portland It would be different from the accidents with Enid and Mary Lou, because, with a man, those things generally did matter a good deal, even when you didn't mean them to matter Which was the only reason for not doing them, outside of their being sins, of course, but somehow that never seemed to count very much when the boy was a real good looker (which one had to admit Sig was, even though it was rather in the style of Adolphe Menjou, but, come to think of it, it was those dark ones with oil on their hair that had always given her the biggest kick!) And when you'd had a couple of drinks, maybe, and you felt you d like some thrills, why, then it never even occurred to you that it was a sin, and then the one thing led to another, and before you knew what had happened – well, it *had* happened, and really she just couldn't believe it was as bad as Father O Reilly said it was, and, anyhow, Our Lady would be a lot more understanding and forgiving than he was, and what about the way Father O Reilly ate his food, whenever he came to dinner? – like a hog, there wasn't any other word for it, and wasn't gluttony just as bad as the other thing? So who was he to talk like that?

highly critical audience, it was true, but then, what a ballet! Nijinsky, Karsavina, Pavlova, Massine – all on a single stage! However terrific the applause it was always merited.

'Ready,' he called at last.

Obediently and in silence, like a trained elephant, Mr Stayte rolled over on to his stomach.

'Well, and how's the patient?' Dr Obispo inquired in the parody of a bedside manner, as he took Virginia's place on the couch. He was in the highest of spirits. His work in the laboratory was coming along unexpectedly well, that new preparation of bile salts had done wonders for his liver, the rearmament boom had sent his aircraft shares up another three points, and it was obvious that Virginia wasn't going to hold out much longer. 'How's the little invalid this morning?' he went on, enriching his parody with the caricature of an English accent, for he had done a year of post-graduate work at Oxford.

Mr Stoyte growled inarticulately. There was something about Dr Obispo's facetiousness that always enraged him. In some not easily definable way it had the quality of a deliberate insult. Mr Stoyte was always made to feel that Obispo's apparently good-natured banter was in reality the expression of a calculated and malignant contempt. The thought of it made Mr Stoyte's blood boil. But when his blood boiled, his blood pressure, he knew, went up, his life was shortened. He could not afford to be as angry with Obispo as he would have liked. And what was more, he couldn't afford to get rid of the man. Obispo was an indispensable evil. 'God is love, there is no death.' But Mr Stoyte remembered with terror that he had had a stroke, that he was growing old. Obispo had put him on his feet again when he was almost dying, had promised him ten more years of life even if those researches didn't work out as well as he hoped, and if they did work out – then more, much more. Twenty years, thirty, forty. Or it might even be that the loathsome little kike would find some way of proving that Mrs Eddy was right, after all. Perhaps there really and truly wouldn't be any death – not for Uncle Jo, at any rate. Glorious prospect! Meanwhile . . . Mr Stoyte sighed, resignedly, profoundly. 'We all have our cross to bear,' he said to himself, echoing, across the intervening years, the words his grandmother used to repeat when she made him take castor oil.

Dr Obispo, meanwhile, had sterilized his needle, filed the top off a glass ampoule, filled his syringe. His movements, as he worked, were characterized by a certain studied exquisiteness, by a florid and self-conscious precision. It was as though the man were simultaneously his own ballet and his own audience – a sophisticated and

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Chapter Five

Jeremy had dressed again and was sitting in the subterranean store room that was to serve as his study The dry acrid dust of old documents had gone to his head, like a kind of intoxicating snuff His face was flushed as he prepared his files and sharpened his pencils, his bald head shone with perspiration, behind their bifocal lenses his eyes were bright with excitement.

There! Everything was ready He turned round in his swivel chair and sat for a while quite still, voluptuously savouring his anticipations Tied up in innumerable brown paper parcels, the Hauberk Papers awaited their first reader Twenty-seven crates of still unravished brides of quietness He smiled to himself at the thought that he was to be their Bluebeard Thousands of brides of quietness accumulated through centuries by successive generations of indefatigable Hauberks Hauberk after Hauberk, barony after knighthood, earldom after barony, and then Earl of Gonister after Earl of Gonister down to the last, the eighth. And, after the eighth, nothing but death-duties and an old house and two old spinster ladies, sinking ever deeper into solitude and eccentricity, into poverty and family pride, but finally, poor pets! more deeply into poverty than pride They had sworn they would never sell, but in the end they had accepted Mr Stoyte's offer The papers had been shipped to California They would be able, now, to buy themselves a couple of really sumptuous funerals And that would be the end of the Hauberks Delicious fragment of English history! Cautionary perhaps or perhaps, and more probably, merely senseless, merely a tale told by an idiot. A tale of cut throats and conspirators, of patrons of learning and shady speculators, of bishops and kings catamites and minor poets, of admirals and pimps, of saints and heroines and nymphomaniacs, of imbeciles and prime ministers, of art collectors and sadists And here was all that remained of them, in twenty seven crates, higgledy piggledy, never catalogued, never even looked at, utterly virgin Gloating over his treasure, Jeremy forgot the fatigues of the journey, forgot Los Angeles and the chauffeur, forgot the cemetery and the castle, forgot even Mr

stoyte He had the Hauberk Papers, had them all to himself Like a child dipping blindly into a bran pie for a present which he knows will be exciting, Jeremy picked up one of the brown paper parcels with which the first crate was filled and cut the string What rich confusion awaited him within! A book of household accounts for the year 1576 and 1577, a narrative by some Hauberk cadet of Sir Kenelm Digby's expedition to Scanderoon, eleven letters in Spanish from Miguel de Molinos to that Lady Ann Hauberk who had scandalized her family by turning papist, a collection, in early eighteenth-century handwriting, of sickroom recipes, a copy of Drelincourt *On Death*, and an odd volume of Andréa de Nerciat's *Félicia, ou Mes Fredaines* He had just cut the string of the second bundle and was wondering whose was the lock of brown pale hair preserved between the pages of the Third Earl's holograph Reflections on the Late Popish Plot, when there was a knock at the door He looked up and saw a small, dark man in a white overall advancing towards him The stranger smiled, said, 'Don't let me disturb you,' but nevertheless disturbed him 'My name's Obispo,' he went on, Dr Sigmund Obispo Physician in ordinary to His Majesty King Stoyte the First – and let's hope also the last'

Evidently delighted by his own joke, he broke into a peal of startlingly loud metallic laughter Then, with the elegantly fastidious gesture of an aristocrat in a dust heap, he picked up one of Molinos's letters and started, slowly, and out loud, to decipher the first line of the flowing seventeenth century calligraphy that met his eyes. '"*Ame a Dios como es en sí y no como se lo dice y forma su imaginación.*"' He looked up at Jeremy with an amused smile. 'Easier said than done, I should think. Why, you can't even love a woman as she is in herself, and after all, there is some sort of objective physical basis for the phenomenon we call a female. A pretty nice basis in some cases. Whereas poor old Dios is only a spirit – in other words, pure imagination And here's this idiot, whoever he is, telling some other idiot that people mustn't love God as he is in their imagination' Once again self-consciously the aristocrat, he threw down the letter with a contemptuous flick of the wrist. 'What drivel it all is! he went on. 'A string of words called religion. Another string of words called philosophy Half a dozen other strings called political ideals And all the words either

or meaningless And people getting so excited about
murder their neighbours for using a word they don't happen
like. A word that probably doesn't mean as much as a
Just a noise without even the excuse of gas on the stomach.
a Dios come es en el," ' he repeated derisively 'It's about as
as saying ' hiccough *a* hiccough *como es en* hiccough" I
know how you *litterae humaniores* boys manage to stand it. Don't
you pine for some sense once in a while?'

Jeremy smiled with an expression of nervous apology 'One
doesn't bother too much about the meanings,' he said. Then,
anticipating further criticism by disparaging himself and the things
he loved most dearly, 'One gets a lot of fun, you know,' he went
on, 'just scrabbling about in the dust-heaps '

Dr Obispo laughed and patted Jeremy encouragingly on the
shoulders 'Good for you!' he said 'You're frank. I like that Most
of the Ph.D boys one meets are such damned Pecksniffs Trying
to pull that high moral culture stuff on you! You know wisdom
rather than knowledge, Sophocles instead of science "Funny," I
always say to them when they try that on me, ' funny that the thing
you get your income from should happen to be the thing that's
going to save humanity " Whereas you don t try to glorify your
little racket You're honest. You admit you're in the thing merely
for the fun of it Well, that's why I m in *my* little racket For the
fun Though, of course, if you'd given me any of that Sophocles
stuff, I'd just have let you have my piece about science and progress,
science and happiness, even science and ultimate truth, if you'd been
obstinate.' He showed his white teeth in a happy derision of
everybody

His amusement was infectious Jeremy also smiled. 'I m glad I
wasn't obstinate,' he said in a tone whose fluty demureness implied
how much he objected to disquisitions on ultimate truth

'Mind you,' Dr Obispo went on, 'I'm not entirely blind to the
charms of your racket I d draw the line at Sophocles, of course.
And I d be deadly bored with this sort of stuff'—he nodded towards
the twenty-seven crates 'But I must admit,' he concluded hand-
somely, 'I ve had a lot of fun out of old books in my time Really,
a lot of fun '

Jeremy coughed and caressed his scalp, his eyes winkled in

anticipation of the deliciously dry little joke he was just about to make But, unfortunately, Dr Obispo gave him no time. Serenely unaware of Jeremy's preparations he looked at his watch, then rose to his feet *I d like to show you my laboratory,* he said *There s plenty of time before lunch.*

'Instead of asking if I d like to see his bloody laboratory,' Jeremy protested inwardly, as he swallowed his joke and it had been such a good one! He would have liked, of course, to go on unpicking the Hauberk Papers, but, lacking the courage to say so, he rose obediently and followed Dr Obispo towards the door

Longevity, the doctor explained, as they left the room That was his subject Had been ever since he left medical school. But of course, so long as he was in practice he hadn't been able to do any serious work on it Practice was fatal to serious work, he added parenthetically How could you do anything sensible, when you had to spend all your time looking after patients? Patients belonged to three classes those that imagined they were sick, but weren t, those that were sick, but would get well anyhow, those that were sick and would be much better dead For anybody capable of serious work to waste h s time with patients was simply id otic. And, of course, nothing but economic pressure would ever have driven him to do it And he might have gone on in that groove for ever Wasting himself on morons But then, quite suddenly, his luck had turned Jo Stoyte had come to consult him It had been positively providential.

'Most awfully a godsend,' Jeremy murmured, quoting his favourite phrase of Coleridge

Jo Stoyte, Dr Obispo repeated, Jo Stoyte on the verge of breaking up completely Forty pounds overweight and having had a stroke Not a bad one, luckily, but enough to put the old bastard into a sweat Talk of being scared to death! (Dr Obispo s white teeth flashed again in wolfish good humour) In Jo s case it had been a panic. Out of that panic had come Dr Obispo s liberation from his patients, had come his income, his laboratory for work on the problems of longevity, his excellent assistant; had come, too, the financing of that pharmaceutical work at Berkeley, of those experiments with monkeys in Brazil, of that expedition to study the tortoises on the Galapagos Islands Everything a research worker

could ask for, with old Jo himself thrown in as the perfect guinea-pig – ready to submit to practically anything short of vivisection without anaesthetics, provided it offered some hope of keeping him above ground a few years longer

Not that he was doing anything spectacular with the old buzzard at the moment Just keeping his weight down, and taking care of his kidneys – and pepping him up with periodical shots of synthetic sex hormone – and watching out for those arteries. The ordinary, commonsense treatment for a man of Jo Stoyte s age and medical history Meanwhile, however, he was on the track of something new, something that promised to be important. In a few months, perhaps in a few weeks, he'd be in a position to make a definite pronouncement

'That s very interesting,' said Jeremy with hypocritical politeness

They were walking along a narrow corridor, white-washed and bleakly illuminated by a series of electric bulbs Through open doors Jeremy had occasional glimpses of vast cellars crammed with totem poles and armour, with stuffed orang utans and marble groups by Thorwaldsen, with gilded Bodhisattvas and early steam-engines, with lingams and stage-coaches and Peruvian pottery, with crucifixes and mineralogical specimens

Dr Obispo, meanwhile, had begun to talk again about longevity. The subject, he insisted, was still in the pre-scientific stage A lot of observations without any explanatory hypothesis A mere chaos of facts And what odd, what essentially eccentric facts! What was it, for example, that made a cicada live as long as a bull? or a canary outlast three generations of sheep? Why should dogs be senile at fourteen and parrots sprightly at a hundred? Why should female humans become sterile in the forties, while female crocodiles con tinued to lay eggs into their third century? Why in heaven's name should a pike live to two hundred without showing any signs of senility? Whereas poor old Jo Stoyte .

From a side passage two men suddenly emerged carrying between them on a stretcher a couple of mummified nuns There was a collision

'Damned fools! Dr Obispo shouted angrily

'Damned fool yourself!'

'Can't you look where you're going?'

'Keep your face shut!

Dr Obispo turned contemptuously away and walked on.

'Who the hell do you think you are?' they called after him.

Jeremy meanwhile had been looking with lively curiosity at the mummies. 'Discalced Carmelites,' he said to nobody in particular, and enjoying the flavour of that curious combination of syllables, he repeated them with a certain emphatic relish. 'Discalced Carmelites.'

Discalced your ass, said the foremost of the two men, turning fiercely upon this new antagonist.

Jeremy gave one glance at that red and angry face, then, with ignominious haste, hurried after his guide.

Dr Obispo halted at last. 'Here we are,' he said, opening a door. A smell of mice and absolute alcohol floated out into the corridor. 'Come on in,' he said cordially.

Jeremy entered. There were the mice all right – cage upon cage of them, in tiers along the wall directly in front of him. To the left, three windows, hewn in the rock, gave on to the tennis-court and a distant panorama of orange trees and mountains. Seated at a table in front of one of these windows, a man was looking through a microscope. He raised his fair, tousled head as they approached, and turned towards them a face of almost child-like candour and openness. 'Hullo, doc,' he said with a charming smile.

'My assistant,' Dr Obispo explained. 'Peter Boone. Pete, this is Mr Pordage.' Pete rose and revealed himself an athletic young giant.

'Call me Pete,' he said, when Jeremy had called him Mr Boone. 'Everyone calls me Pete.'

Jeremy wondered whether he ought to invite the young man to call him Jeremy – but wondered, as usual, so long that the appropriate moment for doing so passed, irrevocably.

'Pete's a bright boy,' Dr Obispo began again in a tone that was affectionate in intention, but a little patronizing in fact. 'Knows his physiology. Good with his hands, too. Best mouse surgeon I ever saw.' He patted the young man on the shoulder.

Pete smiled – a little uncomfortably, it seemed to Jeremy, as though he found it rather difficult to make the right response to the other's cordiality.

'Takes his politics a bit too seriously,' Dr Obispo went on. 'That's his only defect. I'm trying to cure him of that. Not very successfully so far, I'm afraid. Eh, Pete?'

The young man smiled again, more confidently, this time he knew exactly where he stood and what to do.

'*Not* very successfully,' he repeated. Then, turning to Jeremy, 'Did you see the Spanish news this morning?' he asked. The expression on his large, fair, open face changed to one of concern.

Jeremy shook his head.

'It's something awful,' said Pete gloomily. 'When I think of those poor devils without planes or artillery or ...'

'Well, don't think of them,' Dr Obispo cheerfully advised. 'You'll feel better.'

The young man looked at him, then looked away again without saying anything. After a moment of silence he pulled out his watch. 'I think I'll go and have a swim before lunch,' he said, and walked towards the door.

Dr Obispo picked up a cage of mice and held it within a few inches of Jeremy's nose. 'These are the sex hormone boys,' he said with a jocularity that the other found curiously offensive. The animals squeaked as he shook the cage. 'Lively enough while the effect lasts. The trouble is that the effects are only temporary.'

Not that temporary effects were to be despised, he added, as he replaced the cage. It was always better to feel temporarily good than temporarily bad. That was why he was giving old Jo a course of that testosterone stuff. Not that the old bastard had any great need of it with that Mauncple girl around.

Dr Obispo suddenly put his hand over his mouth and looked round towards the window. 'Thank God,' he said, 'he's out of the room. Poor old Pete! A derisive smile appeared on his face. 'Is he in love! He tapped his forehead. 'Thinks she's like something in the Works of Tennyson. You know, chemically pure. Last month he nearly killed a man for suggesting that she and the old boy... Well, you know. God knows what he figures the girl is doing here. Telling Uncle Jo about the spiral nebulae, I suppose. Well, if it makes him happy to think that way, I'm not the one that's going to spoil his fun.' Dr Obispo laughed indulgently. 'But to come back to what I was saying about Uncle Jo ...'

Just having that girl around the house was the equivalent of a hormone treatment But it wouldn't last It never did Brown Séquard and Voronoff and all the rest of them – they'd been on the wrong track They'd thought that the decay of sexual power was the cause of senility Whereas it was only one of the symptoms Senescence started somewhere else and involved the sex mechanism along with the rest of the body Hormone treatments were just palliatives and pick me-ups. Helped you for a time, but didn't prevent your growing old

Jeremy stifled a yawn

For example, Dr Obispo went on, why should some animals live much longer than human beings and yet show so few signs of old age? Somehow, somewhere we had made a biological mistake Crocodiles had avoided that mistake, so had tortoises The same was true of certain species of fish

'Look at this,' he said, and, crossing the room, he drew back a rubber curtain, revealing as he did so the glass front of a large aquarium recessed into the wall Jeremy approached and looked in

In the green and shadowy translucence, two huge fish hung suspended, their snouts almost touching, motionless except for the occasional ripple of a fin and the rhythmic panting of their gills. A few inches from their staring eyes a rosary of bubbles streamed ceaselessly up towards the light, and all around them the water was spasmodically silver with the dartings of smaller fish Sunk in their mindless ecstasy, the monsters paid no attention

Carp, Dr Obispo explained, carp from the fishponds of a castle in Franconia – he had forgotten the name, but it was somewhere near Bamberg The family was impoverished, but the fish were heirlooms, unpurchasable Jo Stoyte had had to spend a lot of money to have these two stolen and smuggled out of the country In a specially constructed automobile with a tank under the back seats Sixty pounders they were, over four feet long, and those rings in their tails were dated 1761

'The beginning of my period,' Jeremy murmured in a sudden access of interest 1761 was the year of *Fingal* He smiled to himself, the juxtaposition of carp and Ossian, carp and Napoleon's favourite poet, carp and the first premonitions of [illegible] light, gave

him a peculiar pleasure What a delightful subject for one of his little essays! Twenty pages of erudition and absurdity – of sacrilege in lavender – of a scholar's delicately *canaille* irreverence for illustrious or unillustrious dead

But Dr Obispo would not allow him to think his thoughts in peace. Indefatigably riding his own hobby, he began again. There they were, he said, pointing at the huge fish, nearly two hundred years old, perfectly healthy, no symptoms of senility, no apparent reason why they shouldn't go on for another three or four centuries. There they were, and there were you He turned back accusingly towards Jeremy Here were you, no more than middle-aged, but already bald, already long sighted and short winded, already more or less edentate, incapable of prolonged physical exertion, chronically constipated (could you deny it?), your memory already not so good as it was, your digestion capricious, your potency falling off – if it hadn't, indeed, already disappeared for good.

Jeremy forced himself to smile, and at every fresh item nodded his head in what was meant to look like an amused assent Inwardly, he was writhing with a mixture of distress at this all too truthful diagnosis and anger against the diagnostician for the ruthlessness of his scientific detachment Talking with a humorous self-deprecation about one's own advancing senility was very different from being bluntly told about it by someone who took no interest in you except as an animal that happened to be unlike a fish Nevertheless, he continued to nod and smile

Here you were, Dr Obispo repeated at the end of his diagnosis, and there were the carp How was it that you didn't manage your physiological affairs as well as they did? Just where and how and why did you make the mistake that had already robbed you of your teeth and hair and would bring you in a very few years to the grave?

Old Metchnikoff had asked those questions and made a bold attempt to answer Everything he said happened to be wrong phagocytosis didn't occur, intestinal autointoxication wasn't the sole cause of senility, neuronophages were mythological monsters, drinking sour milk didn't materially prolong life, whereas the removal of the large gut *did* materially shorten it. Chuckling he recalled those operations that were so fashionable just before the

Wart Old ladies and gentlemen with their colons cut out, and in consequence being forced to evacuate every few minutes, like bananes! All to no purpose, needless to say, because of course the operation that was meant to make them live to a hundred killed them all off within a year or two Dr Obispo threw back his glossy head and uttered one of those peals of brazen laughter which were *his regular response to any tale of human stupidity resulting in* misfortune Poor old Metchnikoff, he went on, wiping the tears of merriment from his eyes Consistently wrong And yet almost certainly not nearly so wrong as people had thought Wrong, yes, in supposing that it was all a matter of intestinal stasis and autointoxication. But probably right in thinking that the secret was somewhere down there, in the gut Somewhere in the gut, Dr Obispo repeated, and, what was more, he believed that he was on its track

He paused and stood for a moment in silence, drumming with his fingers on the glass of the aquarium Poised between mud and air, the two obese and aged carp hung in their greenish twilight, serenely unaware of him Dr Obispo shook his head at them The worst experimental animals in the world, he said in a tone of resentment mingled with a certain gloomy pride Nobody had a right to talk about technical difficulties who hadn't tried to work with fish Take the simplest operation, it was a nightmare Had you ever tried to keep its gills properly wet while it was anaesthetized on the operating table? Or, alternatively, *to do* your surgery under water? Had you ever set out to determine a fish's basal metabolism, or take an electro-cardiograph of its heart action, or measure its blood pressure? Had you ever wanted to analyse its excreta? And, if so, did you know how hard it was even to collect them? Had you ever attempted to study the chemistry of a fish's digestion and assimilation? To determine its blood pressure under *different conditions*? To measure the speed of its nervous reactions?

No, you had not, said Dr Obispo contemptuously And until you had, you had no right to complain about anything

He drew the curtain on his fish, took Jeremy by the arm and led him back to the mice

Look at those,' he said, pointing to a batch of cages on an upper shelf

Jeremy looked. The mice in question were exactly like all mice. What's wrong with them? he asked.

Dr Obispo laughed. 'If those animals were human beings, said dramatically, they'd all be over a hundred years old.'

And he began to talk, very rapidly and excitedly, about fatty alcohols and the intestinal flora of carp. For the secret was the key to the whole problem of senility and longevity. The between the sterols and the peculiar flora of the carp's intestine.

Those sterols! (Dr Obispo frowned and shook his head them.) Always linked up with senility. The most obvious case course, was cholesterol. A senile animal might be defined as with an accumulation of cholesterol in the wall of its Potassium thiocyanate seemed to dissolve those Senile rabbits would show signs of rejuvenation under a with potassium thiocyanate. So would senile humans. B not for very long. Cholesterol in the arteries was evidently only of the troubles. But then cholesterol was only one of They were a closely related group, those fatty alcohols. It take much to transform one into another. But if you'd read Schneeglock's work and the stuff they'd been publishing at U you'd know that some of the sterols were definitely poisonous much more than cholesterol, even in large accumulations. L botham had even suggested a connexion between fatty al and neoplasms. In other words, cancer might be regarded in a analysis as a symptom of sterol poisoning. He himself would g even further and say that such sterol poisoning was responsible the entire degenerative process of senescence in man and the mammals. What nobody had done hitherto was to look into the part played by fatty alcohols in the life of such animals as carp. That was the work he had been doing for the last year. His researches had convinced him of two or three things: first, that the fatty alcohols in carp did not accumulate in excessive quantity; second, that they did not undergo transformation into the more poisonous sterols, and third that both these immunities were due to the peculiar nature of the carp's intestinal flora. What a floral Dr Obispo cried enthusiastically. So rich, so wonderfully varied. He had not yet succeeded in isolating the organism responsible for the carp's immunity to old age, nor did he fully understand the nature

of the chemical mechanisms involved. Nevertheless, the main fact was certain. In one way or another, in combination or in isolation, these organisms contrived to keep the fish's sterols from turning into poisons. That was why a carp could live a couple of hundred years and show no signs of senility.

Could the intestinal flora of a carp be transferred to the gut of a mammal? And, if transferable, would it achieve the same chemical and biological results? That was what he had been trying, for the past few months, to discover. With no success, to begin with. Recently, however, they had experimented with a new technique – a technique that protected the flora from the process of digestion, gave it time to adapt itself to the unfamiliar conditions. It had taken root. The effect on the mice had been immediate and significant. Senescence had been halted, even reversed. Physiologically, the animals were younger than they had been for at least eighteen months – younger at the equivalent of a hundred than they had been at the equivalent of sixty.

Outside in the corridor an electric bell began to ring. It was lunch time. The two men left the room and walked towards the elevator. Dr Obispo went on talking. Mice, he said, were apt to be a bit deceptive. He had now begun to try the thing out on larger animals. If it worked all right on dogs and baboons, it ought to work on Uncle Jo.

Chapter Six

In the small dining room, most of the furnishings came from the Pavilion at Brighton Four gilded dragons supported the lacquered table, and two more served as caryatids on either side a chimney piece in the same material It was the Regency of the Gorgeous East The kind of thing, Jeremy reflected, as sat down on his scarlet and gold chair, the kind of thing that word Cathay' would have conjured up in Keats s mind, example, or Shelley s, or Lord Byron s – just as that Leda by Etty, over there, next to the Fra Angelico s 'Annunciation, was an accurate embodiment of their fancies on the s of pagan mythology, was an authentic illustration (he chuckled inwardly at the thought) to the Odes to Psyche and the Grecian Urn, to *Endymion* and *Prometheus Unbound* An age s habits of thought and feeling and imagination are shared by all who live and work within that age – by all, from the journeyman up to the genius Regency is always Regency, whether you take your sample from the top of the basket or from the bottom In 1820, the man who shut his eyes and tried to visualize magic casements on the foam of faery seas would see – what? The turrets of Brighton Pavilion At the thought, Jeremy smiled to himself with pleasure Etty and Keats, Brighton and Percy Bysshe Shelley – what a delightful subject! Much better than carp and Ossian, better inasmuch as Nash and the Prince Regent were funnier than even the most aged fish But for conversational purposes and at the luncheon-table, even the best of subjects is worthless if there is nobody to discuss it with. And who was there, Jeremy asked himself, who was there in this room desirous or capable of talking with him on such a theme? Not Mr Stoyte, not, certainly, Miss Maunciple, nor the two young women who had come over from Hollywood to have lunch with her, not Dr Obispo, who cared more for mice than books, nor Peter Boone, who probably didn t even know that there were any books to care for The only person who might conceivably be expected to take an interest in the manifestations of the later Georgian time spirit was the individual who had been intro-

duced to him as Dr Herbert Mulge, PH D, D D, Principal of Tarzana College But at the moment Dr Mulge was talking in a rich vein of something that sounded almost like pulpit eloquence about the new Auditorium which Mr Stoyte had just presented to the College and which was shortly to be given its formal opening Dr Mulge was a large and handsome man with a voice to match – a voice at once sonorous and suave, unctuous and ringing The flow of his language was slow, but steady and apparently stanchless In phrases full of the audible equivalents of Capital Letters, he now went on to assure Mr Stoyte and anyone else who cared to listen that it would be a Real Inspiration for the boys and girls of Tarzana to come together in the beautiful new building for their Community Activities For Non-Denominational Worship, for example; for the Enjoyment of the Best in Drama and Music. Yet, what an inspiration! The name of Stoyte would be remembered with love and reverence by successive generations of the College's Alumni and Alumnae – would be remembered, he might say, for ever, for the Auditorium was a *monumentum aere perennius*, a Footprint on the Sands of Time – definitely a Footprint And now, Dr Mulge continued, between the mouthfuls of creamed chicken, now Tarzana's crying need was for a new Art School Because, after all, Art, as we were now discovering, was one of the most potent of educational forces Art was the aspect under which, in this twentieth century of ours, the Religious Spirit most clearly manifested itself Art was the means by which Personalities could best achieve Creative Self Expression and . .

'Cripes!' Jeremy said to himself, and then 'Golly!' He smiled ruefully at the thought that he hoped to talk to this imbecile about the relation between Keats and Brighton Pavilion.

*

Peter Boone found himself separated from Virginia by the blonder of her two young friends from Hollywood, so that he could only look at her past a foreground of rouge and eyelashes, of golden curls and a thick, almost visible perfume of gardenias To anyone else, this foreground might have seemed a bit distracting, but for Pete it was of no more significance than the equivalent amount of mud He was interested only in what was beyond the foreground

– in that exquisitely abbreviated upper lip, in the little nose that made you want to cry when you looked at it, it was so elegant and impertinent, so ridiculous and angelic, in that long Florentine bob of lustrous auburn hair, in those wide-set, widely opened eyes with their twinkling surface of humour and their dark blue depths of what he was sure was an infinite tenderness, a plumbless feminine wisdom He loved her so much that where his heart should have been he could feel only an aching breathlessness, a cavity which she alone could fill

Meanwhile, she was talking to the blonde Foreground about that new job which the Foreground had landed with the Cosmopolitan-Perlmutter Studio The picture was called Say it with Stockings', and the Foreground was to play the part of a rich débutante who runs away from home to make a career of her own, becomes a strip-tease dancer in a Western mining-camp and finally marries a cow-puncher, *who turns out to be the son of a millionaire*

'Sounds like a swell story,' said Virginia 'Don t you think so, Pete?'

Pete thought so, he was ready to think almost anything if she wanted him to

'That reminds me of Spain,' Virginia announced. And while Jeremy, who had been eavesdropping on the conversation, frantically tried to imagine what train of associations had taken her from 'Say it with Stockings' to the civil war – whether it had been Cosmopolitan Perlmutter, Anti-Semitism, Nazis, Franco, or débutante class war, Moscow, Negrin, or strip-tease, modernity, radicalism, Republicans – while he was vainly speculating thus, Virginia went on to ask the young man to tell them about what he had done in Spain, and when he demurred, *insisted – because it was so thrilling*, because the Foreground had never heard about it, because, finally, she wanted him to

Pete obeyed Only half articulately, in a vocabulary composed of slang and clichés, and adorned by expletives and grunts – the vocabulary, Jeremy reflected as he listened surreptitiously through the booming of Dr Mulge's eloquence, the characteristically squalid and poverty stricken vocabulary to which the fear of being thought *unsocially different* or undemocratically superior, *or unsportingly highbrow*, condemns most young Englishmen and Americans – he

began to describe his experiences as a volunteer in the International Brigade during the heroic days of 1937 It was a touching narrative Through the hopelessly inadequate language, Jeremy could divine the young man's enthusiasm for liberty and justice, his courage, his love for his comrades, his nostalgia, even in the neighbourhood of that short upper lip, even in the midst of an absorbing piece of scientific research, for the life of men united in devotion to a cause, made one in the face of hardship and shared danger and impending death

'Gee,' he kept repeating, 'they were swell guys'

They were all swell – Knud, who had saved his life one day, up there in Aragon, Anton and Mack and poor little Dino, who had been killed, André, who had lost a leg, Jan, who had a wife and two children, Fritz, who'd had six months in a Nazi concentration camp, and all the others – the finest bunch of boys in the world And what did he do, but go and get rheumatic fever on them, and then myocarditis – which meant no more active service, no more anything except sitting around That was why he was here, he explained apologetically But, gee, it had been good while it lasted! That time, for example, when he and Knud had gone out at night and climbed a precipice in the dark and taken a whole platoon of Moors by surprise and killed half a dozen of them and come back with a machine gun and three prisoners ..

'And what *is your* opinion of Creative Work, Mr Pordage?'

Surprised in flagrant inattention, Jeremy started guiltily 'Creative work? he mumbled, trying to gain a little time 'Creative work? Well, of course one's all for it Definitely,' he insisted

'I'm glad to hear you say so,' said Dr Mulge 'Because *that's* what I want at Tarzana Creative work – ever more and more Creative Shall I tell you what is my highest ambition? Neither Mr Stoyte nor Jeremy made any reply But Dr Mulge proceeded, nevertheless, to tell them 'It is to make of Tarzana the living Centre of the New Civilization that is coming to blossom here in the West' He raised a large fleshy hand in solemn asseveration 'The Athens of the twentieth century is on the point of emerging here, in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area I want Tarzana to be its Parthenon and its Academe, its Stoa and its Temple of the Muses Religion, Art, Philosophy, Science – I want them all to find their

home in Tarzana, to radiate their influence from our campus, to '

In the middle of his story about the Moors and the precipice, Pete became aware that only the Foreground was listening to him. Virginia's attention had wandered, surreptitiously at first, then frankly and avowedly – had wandered to where, on her left, the less blonde of her two friends was having something almost whispered to her by Dr Obispo

'What's that?' Virginia asked

Dr Obispo leaned towards her and began again The three heads, the oil smooth black, the elaborately curly brown, the lustrous auburn, were almost touching By the expression on their faces Pete could see that the doctor was telling one of his dirty stories Alleviated for a moment by the smile she had given him when she asked him to tell them about Spain, the anguish in that panting void where his heart ought to have been came back with redoubled intensity It was a complicated pain, made up of jealousy and a despairing sense of loss and personal unworthiness, of a fear that his angel was being corrupted and another, deeper fear, which his conscious mind refused to formulate, a fear that there wasn't much further corruption to be done, that the angel was not angelic as his love had made him assume The flow of his narrative suddenly dried up He was silent

'Well, what happened then?' the Foreground inquired with an eagerness and an expression of hero-worshipping admiration that any other young man would have found delightfully flattering

He shook his head 'Oh, nothing much '

'But those Moors '

'Hell!' he said impatiently What does it matter, anyhow?'

His words were drowned by a violent explosion of laughter that sent the three conspiratorial heads, the black, the brown, the lovely auburn, flying apart from one another He looked up at Virginia and saw a face distorted with mirth At what?' he asked himself in agony, trying to measure the extent of her corruption, and a kind of telescoped and synthetic memory of all the schoolboy stories, all the jokes and limericks he had ever heard, rushed in upon him.

Was it at that one that she was laughing? Or at that? Or, God, perhaps at *that*? He hoped and prayed it wasn't at *that*, and the

more he hoped and prayed, the more insanely sure he became that *that* was the one it had been

'. . . above all,' Dr Mulge was saying, 'Creative Work in the Arts. Hence the crying need for a new Art School, an Art School worthy of Tarzana, worthy of the highest traditions of . . .'

The girls' shrill laughter exploded with a force of hilarity proportionate to the strength of the surrounding social taboos. Mr Stoyte turned sharply in the direction from which the noise had come.

'What's the joke?' he asked suspiciously. He wasn't going to have his Baby listen to smut. He disapproved of smut in mixed company almost as whole-heartedly as his grandmother, the Plymouth Sister, had done. 'What's all that noise about?'

It was Dr Obispo who answered. He'd been telling them a funny story he'd heard over the radio, he explained with that suave politeness that was like a sarcasm. Something delightfully amusing. Perhaps Mr Stoyte would like to have him repeat it.

Mr Stoyte grunted ferociously and turned away.

A glance at his host's scowling face convinced Dr Mulge that it would be better to postpone discussion of the Art School to another more propitious occasion. It was disappointing, for it seemed to him that he had been making good progress. But, there! such things would happen. Dr Mulge was a college president chronically in quest of endowments, he knew all about the rich. Knew, for example, that they were like gorillas, creatures not easily domesticated, deeply suspicious, alternately bored and bad-tempered. You had to approach them with caution, to handle them gently and with a boundless cunning. And even then they might suddenly turn savage on you and show their teeth. Half a lifetime of experience with bankers and steel-magnates and retired meat packers had taught Dr Mulge to take such little setbacks as today's with a truly philosophic patience. Brightly, with a smile on his large, imperial Roman face, he turned to Jeremy. 'And what do you think of our Californian weather, Mr Pordage?' he asked.

Meanwhile, Virginia had noticed the expression on Pete's face and immediately divined the causes of his misery. Poor Pete! But really, if he thought she had nothing better to do than always be listening to his talk about that silly old war in Spain – or if it wasn't

Spain, it was the laboratory, and they did vivisection there, which was just awful, because, after all, when you were hunting, the animals had a chance of getting away, particularly if you were a bad shot, like she was, besides, hunting was full of thrills and you got such a kick from being up there in the mountains in the good air, whereas Pete cut them up underground in that cellar place . . . No, if he thought she had nothing better to do than that, he made a big mistake All the same, he was a nice boy, and talk about being in love! It was nice having people around who felt that way about you, made you feel kind of good Though it could be rather a nuisance sometimes Because they got to feel they had some claim *on you, they figured they had a right to tell you things and interfere.* Pete didn t do that in so many words, but he had a way of looking at you – like a dog would do if it suddenly started criticizing you for taking another cocktail Saying it with eyes, like Hedy Lamarr – only it wasn t the same thing as Hedy was saying with *her* eyes, in fact, just the opposite It was just the opposite now – and what had she done? Got bored with that silly old war and listened in to what Sig was saying to Mary Lou Well, all she could say was that she wasn t going to have anyone interfering with the way she chose to live her own life That was her business Why, he was almost as bad, the way he looked at her, as Uncle Jo, or her mother, or Father O Reilly Only, of course, they didn't just look, they said things Not that he meant badly, of course, poor Pete, he was just a kid, just unsophisticated and, on top of everything, in love the way a kid is – like the high-school boy in Deanna Durbin's last picture Poor Pete, she thought again. It was tough luck on him, but the fact was she never had been attracted by that big, fair, Cary Grant sort of boy They just didn't appeal to her, that was all there was to it. She liked him, and she enjoyed his being in love with her But that was all.

Across the corner of the table she caught his eye, gave him a dazzling smile and invited him, if he had half an hour to spare after lunch, to come and teach her and the girls how to pitch horseshoes.

Chapter Seven

The meal was over at last, the party broke up Dr Mulge had an appointment in Pasadena to see a rubber-goods manufacturer's widow, who might perhaps give thirty thousand dollars for a new girls' dormitory. Mr Stoyte drove into Los Angeles for his regular Friday afternoon board meetings and business consultations Dr Obispo was going to operate on some rabbits and went down to the laboratory to prepare his instruments Pete had a batch of scientific journals to look at, but gave himself, meanwhile, a few minutes of happiness in Virginia's company And for Jeremy, of course, there were the Hauberk Papers It was with a sense of almost physical relief, a feeling that he was going home to where he belonged, that he returned to his cellar. The afternoon slipped past – how delightfully, how profitably! Within three hours, another batch of letters from Molinos had turned up among the account books and the business correspondence So had the third and fourth volumes of *Félicia* So had an illustrated edition of *Le Portier des Carmes*, and, bound like a prayer-book, so had a copy of that rarest of all works of the Divine Marquis, *Les Cent-Vingt Jours de Sodome* What a treasure! What unexpected fortune! Or perhaps, Jeremy reflected, not so unexpected if one remembered the history of the Hauberk family. For the date of the books made it likely that they had been the property of the Fifth Earl – the one who had held the title for more than half a century and died at more than ninety, under William IV, completely unregenerate. Given the character of that old gentleman, one had no reason to feel surprised at the finding of a store of pornography – one had every reason, indeed, to hope for more

Jeremy's spirits mounted with each new discovery Always, with him, a sure sign of happiness, he began to hum the tunes that had been popular during his childhood Molinos evoked 'Tara ra Boom-de-ay! *Félicia* and the *Portier des Carmes* shared the romantic lilt of 'The Honeysuckle and the Bee'. As for the '*Cent-Vingt Jours*', which he had never previously read or even seen a copy of – the finding of that delighted him so much that when, as a matter

of bibliographical routine, he raised the ecclesiastical cover and, expecting the Anglican ritual, found instead the coldly elegant prose of the Marquis de Sade, he broke out into that rhyme from 'The Rose and the Ring', the rhyme his mother had taught him to repeat when he was only three years old and which had remained with him as the symbol of childlike wonder and delight, as the only completely adequate reaction to any sudden blessing, any providentially happy surprise.

Oh, what fun to have a plum bun!
How I wish it never was done!

And fortunately it wasn't done, wasn't even begun; the book was still unread, the hours of entertainment and instruction still lay before him. Remembering that pang of jealousy he had felt up there, in the swimming-pool, he smiled indulgently. Let Mr Stoyte have all the girls he wanted; a well-written piece of eighteenth-century pornography was better than any Maunciple. He closed the volume he was holding. The tooled morocco was austerely elegant; on the back, the words 'The Book of Common Prayer' were stamped in a gold which the years had hardly tarnished. He put it down with the other *curiosa* on a corner of the table. When he had finished for the afternoon, he would take the whole collection up to his bedroom.

'Oh, what fun to have a plum bun!' he chanted to himself, as he opened another bundle of papers, and then, 'On a summer's afternoon, where the honeysuckles bloom and all Nature seems at rest.' The Wordsworthian touch about Nature always gave him a special pleasure. The new batch of papers turned out to be a correspondence between the Fifth Earl and a number of prominent Whigs regarding the enclosure, for his benefit, of three thousand acres of common land in Nottinghamshire. Jeremy slipped them into a file, wrote a brief preliminary description of the contents on a card, put the file in a cupboard and the card in its cabinet, and, dipping again into the bran pie, reached down for another bundle. He cut the string. 'You are my honey, honey, honeysuckle, I am the bee.' What would Dr Freud have thought of that, he wondered? Anonymous pamphlets against deism were a bore; he threw them aside. But here was a copy of Law's *Serious Call* with manuscript

notes by Edward Gibbon, and here were some accounts rendered to the Fifth Earl by Mr Rogers of Liverpool accounts of the expenses and profits of three slave-trading expeditions which the Earl had helped finance The second voyage, it appeared, had been particularly auspicious, less than a fifth of the cargo had perished on the way, and the prices realized at Savannah were gratifyingly high Mr Rogers begged to enclose his draft for seventeen thousand two hundred and twenty four pounds eleven shillings and fourpence Written from Venice, in Italian, another letter announced to the same Fifth Earl the appearance upon the market of a half length Mary Magdalen' by Titian, at a price which the Italian correspondent described as derisory Other offers had already been made, but out of respect for the not less learned than illustrious English *cognoscente*, the vendor would wait until a reply had been received from his lordship In spite of which, his lordship would be well advised not to delay too long, for otherwise

*

It was five o clock, the sun was low in the sky Dressed in white shoes and socks, white shorts, a yachting-cap and a pink silk sweater, Virginia had come to see the feeding of the baboons

Its engine turned off, her rose-coloured motor scooter stood parked at the side of the road thirty or forty feet above the cage In company with Dr Obispo and Pete, she had gone down to have a closer look at the animals

Just opposite the point at which they were standing, on a shelf of artificial rock, sat a baboon mother, holding in her arms the withered and disintegrating corpse of the baby she would not abandon even though it had been dead for a fortnight. Every now and then, with an intense, automatic affection she would lick the little cadaver Tufts of greenish fur and even pieces of skin detached themselves under the vigorous action of her tongue Delicately, with black fingers, she would pick the hairs out of her mouth, then begin again Above her, at the mouth of a little cave, two young males suddenly got into a fight The air was filled with screams and barks and the gnashing of teeth Then one of the two combatants ran away and in a moment, the other had forgotten all about the fight and was searching for pieces of dandruff on his chest To the

de mon oncle and *savez-vous planter le chou* She d always said that studying was mostly a waste of time this proved it And why did they have to print this stuff in French anyhow? At the thought that the deficiencies in the educational system of the State of Oregon might for ever prevent her from reading André de Nercat, the tears came into Virginia s eyes It was really *too* bad!

A brill ant idea occurred to Jeremy Why shouldn t he offer to translate the book for her – *viva voce* and sentence by sentence, like an interpreter at a Council Meeting of the League of Nations? Yes, why not? The more he thought of it, the better the idea seemed to him to be H s decision was made and he had begun to consider how most felicitously to phrase his offer when Dr Obispo quietly took the volume Virginia was holding p cked up the three com panion volumes from the table along with *Le Portier des Carmes* and the *Cent Vingt Jours de Sodome*, and slipped the entire collec tion into the s de-pocket of his jacket.

Don t worry, he said to Virg nia I ll translate them for you And now let s go back to the baboons P te ll be wondering what s happened to us Come on Mr Pordage

In silence, but boiling inwardly with self reproach for his own inefficiency and indignation at the doctor s impudence, Jeremy followed them out of the french window and down the steps

Pete had emptied his basket and was leaning against the wire, intently following with his eyes the movements of the animals within At their approach he turned towards them His pleasant young face was bright with excitement.

Do you know, doc, he said, I believe it s working'

What s working? asked Virginia

Pete s answering smile was beautiful with happiness For, oh, how happy he was! Doubly and trebly happy By the sweetness of her subsequent behaviour Virginia had more than made up for the pain she had inflicted by turning away to listen to that smutty story And after all it probably wasn t a smutty story, he had been malign ing her, thinking gratuitous evil of her No it certainly hadn t been a smutty story – not smutty because when she turned back to him, her face had looked like the face of that child in the illustrated Bible at home that child who was gazing so innocently and cutely while Jesus said, Of such is the kingdom of Heaven And that was not

the only reason for his happiness He was happy, too, because it looked as though those cultures of the carp's intestinal flora were really having an effect on the baboons they had tried them on

I believe they're livelier,' he explained 'And their fur – it's kind of glossier'

The fact gave him almost as great a satisfaction as did Virginia's presence here in the transfiguring richness of the evening sunlight, as did the memory of her sweetness, the uplifting conviction of her essential innocence Indeed, in some obscure way, the rejuvenation of the baboons and Virginia's adorableness seemed to him to have a *profound connexion – a connexion not only with one another, but also and at the same time with Loyalist Spain and anti fascism* Three separate things, and yet one thing There was a bit of poetry he had been made to learn at school – how did it go?

> I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not some or other (*he could not at the moment remember what*) more

He did not love anything *more* than Virginia But the fact that he cared so enormously much for science and justice, for this research and the boys back in Spain, did something to make his love for her *more profound and, though it seemed a paradox, more whole-hearted*

Well, what about moving on?' he suggested at last

Dr Obispo looked at his wrist watch I'd forgotten,' he said. 'I've got some letters I ought to write before dinner Guess I'll have to see Mr Propter some other time'

'That's too bad! Pete did his best to impart to his tone and expression the cordiality of regret he did not feel In fact, he was delighted He admired Dr Obispo, thought him a remarkable research worker – but not the sort of person a young innocent girl like Virginia ought to associate with He dreaded for her the influence of *so much cynicism and hardboiledness* Besides, so far as his own relations to Virginia were concerned, Dr Obispo was always in the way That's too bad! he repeated, and the intensity of his pleasure was such that he fairly ran up the steps leading from the baboon-enclosure to the drive – ran so fast that his heart began palpitating and missing beats. Damn that rheumatic fever!

Dr Obispo stepped back to allow Virginia to pass and as he did so, gave a little tap to the pocket containing *Les Cent Vingt Jours de Sodome* and tipped her a wink. Virginia winked back and followed Pete up the steps

A few moments later, Dr Obispo was walking up the drive, the others down Or, to be more exact, Pete and Jeremy were walking, while Virginia, to whom the idea of using one's legs to get from anywhere to anywhere else was practically unthinkable, sat on her strawberry and-cream coloured scooter and, with one hand affectionately laid on Pete's shoulder, allowed herself to be carried down by the force of gravity

The noise of the baboons faded behind them, and at the next turn of the road there was Giambologna's nymph, still indefatigably spouting from her polished breasts Virginia suddenly interrupted a conversation about Clark Gable to say, in the righteously indignant tone of a vice crusader I just can't figure why Uncle Jo allows that thing to stand there It's disgusting!

Disgusting? Jeremy echoed in astonishment.

'Disgusting! she repeated emphatically

Do you object to her not having any clothes on? he asked, remembering as he did so those two little satin asymptotes to nudity which she herself had worn up there, in the swimming pool.

She shook her head impatiently It's the way the water comes out' She made the grimace of one who had tasted something revolting I think it's horrible.'

But why? Jeremy insisted.

'Because it's horrible' was all the explanation she could give A child of her age, which was the age, in this context, of bottle-feeding and contraception, she felt herself outraged by this monstrous piece of indelicacy from an earlier time It was just horrible, that was all that could be said about it. Turning back to Pete she went on talking about Clark Gable

Opposite the entrance to the Grotto, Virginia packed her scooter The masons had finished their work on the tomb and were gone, the place was empty Virginia straightened her rakishly tilted yachting-cap as a sign of respect then ran up the steps paused on the threshold to cross herself and, entering knelt for a few moments before the image The others waited silently, in the roadway

'Our Lady was so wonderful to me when I had sinus trouble last summer,' Virginia explained to Jeremy when she emerged again 'That's why I got Uncle Jo to make this grotto for her Wasn't it gorgeous when the Archbishop came for the consecration' she added, turning to Pete

Pete nodded affirmatively

'I haven't even had a cold since She's been here,' Virginia went on, as she took her seat on the scooter Her face fairly shone with triumph, every victory for the Queen of Heaven was also a personal success for Virginia Mauncple Then abruptly and without warning, as though she were doing a screen test and had received the order to register fatigue and self pity, she passed a hand across her forehead, sighed profoundly and, in a tone of utter dejection and discouragement, said, 'All the same, I'm feeling pretty tired this evening Guess I was in the sun too much right after lunch Maybe I'd better go and lie down a bit' And affectionately but very firmly rejecting Pete's offer to go back with her to the castle, she wheeled her scooter round, so that it faced uphill, gave the young man a last, particularly charming, almost amorous smile and look, said, 'Good bye, Pete darling,' and, opening the throttle of the engine, shot off with gathering momentum and an accelerating roll of explosions up the steep curving road, out of sight Five minutes later she was in her boudoir, fixing a chocolate-and banana split at the soda fountain Seated in a gilded arm-chair upholstered in satin *couleur fesse de nymphe*, Dr Obispo was reading aloud and translating as he went along from the first volume of *Les Cent-Vingt Jours*

Chapter Eight

MR PROPTER was sitting on a bench under the largest of his eucalyptus trees. To the west the mountains were already a flat silhouette against the evening sky, but in front of him, to the north, the upper slopes were still alive with light and shadow, with rosy gold and depths of indigo. In the foreground, the castle had put on a garment of utterly improbable splendour and romance. Mr Propter looked at it and at the hills and up through the motionless leaves of the eucalyptus at the pale sky, then closed his eyes and noiselessly repeated Cardinal Bérulle's answer to the question 'What is man?' It was more than thirty years before, when he was writing his study of the Cardinal, that he had first read those words. They had impressed him even then by the splendour and precision of their eloquence. With the lapse of time and the growth of his experience they had come to seem more than eloquent, had come to take on ever richer connotations, ever profounder significances. 'What is man?' he whispered to himself. '*C'est un néant environné de Dieu, indigent de Dieu, capable de Dieu, et rempli de Dieu, s'il veut.*' 'A nothingness surrounded by God, indigent and capable of God, filled with God, if he so desires.' And what is this God of which men are capable? Mr Propter answered with the definition given by John Tauler in the first paragraph of his *Following of Christ*. 'God is a being withdrawn from creatures, a free power, a pure working.' Man, then, is as nothingness surrounded by, and indigent of, a being withdrawn from creatures, a nothingness capable of free power, filled with a pure working if he so desires. *If* he so desires, Mr Propter was distracted into reflecting with a sudden, rather bitter sadness. But how few men ever so desire or, desiring, ever know what to wish for or how to get it! Right knowledge is hardly less rare than the sustained goodwill to act on it. Of those few who look for God, most find, through ignorance, only such reflections of their own self will as the God of battles, the God of the chosen people, the Prayer Answerer, the Saviour.

Having deviated thus far into negativity, Mr Propter was led on, through a continuing failure of vigilance, into an even less profit-

able preoccupation with the concrete and particular miseries of the day. He remembered his interview that morning with Hansen, who was the agent of Jo Stoyte's estates in the valley. Hansen's treatment of the migrants who came to pick the fruit was worse even than the average. He had taken advantage of their number and their desperate need to force down wages. In the groves he managed, young children were being made to work all day in the sun at the rate of two or three cents an hour. And when the day's work was finished, the homes to which they returned were a row of verminous sties in the waste land beside the bed of the river. For these sties, Hansen was charging a rent of ten dollars a month. Ten dollars a month for the privilege of freezing or suffocating, of sleeping in a filthy promiscuity, of being eaten up by bed bugs and lice, of picking up ophthalmia and perhaps hookworm and amoebic dysentery. And yet Hansen was a very decent, kindly man—one who would be shocked and indignant if he saw you hurting a dog, one who would fly to the protection of a maltreated woman or a crying child. When Mr Propter drew this fact to his attention, Hansen had flushed darkly with anger.

'That's different,' he had said.

Mr Propter had tried to find out why it was different.

It was his duty, Hansen had said.

But how could it be his duty to treat children worse than slaves and inoculate them with hookworm?

It was his duty to the estates. He wasn't doing anything for himself.

But why should doing wrong for someone else be different from doing wrong on your own behalf? The results were exactly the same in either case. The victims didn't suffer any less when you were doing what you called your duty than when you were acting in what you imagined might be your own interests.

This time the anger had exploded in violent abuse. It was the anger, Mr Propter had perceived, of the well meaning but stupid man who is compelled against his will to ask himself indiscreet questions about what he has been doing as a matter of course. He doesn't want to ask these questions, because he knows that if he does he will be forced either to go on with what he is doing, but with the cynic's awareness that he is doing wrong, or else, if he

doesn t want to be a cynic, to change the entire pattern of his life so as to bring his desire to do right into harmony with the real facts as revealed in the course of self interrogation. To most people any radical change is even more odious than cynicism The only way between the h orns of the dilemma is to persist at all costs in the ignorance which permits one to go on doing wrong in the comfort ing belief that by doing so one is accomplishing one's duty – one s duty to the company, to the shareholders, to the family, the city, the state, the fatherland, the church. For, of course, poor Hansen s case wasn't in any way unique, on a smaller scale, and therefore with less power to do evil, he was acting l ke all those civil servants and statesmen and prelates who go through l fe spreading misery and destruction in the name of their ideals and under orders from their categorical imperatives

Well, he hadn't got very far with Hansen, Mr Propter sadly concluded. He d have to try again with Jo Stoyte In the past, Jo had always refused to listen, on the ground that the estates were Hansen's business The alibi was so convenient that it would be hard, he foresaw, to break it down

From Hansen and Jo Stoyte his thoughts wandered to that newly arrived family of transients from Kansas, to whom he had given one of his cabins The three under nourish ed children, with the teeth already rotting in their mouths, the woman, emaciated by God knew what complication of diseases deep-sunken already in apathy and weakness, the husband, alternately resentful and self pitying, violent and morose.

He had gone with the man to get some vegetables from the garden plots and a rabbit for the family supper Sitting there, skin ning the rabbit, he had had to listen to outbursts of incoherent com plaint and ind gnation Complaint and indign..tion against the wheat market, which had broken each time he had begun to do well Against the banks he had borrowed money from and been unable to repay Against the droughts and w nds that had reduced his farm to a hundred and sixty acres of dust and wilderness. Against the luck that had always been against *him*. Against the folks who had treated him so meanly, everywhere, all his life.

Dismally familiar story! With inconsiderable variations, he had heard it a thousand times before. Sometimes they were share-

croppers from further south, dispossessed by the owners in a desperate effort to make the farming pay. Sometimes, like this man, they had owned their own place and been dispossessed, not by financiers, but by the forces of nature – forces of nature which they themselves had made destructive by tearing up the grass and planting nothing but wheat. Sometimes they had been hired men, displaced by the tractors. All of them had come to California as to a promised land, and California had already reduced them to a condition of wandering peonage and was fast transforming them into Untouchables. Only a saint, Mr Propter reflected, only a saint, could be a peon and a pariah with impunity, because only a saint would accept the position gladly and as though he had chosen it of his own free will. Poverty and suffering ennoble only when they are voluntary. By involuntary poverty and suffering men are made worse. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for an involuntarily poor man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Here, for example, was this poor devil from Kansas. How had he reacted to involuntary poverty and suffering? So far as Mr Propter could judge, he was compensating himself for his misfortunes by brutality to those weaker than himself. The way he yelled at the children . . It was an all too familiar symptom.

When the rabbit was skinned and gutted, Mr Propter had interrupted his companion's monologue.

'Do you know which is the stupidest text in the Bible?' he had suddenly asked.

Startled, and evidently a bit shocked, the man from Kansas had shaken his head.

'It's this,' Mr Propter had said, as he got up and handed him the carcase of the rabbit. '"They hated me without a cause"'.

Under the eucalyptus tree, Mr Propter wearily sighed. Pointing out to unfortunate people that, in part at any rate, they were pretty certainly responsible for their own misfortunes, explaining to them that ignorance and stupidity are no less severely punished by the nature of things than deliberate malice – these were never agreeable tasks. Never agreeable, but, so far as he could see, always necessary. For what hope, he asked himself, what faintest glimmer of hope is there for a man who really believes that 'they hated me without a cause' and that he had no part in his own disasters?

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Dismally familiar story! With inconsiderable variations, he had heard it a thousand times before. Sometimes they were share-

croppers from further south, dispossessed by the owners in a desperate effort to make the farming pay Sometimes, like this man, they had owned their own pl ce and been dispossessed, not by financiers, but by tl e forces of nature – forces of nature which they themselves had made destructive by tearing up the grass and planting nothing but wheat Sometimes they had been hired men, displ ced by the tractors All of them had come to California as to a promised land, and California had already reduced them to a con dition of wandering peonage and was fast transforming them into Untouchables Only a saint, Mr Propter reflected, only a saint, could be a peon and a pariah with impunity, because only a saint would accept the position gladly and as though he had chosen it of his own free will Poverty and suffering ennoble only when they are voluntary By involuntary poverty and suffering men are made worse It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for an involuntarily poor man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Here, for example, was this poor devil from Kansas. How had he reacted to involuntary poverty and suffering? So far as Mr Propter could judge, he was compensating himself for his misfortunes by brutality to those weaker than himself The way he yelled at the children It was an all too familiar symptom.

When the rabbit was skinned and gutted, Mr Propter had interrupted his companion s monologue

Do you know which is the stupidest text in the Bible? he had suddenly asked

Startled, and evidently a bit shocked, the man from Kansas had shaken his head

'It s this, Mr Propter had said, as he got up and handed him the carcase of the rabb t ' They hated me without a cause."'

Under the eucalyptus tree, Mr Propter wearily sigh ed. Pointing out to unfortunate people that, in part at any rate, they were pretty certainly responsible for tl eir own misfortunes, explaining to them that ignorance and stupidity are no less severely punished by the nature of things than deliberate malice – these were never agreeable tasks. Never agreeable, but, so far as he could see, always necessary For what hope, he asked himself, what faintest glimmer of hope is there for a man who really believes that 'they without a cause' and that he had no part in

Obviously, no hope whatever We see, as matter of brute fact, that disasters and hatreds are never without causes, we also see that some at least of those causes are generally under the control of the people who suffer the disasters or are the object of the hatred In some measure they are directly or indirectly responsible Directly, by the commission of stupid or malicious acts Indirectly, by the omission to be as intelligent and compassionate as they might be. And if they make this omission, it is generally because they choose to conform unthinkingly to local standards, and the current way of living Mr Propter's thoughts returned to the poor fellow from Kansas Self righteous, no doubt disagreeable to the neighbours, an incompetent farmer, but that wasn't the whole story His gravest offence had been to accept the world in which he found himself as normal, rational and right. Like all the others, he had allowed the advertisers to multiply his wants, he had learned to equate happiness with possessions, and prosperity with money to spend in a shop Like all the others, he had abandoned any idea of subsistence farming to think exclusively in terms of a cash crop, and he had gone on thinking in those terms, even when the crop no longer gave him any cash. Then, like all the others, he had got into debt with the banks And finally, like all the others, he had learned that what the experts had been saying for a generation was perfectly true in a semi arid country it is grass that holds down the soil, tear up the grass, the soil will go In due course, it had gone.

The man from Kansas was now a peon and a pariah, and the experience was making a worse man of him.

St Peter Claver was another of the historical personages to whom Mr Propter had devoted a study When the slave-ships came into the harbour of Cartagena, Peter Claver was the only white man to venture down into the holds There, in the unspeakable stench and heat, in the vapours of pus and excrement, he tended the sick, he dressed the ulcers of those whom their manacles had wounded, he held in his arms the men who had given way to despair and spoke to them words of comfort and affection – and in the intervals talked to them about their sins *Their* sins! The modern humanitarian would laugh, if he were not shocked And yet – such was the conclusion to which Mr Propter had gradually and reluctantly come – and yet St Peter Claver was probably right.

Not completely right, of course, for, acting on wrong knowledge, no man, however well intentioned, can be more than partially right But as nearly right, at any rate, as a good man with a counter-Reformation Catholic philosophy could expect to be Right in insisting that, whatever the circumstances in which he finds himself, a human being always has omissions to make good commissions whose effects must, if possible, be neutralized Right in believing that it is well even for the most brutally sinned against to be reminded of their own shortcomings

Peter Claver's conception of the world had the defect of being erroneous, but the merit of being simple and dramatic. Given a personal God, dispenser of forgiveness, given heaven and hell and the absolute reality of human personalities, given the meritoriousness of mere good intentions and of unquestioning faith in a set of incorrect opinions, given the one true church, the efficacy of priestly mediation, the magic of sacraments – given all these, it was really quite easy to convince even a newly imported slave of his sinfulness and to explain exactly what he ought to do about it But if there is no single inspired book, no uniquely holy church, no mediating priesthood nor sacramental magic, if there is no personal God to be placated into forgiving offences, if there are, even in the moral world, only causes and effects and the enormous complexity of inter relationships – then, clearly the task of telling people what to do about their shortcomings is much more difficult. For every individual is called upon to display not only unsleeping good will but also unsleeping intelligence. And this is not all. For, if individuality is not absolute, if personalities are illusory figments of a self will disastrously blind to the reality of a more than personal consciousness, of which it is the limitation and denial, then all of every human being s efforts must be directed, in the last resort, to the actualization of that more-than personal consciousness. So that even intelligence is not sufficient as an adjunct to good will, there must also be the recollection which seeks to transform and transcend intelligence Many are called, but few are chosen – because few even know in what salvation consists Consider again this man from Kansas Mr Propter sadly shook his head Everything was against the poor fellow – his fundamentalist orthodoxy, his wounded and inflamed egotism, his nervous irritability, his low

intelligence The first three disadvantages might perhaps be
moved But could anything be done about the fourth? The na
of things is implacable towards weakness 'From him that hath
shall be taken away even that which he hath' And what were
words of Spinoza's? 'A man may be excusable and nevertheless
tormented in many ways A horse is excusable for not being a ma
but nevertheless he must needs be a horse, and not a man.' All d
same, there must surely be something to be done for people li
the man from Kansas – something that didn't entail telling harmf
untruths about the nature of things The untruth, for example, th
there is a person up aloft, or the other more modern untruth to t
effect that human values are absolute and that God is the nation
the party or the human race as a whole Surely, Mr Propter h
sisted, surely there was something to be done for such people Th
man from Kansas had begun by resenting what he had said abo
the chain of cause and effect, the network of relationships – reset
ing it as a personal insult. But afterwards, when he saw that he w
not being blamed, that no attempt was being made to come it ov
him, he had begun to take an interest, to see that after all there w
something in it Little by little it might be possible to make hi
think a bit more realistically, at least about the world of everyd
life, the outside world of appearances And when he had done thi
then it mightn't be so overwhelmingly difficult for him to think
bit more realistically about himself – to conceive of that all impo
tant ego of his as a fiction, a kind of nightmare, a frantical
agitated nothingness capable, when once its frenzy had be
quieted, of being filled with God, with a God conceived a
experienced as a more than personal consciousness, as a free powe
a pure working, a being withdrawn Suddenly, as he thus r
turned to his starting point, Mr Propter became aware of the lon
circuitous, unprofitable way he had travelled in order to reach
He had come to this bench under the eucalyptus tree in order
recollect himself, in order to realize for a moment the existence
that other consciousness behind his private thoughts and feeling
free, pure power greater than his own. He had come for thi
memories had slipped in while he was off his guard, specul
ns had started up, cloud upon cloud, like sea birds rising fro
their nesting place to darken and eclipse the sun Bondage is the li

of personality, and for bondage the personal self will fight with tireless resourcefulness and the most stubborn cunning. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance, and he had failed to be vigilant. It wasn't a case, he reflected ruefully, of the spirit being willing and the flesh weak. That was altogether the wrong antithesis. The spirit is always willing, but the person, who is a mind as well as a body, is always unwilling – and the person, incidentally, is not weak but extremely strong.

He looked again at the mountains, at the pale sky between the leaves, at the soft russet pinks and purples and greys of the eucalyptus trunks, then shut his eyes once more.

'A nothingness surrounded by God, indigent of God, capable of God and filled with God if man so desires. And what is God? A being withdrawn from creatures, a free power, a pure working.' His vigilance gradually ceased to be an act of the will, a deliberate thrusting back of irrelevant personal thoughts and wishes and feelings. For little by little these thoughts and wishes and feelings had settled like a muddy sediment in a jar of water, and as they settled, his vigilance was free to transform itself into a kind of effortless unattached awareness, at once intense and still, alert and passive – an awareness whose object was the words he had spoken and at the same time that which surrounded the words. But that which surrounded the words was the awareness itself, for this vigilance which was now an effortless awareness – what was it but an aspect, a partial expression, of that impersonal and untroubled consciousness into which the words had been dropped and through which they were slowly sinking? And as they sank they took a new significance for the awareness that was following them down into the depths of itself – a significance new not in respect to the entities connoted by the words, but rather in the mode of their comprehension, which, from being intellectual in character, had become intuitive and direct, so that the nature of man in his potentiality and of God in actuality were realized by an analogue of sensuous experience, by a kind of unmediated participation.

The busy nothingness of his being experienced itself as transcended in the felt capacity for peace and purity, for the withdrawal from revulsion and desires, for the blissful freedom from personality.

The sound of approaching footsteps made him open his eyes. Peter Boone and that Englishman he had sat with in the car were advancing up the path towards his seat under the eucalyptus trees. Mr Propter raised his hand in welcome and smiled He was fond of young Pete There was native intelligence there and native kindliness, there was sensitiveness, generosity, a spontaneous decency of impulse and reaction Charming and beautiful qualities! The pity was that by themselves, and undirected as they were by a right knowledge of the nature of things, they should be so impotent for good, so inadequate to anything a reasonable man could call salvation. Fine gold, but still in the ore, unsmelted, unworked Some day, perhaps, the boy would learn to use his gold. He would have to wish to learn first – and wish also to unlearn a lot of the things he now regarded as self-evident and right. It would be hard for him – as hard, but for other reasons, as it would be for that poor fellow from Kansas.

'Well, Pete,' he called 'come and sit with me here And you've brought Mr Pordage, that's good.' He moved to the middle of the bench so that they could sit, one on either side of him 'And did you meet the Ogre?' he said to Jeremy, pointing in the direction of the castle

Jeremy made a grimace and nodded 'I remembered the name you used to call him at school,' he said 'That made it a little easier'

'Poor Jo,' said Mr Propter 'Fat people are always supposed to be so happy But who ever enjoyed being laughed at? That jolly manner they sometimes have, and the jokes they make at their own expense – it's just a case of alibis and prophylactics They vaccinate themselves with their own ridicule so that they shan't react too violently to other people's'

Jeremy smiled. He knew all about that. 'It's a good way out of an unpleasant predicament,' he said

'Mr Propter nodded But unfortunately,' he said, 'it didn't happen to be Jo's way Jo was the kind of a fat boy who bluffs it out The kind that fights The kind that bullies or patronizes The kind that boasts and shows off The kind that buys popularity by treating the girls to ice-creams, even if he has to steal a dime from his grandmother's purse to do it. The kind that goes on stealing even if he's found out and gets beaten and believes it when they tell

him he'll go to hell. Poor Jo, he's been that sort of fat boy all his life.' He pointed once again in the direction of the castle. 'That's his monument to a faulty pituitary. And talking of pituitaries,' he went on, turning to Pete, 'how's the work been going?'

Pete had been thinking gloomily of Virginia – wondering for the hundredth time why she had left them, whether he had done anything to offend her, whether she was really tired or if there might be some other reason. At Mr Propter's mention of work he looked up, and his face brightened. 'It's going just fine,' he answered, and, in quick, eager phrases, strangely compounded of slang and technical terms, he told Mr Propter about the results they had already got with their mice and were beginning to get, so it seemed, with the baboons and the dogs.

'And if you succeed,' Mr Propter asked, 'what happens to your dogs?'

'Why, their life's prolonged,' Pete answered triumphantly.

'Yes, yes, I know that,' said the older man. 'What I meant to ask was something different. A dog's a wolf that hasn't fully developed. It's more like the foetus of a wolf than an adult wolf; isn't that so?'

Pete nodded.

'In other words,' Mr Propter went on, 'it's a mild, tractable animal because it has never grown up into savagery. Isn't that supposed to be one of the mechanisms of evolutionary development?'

Pete nodded again. 'There's a kind of glandular equilibrium,' he explained. 'Then a mutation comes along and knocks it sideways. You get a new equilibrium that happens to retard the development rate. You grow up; but you do it so slowly that you're dead before you've stopped being like your great-great-grandfather's foetus.'

'Exactly,' said Mr Propter. 'So what happens if you prolong the life of an animal that has evolved that way?'

Pete laughed and shrugged his shoulders. 'Guess we'll have to wait and see,' he said.

'It would be a bit disquieting,' said Mr Propter, 'if your dogs grew back in the process of growing up.'

Pete laughed again delightedly. 'Think of the dowagers being chased by their own Pekingese,' he said.

Mr Propter looked at him curiously and was silent for a moment,

as though waiting to see whether Pete would make any further comment. The comment did not come. 'I m glad you feel so happy about it,' he said Then, turning to Jeremy, ' "It is not," if I remember rightly, Mr Pordage,' he went on, ' "it is not growing like a tree in bulk doth make men better be" '

' "Or standing long an oak, three hundred years," ' said Jeremy, smiling with the pleasure which an apt quotation always gave him.

'What shall we all be doing at three hundred?' Mr Propter speculated. 'Do you suppose you'd still be a scholar and a gentleman?'

Jeremy coughed and patted his bald head 'One will certainly have stopped being a gentleman,' he answered 'One's b-gun to stop even now, thank heaven '

'But the scholar will stay the course?'

'There's a lot of books in the British Museum '

'And you, Pete?' said Mr Propter 'Do you suppose you'll still be doing scientific research?'

'Why not? What's to prevent you from going on with it for ever?' the young man answered emphatically

'For ever?' Mr Propter repeated 'You don't think you'd get a bit bored? One experiment after another Or one book after another,' he added in an aside to Jeremy 'In general, one damned thing after another You don't think that would prey on your mind a bit?'

'I don't see why,' said Pete

'Time doesn't bother you, then?'

Pete shook his head 'Why should it?'

'Why shouldn't it?' said Mr Propter, smiling at him with an amused affection 'Time's a pretty bothersome thing, you know'

'Not if you aren't scared of dying, or growing old.'

'Yes, it is,' Mr Propter insisted, 'even if you're not scared It's nightmarish in itself – intrinsically nightmarish, if you see what I mean.'

'Intrinsically?' Pete looked at him perplexed. 'I don't get it,' he said 'Intrinsically nightmarish . . .?'

'Nightmarish in the present tense, of course,' Jeremy put in. 'But if one takes it in the fossil state – in the form of the Haubetk Papers, for example . . .' He left the sentence unfinished

'Oh, pleasant enough,' said Mr Propter, agreeing with his im-

plied conclusion. 'But, after all, history isn't the real thing Past time is only evil at a distance, and, of course, the study of past time is itself a process in time Cataloguing bits of fossil evil can never be more than an *Ersatz* for the experience of eternity.' He glanced curiously at Pete, wondering how the boy would respond to what he was saying Plunging like this into the heart of the matter, beginning at the very core and centre of the mystery – it was risky, there was a danger of evoking nothing but bewilderment, or alternatively nothing but angry derision Pete's, he could see, was more nearly the first reaction, but it was a bewilderment that seemed to be tempted by interest, he looked as though he wanted to find out what it was all about.

Meanwhile, Jeremy had begun to feel that this conversation was taking a most undesirable turn 'What precisely are we supposed to be talking about?' he asked acidulously 'The New Jerusalem?'

Mr Propter smiled at him good humouredly 'It's all right,' he said 'I won't say a word about harps or wings.'

'Well, that's something,' said Jeremy.

'I never could get much satisfaction out of meaningless discourse,' Mr Propter continued 'I like the words I use to bear some relation to facts. That's why I'm interested in eternity – psychological eternity Because it's a fact'

'For you, perhaps,' said Jeremy in a tone which implied that more civilized people didn't suffer from these hallucinations

'For anyone who chooses to fulfil the conditions under which it can be experienced'

'And why should anyone choose to fulfil them?'

'Why should anyone choose to go to Athens to see the Parthenon? Because it's worth the bother And the same is true of eternity The experience of timeless good is worth all the trouble it involves'

'"Timeless good,"' Jeremy repeated with distaste 'I don't know what the words mean'

'Why should you?' said Mr Propter 'One doesn't know the full meaning of the word "Parthenon" until one has actually seen the thing'

'Yes, but at least I've seen photographs of the Parthenon, I've read descriptions.'

'You've read descriptions of timeless good,' Mr Propter answered 'Dozens of them. In all the literatures of philosophy and religion You've read them, but you've never bought your ticket for Athens'

In a resentful silence, Jeremy had to admit to himself that this was true The fact that it was true made him disapprove of the conversation even more profoundly than he had done before

'As for time,' Mr Propter was saying to Pete, 'what is it, in this particular context, but the medium in which evil propagates itself the element in which evil lives and outside of which it dies? Indeed, it's more than the element of evil, more than merely its medium. If you carry your analysis far enough, you'll find that time is evil One of the aspects of its essential substance'

Jeremy listened with growing discomfort and a mounting irritation His fears had been justified, the old boy was launching out into the worst kind of theology Eternity, timeless experience of good, time as the substance of evil – it was bad enough, God knew, in books, but, fired at you like this, point blank, by somebody who really took it seriously, why, it was really frightful. Why on earth couldn't people live their lives in a rational, civilized way? Why couldn't they take things as they came? Breakfast at nine, lunch at one-thirty, tea at five And conversation And the daily walk with Mr Gladstone the Yorkshire terrier And the library, the Works of Voltaire in eighty three volumes, the inexhaustible treasure of Horace Walpole, and for a change the *Divine Comedy*; and then, in case you might be tempted to take the Middle Ages too seriously, Salimbene's autobiography and the Miller's Tale And sometimes calls in the afternoon – the Rector, Lady Fredegond with her ear trumpet, Mr Veal And political discussions – except that in these last months, since the *Anschluss* and Munich, one had found that political discussion was one of the unpleasant things it was wise to avoid And the weekly journey to London, with lunch at the Reform, and always dinner with old Thripp of the British Museum, and a chat with one's poor brother Tom at the Foreign Office (only that too was rapidly becoming one [illegible] avoided) And then, of course, the London [illegible] minster Cathedral, if they [illegible] every alternate week, between [illegible]

half with Mae or Doris in their flat in Maida Vale Infinite squalor in a little room, as he liked to call it, abysmally delightful Those were the things that came, why couldn t they take them, quietly and sensibly? But no, they had to gibber about eternity and all the rest. That sort of stuff always made Jeremy want to be blasphemous – to ask whether God had a *boyau rectum*, to protest, like the Japanese in the anecdote, that he was altogether flummoxed and perplexed by position of Honourable Bird But, unfortunately, the present was one of those peculiarly exasperating cases where such reactions were out of place For, after all, old Propter had written *Short Studies*, what he said couldn t just be dismissed as the vapourings of a deficient mind. Besides, he hadn t talked Christianity so that jokes about anthropomorphism were beside the point It was really too exasperating! He assumed an expression of haughty detachment and even started to hum 'The Honeysuckle and the Bee The impression he wanted to give was that of a superior being who really couldn t be expected to waste his time listening to stuff like this

A comic spectacle, Mr Propter reflected as he looked at him, except, of course, that it was so extremely depressing

Chapter Nine

'Time and craving,' said Mr Propter, 'craving and time – two aspects of the same thing; and that thing is the raw material of evil. So you see, Pete,' he added in another tone, 'you see what a queer sort of present you'll be making us, if you're successful in your work. Another century or so of time and craving. A couple of extra lifetimes of potential evil.'

'*And* potential good,' the young man insisted with a note of protest in his voice.

'*And* potential good,' Mr Propter agreed. 'But only at a far remove from that extra time you're giving us.'

'Why do you say that?' Pete asked.

'Because potential evil is *in* time; potential good isn't. The longer you live, the more evil you automatically come into contact with. Nobody comes automatically into contact with good. Men don't find more good by merely existing longer. It's curious,' he went on reflectively, 'that people should always have concentrated on the problem of evil. Exclusively. As though the nature of good were something self-evident. But it isn't self-evident. There's a problem of good at least as difficult as the problem of evil.'

'And what's the solution?' Pete asked.

'The solution is very simple and profoundly unacceptable. Actual good is outside time.'

'Outside time? But then how . . .?'

'I told you it was unacceptable,' said Mr Propter.

'But if it's outside time, then . . .'

'. . . then nothing within time can be actual good. Time is potential evil, and craving converts the potentiality into actual evil. Whereas a temporal act can never be more than potentially good, with a potentiality, what's more, that can't be actualized except out of time.'

'But inside time, here – you know, just doing the ordinary things – hell! we do sometimes do right. What acts *are* good?'

'Strictly speaking, none,' Mr Propter answered. 'But, in practice, I think one's justified in applying the word to certain acts. Any act

that contributes towards the liberation of those concerned in it – I'd call it a good act'

'Liberation?' the young man repeated dubiously. The words, in his mind, carried only economic and revolutionary connotations. But it was evident that Mr Propter wasn't talking about the necessity for getting rid of capitalism. 'Liberation from what?'

Mr Propter hesitated before replying. Should he go on with this? he wondered. The Englishman was hostile, the time short, the boy himself entirely ignorant. But it was an ignorance evidently mitigated by good will and a touching nostalgia for perfection. He decided to take a chance and go on.

'Liberation from time,' he said. 'Liberation from craving and revulsions. Liberation from personality.'

'But heck,' said Pete, 'you're always talking about democracy. Doesn't that mean respecting personality?'

'Of course,' Mr Propter agreed. Respecting it in order that it may be able to transcend itself. Slavery and fanaticism intensify the obsession with time and evil and the self. Hence the value of democratic institutions and a sceptical attitude of mind. The more you respect a personality, the better its chance of discovering that all personality is a prison. Potential good is anything that helps you to get out of prison. Actualized good lies outside the prison, in timelessness, in the state of pure, disinterested consciousness.'

'I'm not much good at abstractions,' said the young man. 'Let's take some concrete examples. What about science, for instance? Is that good?'

'Good, bad and indifferent, according to how it's pursued and what it's used for. Good, bad, and indifferent, first of all, for the scientists themselves – just as art and scholarship may be good, bad, or indifferent for artists and scholars. Good if it facilitates liberation, indifferent if it neither helps nor hinders, bad if it makes liberation more difficult by intensifying the obsession with personality. And, remember, the apparent selflessness of the scientist, or the artist, is not necessarily a genuine freedom from the bondage of personality. Scientists and artists are men devoted to what we vaguely call an ideal. But what is an ideal? An ideal is merely the projection, on an enormously enlarged scale, of some aspect of personality.'

'Say that again,' Pete requested, while even Jeremy so far forgot his pose of superior detachment to lend his most careful attention.

Mr Propter said it again 'And that's true,' he went on, 'of every ideal except the highest, which is the ideal of liberation – liberation from personality, liberation from time and craving, liberation into union with God, if you don't object to the word, Mr Pordage Many people do,' he added 'It's one of the words that the Mrs Grundys of the intellect find peculiarly shocking I always try to spare their sensibilities, if I can Well, to return to our idealist,' he continued, glad to see that Jeremy had been constrained, in spite of himself, to smile 'If he serves any ideal except the highest – whether it's the artist's ideal of beauty, or the scientist's ideal of truth, or the humanitarian s ideal of what currently passes for good ness – he's not serving God, he's serving a magnified aspect of himself He may be completely devoted, but in the last analys.s his devotion turns out to be directed towards an aspect of his own personality His apparent selflessness is really not a liberation from his ego, but merely another form of bondage Thus means that science may be bad for scientists, even when it appears to be a deliverer And the same holds good of art, of scholarship, of humanitarianism'

Jeremy thought nostalgically of his library at The Araucarias. Why couldn't this old madman be content to take things as they came?

'And what about other people?' Pete was saying 'People who aren't scientists Hasn't it helped to set them free?'

Mr Propter nodded. 'And it has also helped to tie them more closely to themselves And what s more, I should guess that it has increased bondage more than it has diminished it – and will tend to go on increasing it, progressively'

'How do you figure that out?'

'Through its applications,' Mr Propter answered 'Applications to warfare, first of all Better planes, better explosives, better guns and gases – every improvement increases the sum of fear and hatred, widens the incidence of nationalistic hysteria In other words, every improvement in armaments makes it more difficult for people to escape from their egos, more difficult to forget those horrible projections of themselves they call their ideals of patriotism,

heroism, glory and all the rest. And even the less destructive applications of science aren't really much more satisfactory. For what do such applications result in? The multiplication of possessable objects, the invention of new instruments of stimulation, the dissemination of new wants through propaganda aimed at equating possession with well being and incessant stimulation with happiness.

But incessant stimulation from without is a source of bondage, and so is the preoccupation with possessions. And now you're threatening to prolong our lives, so that we can go on being stimulated, go on desiring possessions, go on waving flags and hating our enemies and being afraid of air attack – go on and on, generation after generation, sinking deeper and deeper into the stinking slough of our personality.' He shook his head. 'No, I can't quite share your optimism about science.'

There was a silence while Pete debated with himself whether to ask Mr Propter about love. In the end he decided he wouldn't. Virginia was too sacred. But why, why had she turned back at the Grotto? What could he have said or done to offend her? As much to prevent himself from brooding over these problems as because he wanted to know the old man's opinions on the last of the three things that seemed to him supremely valuable, he looked up at Mr Propter and asked, 'What about social justice? I mean, take the French Revolution. Or Russia. And what about this Spanish business – fighting for liberty and democracy against fascist aggression?' He had tried to remain perfectly calm and scientific about the whole thing, but his voice trembled a little as he spoke the last words. In spite of their familiarity (perhaps because of their familiarity), phrases like 'fascist aggression' still had power to move him to the depths.

'Napoleon came out of the French Revolution,' said Mr Propter after a moment's silence. 'German nationalism came out of Napoleon. The war of 1870 came out of German nationalism. The war of 1914 came out of the war of 1870. Hitler came out of the war of 1914. Those are the bad results of the French Revolution. The good results were the enfranchisement of the French peasants and the spread of political democracy. Put the good results in one scale of your balance and the bad ones in the other, and try which set is

the heavier Then perform the same operation with Russia Put the abolition of tsardom and capitalism in one scale, and in the other put Stalin, put the secret police, put the famines, put twenty years of hardship for a hundred and fifty million people, put the liquidation of intellectuals and kulaks and old bolsheviks, put the hordes of slaves in prison camps, put the military conscription of everybody, male and female, from childhood to old age, put the revolutionary propaganda which spurred the bourgeoisie to invent fascism' Mr Propter shook his head 'Or take the fight for democracy in Spain, he went on. 'There was a fight for democracy all over Europe not so long ago Rational prognosis can only be based on past experience Look at the results of 1914 and then ask yourself what chance the loyalists ever had of establishing a liberal régime at the end of a long war The others are winning, so we shall never have the opportunity of seeing what circumstances and their own passions would have driven those well intentioned liberals to become'

'But hell! Pete broke out, 'what do you expect people to do when they're attacked by the fascists? Sit down and let their throats be cut?

'Of course not,' said Mr Propter 'I *expect* them to fight. And the expectation is based on my previous knowledge of human behaviour But the fact that people generally do react to that kind of situation in that kind of way doesn't prove that it's the best way of reacting Experience makes me expect that they'll behave like that. But experience also makes me expect that, if they do behave like that, the results will be disastrous.'

Well, how do you want us to act? Do you want us to sit still and do nothing?'

'Not nothing,' said Mr Propter 'Merely something appropriate.'

'But what is appropriate?

'Not war, anyhow Not violent revolution Nor yet politics, to any considerable extent, I should guess'

Then what?

'That's what we've got to discover The main lines are clear enough But there's still a lot of work to be done on the practical details'

Pete was not listening His mind had gone back to that time in Aragon when life had seemed supremely significant. 'But those

boys, back there in Spain,' he burst out 'You didn't know them, Mr Propter They were wonderful, really they were Never mean to you, and brave, and loyal and . and everything He wrestled with the inadequacies of his vocabulary, with the fear of making an exhibition of himself by talking big, like a highbrow 'They weren't living for themselves, I can tell you that Mr Propter' He looked into the old man's face almost supplicatingly, as though imploring him to believe They were living for something much bigger than themselves – like what you were talking about just now, you know, something more than just personal'

'And what about Hitler's boys?' Mr Propter asked 'What about Mussolini's boys? What about Stalin's boys? Do you suppose they're not just as brave, just as kind to one another, just as loyal to their cause and just as firmly convinced that it's the cause of justice, truth, freedom, right and honour?' He looked at Pete inquiringly, but Pete said nothing 'The fact that people have a lot of virtues,' Mr Propter went on, 'doesn't prove anything about the goodness of their actions You can have all the virtues – that's to say, all except the two that really matter, understanding and compassion – you can have all the others, I say, and be a thoroughly bad man Indeed, you can't be really bad unless you *do* have most of the virtues Look at Milton's Satan for example Brave, strong, generous, loyal, prudent, temperate, self sacrificing And let's give the dictators the credit that's due to them, some of them are nearly as virtuous as Satan Not quite, I admit, but nearly That's why they can achieve so much evil.'

His elbows on his knees, Pete sat in silence, frowning 'But that feeling,' he said at last, 'That feeling there was between us You know — the friendship, only it was more than just ordinary friendship. And the feeling of being there all together – fighting for the same thing – and the thing being worth while – and then the danger, and the rain, and that awful cold at nights, and the heat in summer, and being thirsty, and even those lice and the dirt – share and share alike in everything bad or good – and knowing that tomorrow it might be your turn, or one of the other boys – your turn for the field hospital (and the chances were they wouldn't have enough anaesthetics, except maybe for an amputation or something like that), or your turn for the burial party All those

feelings, Mr Propter – I just can't believe they didn t mea
something'

'They meant themselves,' said Mr Propter

Jeremy saw the opportunity for a counter attack and, with
promptitude unusual in him, immediately took it. 'Doesn't th
same thing apply to your feelings about eternity, or whatever
is?' he asked

Of course it does,' said Mr Propter

'Well, in that case, how can you claim any validity for it? Th
feeling means itself, and that's all there is to it.'

'It means itself,' Mr Propter agreed 'But what precisely is thi
'itself'? In other words, what is the nature of the feeling?'

'Don t ask me,' said Jeremy with a shake of the head and a
comically puzzled lift of the eyebrows I really don't know'

Mr Propter smiled 'I know you don't want to know,' he said
'And I won't ask you I ll just state the facts The feeling in ques
tion is a non personal experience of timeless peace Accordingly,
non personality, timelessness and peace are what it means Now
let s consider the feeling that Pete had been talking about. These
are all personal feelings, evoked by temporal situations, and char-
acterized by a sense of excitement. Intensification of the ego within
the world of time and craving – that s what these feelings meant.'

But you can t call self sacrifice an intensification of the ego,'
said Pete

I can and I do,' Mr Propter insisted 'For the good reason that
it generally is Self sacrifice to any but the highest cause is sacrifice
to an ideal, which is simply a projection of the ego What is com
monly called self sacrifice is the sacrifice of one part of the ego to
another part, one set of personal feelings and passions for another
set – as when the feelings connected with money or sex are sacri
ficed in order that the ego may have the feelings of superiority,
solidarity, and hatred which are associated with patriotism, or
any kind of political or religious fanaticism.'

Pete shook his head 'Sometimes,' he said, with a smile of rueful
perplexity, 'sometimes you almost talk like Dr Obispo You know
– cynically'

Mr Propter laughed 'It's good to be cynical,' he said 'That is,
if you know when to stop Most of the things that we re all taught

to respect and reverence – they don't deserve anything but cynicism. Take your own case. You've been taught to worship ideals like patriotism, social justice, science, romantic love. You've been told that such virtues as loyalty, temperance, courage, and prudence are good in themselves, in any circumstances. You've been assured that self-sacrifice is always splendid and fine feelings invariably good. And it's all nonsense, all a pack of lies that people have made up in order to justify themselves in continuing to deny God and wallow in their own egotism. Unless you're steadily and unflaggingly cynical about the solemn twaddle that's talked by bishops and bankers and professors and politicians and all the rest of them, you're lost. Utterly lost. Doomed to perpetual imprisonment in your ego – doomed to be a personality in a world of personalities, and a world of personalities is *this* world, the world of greed and fear and hatred, of war and capitalism and dictatorship and slavery. Yes, you've got to be cynical, Pete. Specially cynical about all the actions and feelings you've been taught to suppose were good. Most of them are not good. They're merely evils which happen to be regarded as creditable. But, unfortunately, creditable evil is just as bad as discreditable evil. Scribes and Pharisees aren't any better, in the last analysis, than publicans and sinners. Indeed, they're often much worse. For several reasons. Being well thought of by others, they think well of themselves, and nothing so confirms an egotism as thinking well of oneself. In the next place, publicans and sinners are generally just human animals, without enough energy or self-control to do much harm. Whereas the Scribes and Pharisees have all the virtues, except the only two which count, and enough intelligence to understand everything except the real nature of the world. Publicans and sinners merely fornicate and overeat, and get drunk. The people who make wars, the people who reduce their fellows to slavery, the people who kill and torture and tell lies in the name of their sacred causes, the really evil people, in a word – these are never the publicans and the sinners. No, they're the virtuous, respectable men, who have the finest feelings, the best brains, the noblest ideals.'

'So what it all boils down to,' Pete concluded in a tone of angry despair, 'is that there just isn't anything you can do. Is that it?'

'Yes and no,' said Mr Propter, in his quiet judicial way. 'On the

body posture and the worse, in consequence, becomes the functioning of the entire organism In a word, in so far as we're human beings, we prevent ourselves from realizing the physiological and instinctive good that we're capable of as animals And *mutatis mutandis*, the same thing is true in regard to the sphere above In so far as we're human beings, we prevent ourselves from realizing the spiritual and timeless good that we're capable of as potential inhabitants of eternity, as potential enjoyers of the beatific vision We worry and crave ourselves out of the very possibility of transcending personality and knowing, intellectually at first and then by direct experience, the true nature of the world.'

Mr Propter was silent for a moment, then, with a sudden smile, 'Luckily,' he went on, 'most of us don't manage to behave like human beings all the time We forget our wretched little egos and those horrible great projections of our egos in the ideal world – forget them and relapse for a while into harmless animality The organism gets a chance to function according to its own laws, other words, it gets a chance to realize such good as it is capable of That's why we're as healthy and sane as we are Even in great cities, as many as four persons out of five manage to go through life without having to be treated in a lunatic asylum. If we were consistently human, the percentage of mental cases would rise from twenty to a hundred But fortunately most of us are incapable of consistency – the animal always resuming its rights And to some people fairly frequently, perhaps occasionally to all, there come little flashes of illumination – momentary glimpses into the nature of the world as it is for a consciousness liberated from appetite and time, of the world as it might be if we didn't choose to deny God by being our personal selves Those flashes come to us when we're off our guard, then craving and worry come rushing back and the light is eclipsed once more by our personality and its lunatic ideals, its criminal policies and plans'

There was silence The sun had gone Behind the mountains to the west, a pale yellow light faded through green into a blue that deepened as it climbed At the zenith, it was all night

Pete sat quite still, staring into the dark but still transparent above the northern peaks That voice, so calm at first and at the end so powerfully resonant, those words, now

critical of all the things to which he had given his allegiance, now charged with the half-comprehended promise of things incommensurably worthier of loyalty, had left him profoundly moved and at the same time perplexed and at a loss. Everything he saw would have to be brought out again, from the beginning – science, politics, perhaps even love, even Virginia. He was appalled by the prospect and yet, in another part of his being, attracted, he felt resentful at the thought of Mr Propter, but at the same time loved the disquieting old man, loved him for what he did and, above all, for what he so admirably and, in Pete's own experience, uniquely was – disinterestedly friendly, at once serene and powerful, gentle and strong, self-effacing and yet intensely *there*, more present, so to speak, radiating more life than anyone else.

Jeremy Pordage had also found himself taking an interest in what the old man said; had even, like Pete, experienced the stirrings of a certain disquiet – a disquiet none the less disquieting for having stirred in him before. The substance of what Mr Propter had said was familiar to him. For, of course, he had read all the significant books on the subject – would have thought himself barbarously uneducated if he hadn't – had read Sankara and Eckhart, the Pali texts and John of the Cross, Charles de Condren and the Bardo, and Patanjali and the Pseudo-Dionysius. He had read them and been moved by them into wondering whether he oughtn't to do something about them, and, because he had been moved in this way, he had taken the most elaborate pains to make fun of them, not only to other people, but also and above all to himself. 'You've never bought your ticket to Athens,' the man had said – damn his eyes! Why did he want to go putting these things over on one? All one asked was to be left in peace, to take things as they came. Things as they came – one's books, one's little articles, and Lady Fredegond's ear trumpet, and Palestrina and steak and kidney pudding at the Reform, and Mae and Doris. Which reminded him that to-day was Friday, if he were in England it would be his afternoon at the flat in Maida Vale. Deliberately he turned his attention away from Mr Propter and thought instead of those alternate Friday afternoons, of the pink lampshades, the smell of talcum powder and perspiration, the Trojan women, as he called them because they worked so hard, in their kimonos from Marks and

Spencer s, the framed reproductions of pictures by Poynter and Alma Tadema (delicious irony, that works which the Victorians had regarded as art should have come to serve, a generation later, as pornography in a trollop s bedroom!), and, finally, the erotic routine, so matter-of factly sordid, so conscientiously and fessionally low, with a lowness and a sord dness that cons for Jeremy, their greatest charm, that he prized more highly any amourt of moonlight and romance, any number of lyrics and *Liebestods* Infinite squalor in a little room! It was the apotheosis of refinement, the logical conclusion of good taste

Chapter Ten

This Friday, Mr Stoyte's afternoon in town had been exceptionally uneventful. Nothing untoward had occurred during the preceding week. In the course of his various meetings and interviews nobody had said or done anything to make him lose his temper The reports on business conditions had been very satisfactory The Japs had bought another hundred thousand barrels of oil Copper was up two cents. The demand for bentonite was definitely increasing True, applications for bank credit had been rather disappointing, but the influenza epidemic had raised the weekly turnover of the Pantheon to a figure well above the average

Things went so smoothly that Mr Stoyte was through with all his business more than an hour before he had expected Finding himself with time to spare, he stopped on the way home at his agent's, to find out what was happening on the estate. The interview lasted only a few minutes – long enough, however, to put Mr Stoyte in a fury that sent him rushing out to the car

'Drive to Mr Propter's,' he ordered with a peremptory ferocity as he slammed the door

What the hell did Bill Propter think he was doing? he kept indignantly asking himself Shoving his nose into other people's business And all on account of those lousy bums who had come to pick the oranges! All for those tramps, those stinking, filthy hobos! Mr Stoyte had a peculiar hatred for the ragged hordes of transients on whom he depended for the harvesting of his crops, a hatred that was more than the rich man's ordinary dislike of the poor Not that he didn't experience that complex mixture of fear and physical disgust, of stifled compassion and shame transformed by repression into chronic exasperation He did But over and above this common and generic dislike for poor people, he was moved by other hatreds of his own Mr Stoyte was a rich man who had been poor In the six years between the time when he ran away from his father and grandmother in Nashville and the time when he had been adopted by the black sheep of the family, his Uncle Tom, in

California, Jo Stoyte had learned, as he imagined, everything there was to be known about being poor Those years had left him with an ineradicable hatred for the circumstances of poverty and at the same time an ineradicable contempt for all those who had been too stupid, or too weak, or too unlucky, to climb out of the hell into which they had fallen or been born The poor were odious to him, not only because they were potentially a menace to his position in society, not only because their misfortunes demanded a sympathy he did not wish to give, but also because they reminded him of what he himself had suffered in the past, and at the same time because the fact that they were still poor was a sufficient proof of their contemptibleness and his own superiority And since he had suffered what they were now suffering it was only right that they should go on suffering what he had suffered Also, since their continued poverty proved them contemptible, it was proper that he who was now rich should treat them in every way as the contemptible creatures they had shown themselves to be Such was the logic of Mr Stoyte s emotions And here was Bill Propter, running counter to this logic by telling the agent that they oughtn t to take advantage of the glut of transient labour to force down wages, that they ought, on the contrary, to raise them – raise them, if you please, at a time when these bums were swarming over the State like a plague of Mormon crickets! And not only that, they ought to build accommodation for them – cabins, like the ones that crazy fool Bill had built for them himself, two-roomed cabins at six or seven hundred dollars apiece for bums like that, and their women, and those disgusting children who were so filthy dirty he wouldn t *have them in his hospital, not unless they were really dying of* appendicitis or something – you couldn t refuse them then, of course But meanwhile, what the hell did Bill Propter think he was doing? And it wasn t the first time either that he d tried to interfere Gliding through the twilight of the orange groves, Mr Stoyte kept striking the palm of his left hand with his clenched right fist

I ll let him have it,' he whispered to himself 'I ll let him have it

Fifty years before, Bill Propter had been the only boy in the school who, even though he was the older and stronger, didn make fun of him for being fat. They had met again when Bill was

teaching at Berkeley and he himself had made good in the real estate game and had just gone into oil Partly in gratitude for the way Bill Propter had acted when they were boys, partly also in order to display his power, to redress the balance of superiority in his own favour, Jo Stoyte had wanted to do something handsome for the young assistant professor But in spite of his modest salary and the two or three miserable thousand dollars a year his father had left him, Bill Propter hadn't wanted anything done for him. He had seemed genuinely grateful, he had been perfectly courteous and friendly, but he just didn't want to come in on the ground floor of Consol Oil – didn't want to because, as he kept explaining, he had all he needed and preferred not to have anything more Jo's effort to redress the balance of superiority had failed. Failed disastrously because, by refusing his offer, Bill had done something which, though he called him a fool for doing it, compelled Jo Stoyte secretly to admire him more than ever Extorted against his will, this admiration bred a corresponding resentment towards its object. Jo Stoyte felt aggrieved that Bill had given him so many reasons for liking him He would have preferred to like him without a reason, in spite of his shortcomings But Bill had few shortcomings and many merits, merits which Jo himself did not have and whose presence in Bill he therefore regarded as an affront Thus it was that all the reasons for liking Bill Propter were also, in Jo's eyes, equally valid reasons for disliking him He continued to call Bill a fool, but he felt him as a standing reproach And yet the nature of this standing reproach was such that he liked to be in Bill's company It was because Bill had settled down on a ten acre patch of land in this part of the valley that Mr Stoyte had decided to build his castle on the site where it now stood He wanted to be near Bill Propter, even though, in practice, there was almost nothing that Bill could do or say that didn't annoy him Today, this chronic exasperation had been fanned by Mr Stoyte's hatred of the transients into a passion of fury

'I'll let him have it,' he repeated again and again.

The car came to a halt, and before the chauffeur could open the door for him, Mr Stoyte had darted out and was hurrying in his determined way, looking neither to right nor left, up the path that led from the road to his old friend's bungalow

I want to show you something Jo,' he said 'Something that'll interest you, I think.'

I don t want to see it,' said Mr Stoyte between his false teeth.

Mr Propter paid no attention but continued to lead him towards the back of the house It's a gadget that Abbot of the Smithsonian has been working on for some time, he continued. 'A thing for making use of solar energy ' He interrupted himself for a moment to call back to the others to follow him, then turned again to Mr Stoyte and resumed the conversation 'Much more compact than anything of the kind that s ever been made before,' he said. more efficient, too ' And he went on to describe the system *trough-shaped reflectors the tubes of oil heated to* of four or five hundred degrees Fahrenheit, the boiler for steam, if you wanted to run a low pressure engine, the cooking range and water heater, if you were using it only for domestic purposes Pity the sun s down,' he said, as they stood in front of the machine 'I d have liked to show you the way it works the engine I ve had two horse-power, eight hours a day, ever since I got the thing working last week. Not bad considering we re still in January We ll have her working overtime all summer '

Mr Stoyte had intended to persist in his silence – just to show Bill that he was still angry, that he hadn t forgiven him, but his interest in the machine and, above all, his exasperated concern with Bill s idiotic, crackpot notions were too much for him. 'What the hell do you want with two horse-power, eight hours a day?' he asked

'To run my electric generator '

But what do you want with an electric generator? Haven t you got your current wired in from the city?'

'Of course And I m trying to see how far I can be independent of the city

But what for?

Mr Propter uttered a little laugh. Because I believe in Jeffersonian democracy '

What the hell has Jeffersonian democracy got to do with it?' said Mr Stoyte with mounting irritation. 'Can t you believe in Jefferson and have your current wired in from the city?'

That s exactly it,' said Mr Propter, 'you almost certainly can t.

'What do you mean?'

'What I say,' Mr Propter answered mildly

'*I* believe in democracy too,' Mr Stoyte announced with a look of defiance

'I know you do And you also believe in being the undisputed boss in all your businesses'

'*I should hope so!*'

'There's another name for an undisputed boss,' said Mr Propter. ''Dictator".'

'What are you trying to get at?'

'Merely at the facts You believe in democracy, but you're at the head of businesses which have to be run dictatorially And your subordinates have to accept your dictatorship because they're dependent *on you for their living In Russia they'd depend on* government officials for their living Perhaps you think that's an improvement,' he added, turning to Pete

Pete nodded 'I m all for the public ownership of the means of production,' he said It was the first time he had openly confessed his faith in the presence of his employer, I e felt happy at having dared to be a Daniel

'"*Public ownership of the means of production,*"' *Mr Propter* repeated 'But unfortunately governments have a way of regarding the individual producers as being parts of the means Frankly, I d rather have Jo Stoyte as my boss than Jo Stalin This Jo,' (he laid his hand on Mr Stoyte's shoulder), 'this Jo can't have you executed, he can't send you to the Arctic, he can't prevent you from getting a job under another boss Whereas the other Jo . ' he *shook his head 'Not that,' he added, 'I'm exactly longing to have* even this Jo as my boss'

'You'd be fired pretty quick,' growled Mr Stoyte

'I don't want *any* boss,' Mr Propter went on 'The more bosses, the less democracy But unless people can support themselves, they've got to have a boss who'll undertake to do it for them So the less self support, the less democracy In Jefferson's day, a great *many Americans did support themselves They were economically* independent. Independent of governments and independent of big business Hence the Constitution'

'We've still got the Constitution,' said Mr Stoyte

Mr Stoyte crossed the great hall, stepped into the elevator and, from the elevator, walked directly into Virginia's boudoir.

When he opened the door, the two were sitting at least fifteen feet apart. Virginia was at the soda-counter, pensively eating a chocolate and banana split, seated in an elegant pose on one of the pink satin armchairs, Dr Obispo was in process of lighting a cigarette.

On Mr Stoyte the impact of suspicion and jealousy was like the blow of a fist directed (for the shock was physical and localized in the midriff) straight to the solar plexus. His face contracted as though with pain. And yet he had seen nothing, there was no apparent cause for jealousy, no visible reason, in their attitudes, their actions, their expressions, for suspicion. Dr Obispo's manner was perfectly easy and natural, and the Baby's smile of startled and delighted welcome was angelic in its candour.

'Uncle Jo!' She ran to meet him and threw her arms round his neck. 'Uncle Jo!'

The warmth of her tone, the softness of her lips had a magnified effect on Mr Stoyte. Moved to a point at which he was using the word to the limit of its double connotation, he murmured, 'My Baby!' with a lingering emphasis. The fact that he should have felt suspicious, even for a moment, of this pure and adorable, this deliciously warm, resilient and perfumed child, filled him with shame. And even Dr Obispo now heaped coals of fire on his head.

'I was a bit worried,' he said as he got up from his chair, 'by the way you coughed after lunch. That's why I came up here, to make sure of catching you the moment you got in.' He put a hand in his pocket and, after half drawing out and immediately replacing a little leather bound volume, like a prayer book, extracted a stethoscope. 'Prevention's better than cure,' he went on. 'I'm not going to let you get influenza if I can help it.'

Remembering what a good week they had had at the Beverly Pantheon on account of the epidemic, Mr Stoyte felt alarmed. 'I don't *feel* bad,' he said. 'I guess that cough wasn't anything. Only my old – you know, the chronic bronchitis.'

'Maybe it was only that. But all the same, I'd like to listen in.' Briskly professional, Dr Obispo hung the stethoscope round his neck.

'He's right, Uncle Jo,' said the Baby.

Touched by so much solicitude, and at the same time rather disturbed by the thought that it might perhaps be influenza, Mr Stoyte took off his coat and waistcoat and began to undo his tie. A moment later he was standing stripped to the waist under the crystals of the chandelier. *Modestly, Virginia retired again to her soda-fountain.* Dr Obispo slipped the ends of the curved nickel tubes of the stethoscope into his ears. 'Take a deep breath,' he said as he pressed the muzzle against Mr Stoyte's chest. 'Again,' he ordered. 'Now cough.' Looking past that thick barrel of hairy flesh, he could see, on the wall behind the inhabitants of Watteau's mournful paradise as they prepared to set sail for some other paradise, doubtless yet more heartbreaking.

'Say ninety-nine,' Dr Obispo commanded, returning from the embarkation for Cythera to a near view of Mr Stoyte's thorax and abdomen.

'Ninety-nine,' said Mr Stoyte. 'Ninety-nine. Ninety-nine.'

With professional thoroughness, Dr Obispo shifted the muzzle of his stethoscope from point to point on the curving barrel of flesh before him. There was nothing wrong, of course, with the old buzzard. Just the familiar set of râles and wheezes he always had. Perhaps it would make things a bit more realistic if he were to take the creature down to his office and stick him up in front of the fluoroscope. But, no; he really couldn't be bothered. And, besides, this farce would be quite enough.

'Cough again,' he said, planting his instrument among the grey hairs on Mr Stoyte's left pap. And among other things, he went on to reflect, while Mr Stoyte forced out a succession of artificial coughs, among other things, these old sacks of guts didn't smell too good. How any young girl could stand it, even for money, he really couldn't imagine. And yet the fact remained that there were thousands of them who not only stood it, but actually enjoyed it. Or, perhaps, 'enjoy' was the wrong word. Because in most cases there probably wasn't any question of enjoyment in the proper, physiological sense of the word. It all happened in the mind, not in the body. They loved their old gut-sacks with their heads; loved them because they admired them, because they were impressed by the gut-sack's position in the world, or his knowledge, or his

celebrity What they slept with wasn t the man, it was a reputation, it was the embodiment of a function And then, of course, some of the girls were future models for Mother's Day advertisements, some were little Florence Nightingales, on the look out for a Crimean War In those cases, the very infirmities of their gut-sacks were added attractions They had the satisfaction of sleeping not only with a reputation or a stock of wisdom, not only with a federal judgeship, for example, or the presidency of a chamber of commerce, but also and simultaneously with a wounded soldier, with an imbecile child, with a lovely sinking little baby who still made messes in its bed Even this cutie (Dr Obispo shot a sideways glance in the direction of the soda fountain), even this one had something of the Florence Nightingale in her, something of the Gold Star Mother (And that in spite of the fact that, with her conscious mind, she felt a kind of physical horror of physical maternity) Jo Stoyte was a little bit her baby and her parent, and at the same time, of course, he was a great deal her own private Abraham Lincoln Incidentally, he also happened to be the man with the cheque book Which was a consideration, of course But if he were only that, Virginia wouldn t have been so nearly happy as she obviously was The cheque-book was made more attractive by being in the hands of a demi god who had to have a nanny to change his diapers

'Turn round, please '

Mr Stoyte obeyed The back, Dr Obispo reflected, was perceptibly less revolting than the front Perhaps because it was less personal.

'Take a deep breath,' he said, for he was going to play the farce all over again on this new stage 'Another '

Mr Stoyte breathed enormously, like a cetacean

'And another,' said Dr Obispo *'And* again,' said Dr Obispo, reflecting as the old man snorted that his own chief asset was a refreshing unlikeness to this smelly old gut-sack She would take him, and take him, what was more, on his own terms No Romeo-and Juliet acts, no nonsense about Love with a large L, none of that popular song claptrap with its skies of blue, dreams come true, heaven with you Just sensuality for its own sake The real, essential concrete thing, no less, it went without saying, but also (and

thus most certainly d dn t go without saying, for the b tches were always trying to get you to st ck them on pedestals, or be their soul mates), also no more. No more, to begin with, ot t of respect for scientific truth He bel eved in scientific truth Facts were facts, accept tl em as such It was a fact, for example, that young girls in tl e pay of rich old men could be seduced without much difficulty It w as also a fact that rich old men, however successful at busi ness were generally so frightened, ignorant and stup d that they could be bamboozled by any intell g nt person who chose to try

'Say ninety nine again,' he sa d aloud

Ninety nine Ninety nine

Ninety nine chances out of a hundred that they would never find out anything That was the fact about old men The fact about love was that it consisted essentially of tumescence and d tumescence So why embroider the fact with unnecessary f ctions? Why not be real stic? *why not treat the whole business scientifically?*

'Ninety nine,' Mr Stoyte went on repeating 'Ninety nine'

And then, Dr Obispo went on to reflect, as he listened without interest to the whisperings and crepitations inside the warm smelly barrel before him, then there were the more personal reasons for preferring to take love unadorned, in the chemically pure condi tion Personal reasons that were also, of course, a fact that had to be accepted. *For it was a fact that he personally found an add d* pleasure in th imposition of his will upon the partner he had chosen To be pleasurable, this imposition of will must never be too easy, too much a matter of course Wh ch ruled out all pro-fessionals. Th partner had to be an amateur and, like all amateurs, committed to the thesis that tumescence and detumescence should always be associated with LOVE, PASSION, SOUL MATING – all in upper-case letters *In impos ng h s will, he imposed the contra-dictory doctrine, the doctrine of tumescence and detumescence for* tumescence s and detumescence s sake All he a.ked was that a partner should give the thesis a practical try-out – however reluc-tantly, however experimentally, for just this once only, he d dn t care Just a single try-out After th at it was up to h m. If h e couldn't make a permanent and enthus astic convert of her, at any rate so far as he was concerned, then *the fault was his*

'Ninety nine, ninety nine,' said Mr Stoyte with exemplary patience

'You can stop now,' Dr Obispo told him graciously

Just one try-out, he could practically guarantee himself success It was a branch of applied phys ology , he was an expert, a specialist. The Claude Bernard of the subject And talk of imposing one s will! You began by forcing the girl to accept a thesis that was in flat contradiction to all the ideas she had been brought up with, all the dreams-come-true rigmarole of popular ideology Qu te a pleasant little victory, to be sure But it was only when you got down to the applied phys ology that the series of really satisfying triumphs began You took an ordinarily rational human being a good hundred per cent American with a background, a position in society, a set of convent ons, a code of ethics a religion (Catholic in the present instance, Dr Obispo remembered parenthetically), you took this good citizen, with rights fully and formally guar anteed by the Constitution, you took her (and perhaps she had come to the place of ass gnation in her husband s Packard limousine and direct from a banquet, with speeches in honour, say, of Dr N cholas Murray Butler or the retiring Archbishop of Indianapolis), you took her and you proceeded, systematically and scientifically, to reduce this unique personality to a mere epileptic body, moaning and gibbering under the excruciations of a pleasure for which you, the Claude Bernard of the subject, were responsible and of which you remained the enjoying but always detached, always ironically amused, spectator

Just a few more deep breaths if you don t mind'

Wheezily Mr Stoyte inhaled, then with a snorting sigh emptied his lungs

Chapter Eleven

There was silence after Mr Stoyte's departure A long silence, while each of the three men thought his own private thoughts. It was Pete who spoke first.

'Things like that,' he said gloomily, 'they get *me* kind of wondering if I ought to go on taking his money What would you do, Mr Propter, if you were *me*?'

'What would I do?' Mr Propter reflected for a moment. 'I'd go on working in Jo's laboratory,' he said 'But only so long as I felt fairly certain that what I was doing wouldn't cause more harm than good. One has to be a utilitarian in these matters A utilitarian with a difference,' he qualified 'Bentham crossed with Eckhart, say, or Nagarjuna'

'Poor Bentham! said Jeremy, horrified by the thought of what was being done to his namesake

Mr Propter smiled 'Poor Bentham, indeed! Such a good, sweet, absurd, intelligent man! So nearly right, but so enormously wrong! Deluding himself with the notion that the greatest happiness of the greatest number could be achieved on the strictly human level – the level of time and evil, the level of the absence of God Poor Bentham!' he repeated 'What a great man he would have been if only he could have grasped that good can't be had except where it exists!

'That sort of utilitarian you're talking about,' said Pete, 'what would he feel about the job I'm doing now?'

'I don't know,' Mr Propter answered 'I haven't thought about it enough to guess what he'd say And, anyhow, we haven't yet got the empirical material on which a reasonable judgement could be based All I know is that if I were in on this I'd be cautious. *Infinitely cautious*,' he insisted

'And what about the money?' Pete went on 'Seeing where it *comes from and who it belongs to, do you think I ought to take it*?'

'All *money's pretty dirty*,' said Mr Propter 'I don't know that poor Jo's is appreciably dirtier than anyone else's You may think

it is, but that's only because, for the first time, you're seeing money at its source – its personal, human source You're like one of these city children who have been used to getting their milk in sterilized bottles from a shiny white delivery wagon. When they go into the country and see it being pumped out of a big, fat, smelly old animal, they're horrified, they're disgusted. It's the same with money You've been used to getting it from behind a bronze grating in a magnificent marble bank Now you've come out into the country and are living in the cowshed with the animal that actually secretes the stuff And the process doesn't strike you as very savoury or hygienic But the same process was going on, even when you didn't know about it And if you weren't working for Jo Stoyte, you'd probably be working for some college or university But where do colleges and universities get their money from? From rich men. In other words, from people like Jo Stoyte Again it's dirt served out in sterile containers – by a gentleman in a cap and gown this time'

'So you figure it's all right for me to go on like I am now?' said Pete

'*All right,' Mr Propter answered, in the sense that it's not con*spicuously worse than anything else.' Suddenly smiling, 'I was glad to hear that Dr Mulge had got his Art School,' he said in another, lighter tone 'Immediately after the Auditorium, too It's a lot of money But I suppose the prestige of being a patron of learning is worth it And, of course, there's an enormous social pressure on the rich to make them become patrons of learning They're being pushed by shame as well as pulled by the longing to believe they're the benefactors of humanity And, happily, with Dr Mulge a rich man can have his kudos with safety No amount of art schools at Tarzana will ever disturb the *status quo* Whereas if I were to ask Jo for fifty thousand dollars to finance research into the technique of democracy, he'd turn me down flat Why? Because he knows that sort of thing is dangerous He likes speeches about democracy (Incidentally, Dr Mulge is really terrific on the subject.) But he doesn't approve of the coarse materialists who try to find out how to put those ideals into practice You saw how angry he got about my poor little sun machine Because, in its tiny way, it's a menace to the sort of big business he makes his money from

And it s the same with these other little gadgets that I've talked to him about from time to time Come and look, if it doesn't bore you'

He took them into the house Here was the little electric m ll, hardly larger than a coffee-machine, in which he ground his own flour as he needed it Here was th e loom at which he had learnt and was now teaching others to weave Next he took them out to the shed in which, with a few hundred dollars' worth of electrically operated tools, he was equipped to do any kind of carpentry and even some light metal work. Beyond the shed were the still unfinished greenhouses, for the vegetable plots weren t adequate to supply the demands of his transients Th ere they were, he added, *pointing through the increasing darkness to the lights of a row of* cabins He could put up only a few of them, the rest had to live in a sort of garbage-heap down in the dry bed of the river – paying rent to Jo Stoyte for the privilege Not the best material to work with, of course But such misery as theirs left one no choice They simply had to be attended to A few had come through undemoralized, and, of these, a few could see what had to be done, what you had to aim at Two or three were working with him here, and he had been able to raise money to settle two or three more on some land near Santa Susanna Mere beginning – unsatisfactory at that Because, obviously, you could not even start experimenting properly until you had a full fledged community working under the new conditions But to set a community on its feet would require money A *lot of money But rich men wouldn't touch the work, they pre*ferred art schools at Tarzana The people who were interested had no money, that was one of the reasons why they were interested Borrowing at the current commercial rates was dangerous Except in very favourable circumstances, the chances were that you d merely be selling yourself into slavery to a bank.

'It isn't easy,' said Mr Propter, as they walked back to the house 'But the great point is that, easy or not easy, it s there, waiting to be done Because, after all, Pete, there *is* something to do'

Mr Propter went into the bungalow for a moment to turn out th e lights, then emerged again on to the porch Together, the three men walked down the path to the road. Before th em the castle was a vast black silhouette punctured by occasional lights.

'There is something you can do' Mr Propter resumed, 'but only on condition that you know what the nature of the world happens to be If you know that the strictly human level is the level of evil, you won't waste your time trying to produce good on that level. Good manifests itself only on the animal level and on the level of eternity Knowing that, you'll realize that the best you can do on the human level is preventive You can see that purely human activities don't interfere too much with the manifestation of good on the other levels That's all But politicians don't know the nature of reality If they did, they wouldn't be politicians Reactionary or revolutionary, they're all humanists, all romantics They live in a world of illusion, a world that's a mere projection of their own human personalities They act in ways which would be appropriate if such a world as they think they live in really existed But, unfortunately, it doesn't exist except in their imaginations. Hence nothing that they do is appropriate to the real world All their actions are the actions of lunatics, and all, as history is there to demonstrate, are more or less completely disastrous. So much for the romantics The realists, who have studied the nature of the world know that an exclusively humanistic attitude towards life is always fatal and that all strictly human activities must therefore be made instrumental to animal and spiritual good They know, in other words, that men's business is to make the human world safe for animals and spirits Or perhaps,' he added turning to Jeremy, 'perhaps, as an Englishman, you prefer Lloyd George's phrase to Wilson's "A home fit for heroes to live in" – wasn't that it? A home fit for animals and spirits, for physiology and disinterested consciousness At present, I'm afraid, it's profoundly unfit The world we've made *for ourselves is a world of sick bodies and insane or criminal per*sonalities How shall we make this world safe for ourselves as animals and as spirits? If we can answer that question, we've discovered what to do

Mr Propter halted at what appeared to be a wayside shrine, opened a small steel door with a key he carried in his pocket, and, lifting the receiver of the telephone within announced their presence to an invisible porter, somewhere on the other side of the moat They walked on

'What are the things that make the world unsafe for animals and

spirits?' Mr Propter continued 'Obviously greed and fear, lust for power, hatred, anger . . .'

At this moment, a dazzling light struck them full in the face and was almost immediately turned out

'What in heaven's name . . .?' Jeremy began

'Don't worry,' said Peter. 'They only want to make sure it's us, not a set of gangsters It's just the searchlight'

'Just our old friend Jo expressing his personality,' said Mr Propter taking Jeremy's arm. 'In other words, proclaiming to the world that he's afraid because he s been greedy and domineering And he's been greedy and domineering, among other reasons, because the present system puts a premium on those qualities Our problem is to find a system that will give the fewest possible opportunities for unfortunate people, like Jo Stoyte, to realize their potentialities'

The bridge had swung down as they approached the moat, and now the boards rang hollow under their feet

'*You'd like socialism, Pete,*' *Mr Propter continued* '*But socialism* seems to be fatally committed to centralization and standardized urban mass production all round Besides, I see too many occasions for bullying there – too many opportunities for bossy people to display their bossiness, for sluggish people to sit back and be slaves'

The portcullis rose, the gates slid back to receive them.

'If you want to make the world safe for animals and spirits, you must have a system that reduces the amount of fear and greed and hatred and domineering to their minimum Which means that you must have enough economic security to get rid at least of that source of worry Enough personal responsibility to prevent people from wallowing in sloth Enough property to protect them from being bullied by the rich, but not enough to permit them to bully. And the same thing with political rights and authority – enough of the first for the protection of the many, too little of the second for domination by the few'

'Sounds like peasants to me,' said Pete dubiously

'Peasants plus small machines and power Which means that they're no longer peasants, except in so far as they're largely self-sufficient.'

helpful in most cases, than rushing about with good intentions, *doing* things'

Floodlighted, Giambologna's nymph was still indefatigably spouting away against the velvet background of the darkness. Electricity and sculpture, Jeremy was thinking as he looked at her – predestined partners. The things that old Bernini could have done with a battery of projectors! The startling lights, the rich fantastic shadows! The female mystics in orgasm, the conglobulated angels, the skeletons whizzing up out of papal tombs like sky rockets, the saints in their private hurricane of flapping draperies and wind-blown marble curls! What fun! What splendour! What self parodying emphasis! What staggering beauty! What enormous bad taste! And what a shame that the man should have had to be content with mere daylight and tallow candles!

'No,' Mr Propter was saying in answer to a protesting question from the young man, 'no, I certainly wouldn't advise their abandonment. I'd advise the constant reiteration of the truths they've been told again and again during the past three thousand years. And in the intervals, I'd do active work on the technics of a better system and active collaboration with the few who understand what the system is and are ready to pay the price demanded for its realization. Incidentally, the price, measured in human terms, is enormously high. Though, of course, much lower than the price demanded by the nature of things from those who persist in behaving in the standard human way. Much lower than the price of war, for example – particularly war with contemporary weapons. Much lower than the price of economic depression and political enslavement.

'And what happens,' Jeremy asked in a fluting voice, 'what happens when you've had your war? Will the few be any better off than the many?'

Oddly enough, Mr Propter answered, there's just a chance they may be. For this reason. If they've learnt the technique of self sufficiency they'll find it easier to survive a time of anarchy than the people who depend for their livelihood on a highly centralized and specialized organization. You can't work for the good without incidentally preparing yourself for the worst.'

He stopped speaking, and they walked on through a silence broken only by the sound, from somewhere high overhead in the castle, of two radios tuned to different stations. The baboons, on the contrary, were already asleep