

With a Preface by the author

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

From 1929 to 1933, I lived almost continuously in Berlin, with only occasional visits to other parts of Germany and to England. Already, during that time, I had made up my mind that I would one day write about the people I'd met and the experiences I was having. So I kept a detailed diary, which in due course provided raw material for all my Berlin stories.

My first idea, immediately after leaving Berlin in 1933, was to transform this material into one huge, tightly constructed melodramatic novel, in the manner of Balzac. I wanted to call it *The Lost*. The title, or rather its German equivalent, *Die Verlorenen*, seemed to me wonderfully ominous. I stretched it to mean not only *The Astray* and *The Doomed*--referring tragically to the political events in Germany and our epoch--but also "The Lost" in quotation marks--referring satirically to those individuals whom respectable society shuns in horror: an Arthur Norris, a von Pregnitz, a Sally Bowles.

Maybe Balzac himself could have devised a plot-structure which would plausibly contain the mob characters I wanted to introduce to my readers. The task was quite beyond my powers. What I actually produced was an absurd jumble of subplots and coincidences which defeated me whenever I tried to straighten it out on paper. Thank Goodness I never did write *The Lost*!

Just the same, all of these characters had grown together, like a nest of Siamese twins, in my head, and I could only separate them by the most delicate operations. There was a morning of acute nervous tension throughout which I paced up and down the roof of an hotel in the Canary Islands, shaping the plot of Mr. Norris and discarding everybody and everything that didn't belong in it. This was in March 1934. A few days later, I set to work on the novel, sitting in the garden of a pension at Orotava on Tenerife. The pension was run by a happy-go-lucky Englishman, who used to laugh at my industry and tell me I ought to go swimming, while I was still young. "After all, old boy, I mean to say, will it matter a hundred years from now if you wrote that yarn or not?" Relentlessly, at four o'clock every afternoon, he would start playing records at full blast through the loudspeaker on the patio, hoping to attract wandering tourists in for a drink. They seldom came, but the jazz tunes always put an end to my day's work. On August 12, I noted in my diary: "Finished Mr. Norris. The gramophone keeps repeating a statement about Life with which I do not agree." I remember how I raced through that last chapter with one eye on my watch, determined to get finished before the racket started.

Mr. Norris was published in 1935. In England, the book bore its correct name: *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*; but the American publisher, William Morrow, found this obscure--so I changed it to *The Last of Mr. Norris*, a title which should be followed by a very faint question mark.

Next I wrote the story of Sally Bowles, and it appeared as a small separate volume in 1937. Three other pieces--*The Nowaks*, *The Landauers* and *Berlin Diary: Autumn 1930*--were published in issues of John Lehmann's *New Writing*. Finally, the complete *Goodbye to Berlin* was published in 1939.

Goodbye indeed! During those years that followed, the Berlin I'd known seemed as dead as ancient Carthage. But 1945 came at last, and V-E Day. That summer, *New Directions* was getting ready to republish Mr. Norris and *Goodbye to Berlin* in one volume, *The Berlin Stories*. While I was correcting the proofs, a letter, the first in seven years, reached me from Heinz, my closest "enemy" friend, telling how he had fought in Russia and later been taken prisoner by the Americans. After the fighting was over, the authorities at his POW camp had more or less allowed him, and a number of others, to run away, and had later forwarded his mail to his home address, marked "Escaped"! As I read and reread this letter, the feeling began to work through me painfully and joyfully, like blood through a number of legs, that Berlin--or, at any rate, the Berliners--still existed, after all.

Then, in the summer of 1951, John van Druten decided that he could make a play out of Sally Bowles. His adaptation, *I Am a Camera*, was written with his usual skilled speed, and was ready for production that fall. When I arrived in New York to sit in on rehearsals, I had first to go to a studio and be photographed, for publicity, with our leading lady, Julie Harris. I had never met Miss Harris before. I hadn't even seen her famous performance in *The Member of the Wedding*.

Now, out of the dressing-room, came a slim sparkling-eyed girl in an absurdly tart-like black satiny dress, with a little cap stuck jauntily on her pale flame-coloured hair, and a silly naughty giggle. That was Sally Bowles in person. Miss Harris was more essentially Sally Bowles than the Sally of my book, and much more like Sally than the real girl who long ago gave me the idea for my character.

I felt half hypnotised by the strangeness of the situation. "This is terribly sad," I said to her. "You've stayed the same age while I've gotten twenty years older." We exchanged scraps of dialogue from the play, ad-libbed new lines, laughed wildly, hammed and hugged each other, while the photographer's camera clicked. I couldn't take my eyes off her. I was dumbfounded, infatuated. Who was she? What was she? How much was there in her of Miss Harris, how much of van Druten, how much of the girl I used to know in Berlin, how much of myself? It was no longer possible to say. I only knew that she was lovable in a way that no human could ever quite be, since, being a creature of art, she had been created out of pure love.

As I watched those rehearsals, I used to think a good deal--sometimes comically, sometimes sentimentally--about the relation of art to life. In writing *Goodbye to Berlin*, I destroyed a certain portion of my real past. I did this deliberately, because I preferred the simplified, more creditable, more exciting fictitious past which I'd created to take its place. Indeed, it had now become hard for me to remember just how things really had happened. I only knew how I would like them to have happened--that is to say, how I had made them happen in my stories. And so, gradually, the real past had disappeared, along with the real Christopher Isherwood of twenty years ago. Only the Christopher Isherwood of the stories remained.

I'd never thought about this situation before, because it had never seemed to have any particular significance. If my past was artificial, at least it had been entirely my own--until now. Now John, Julie, and the rest of them had suddenly swooped down on it, and carried bits of it away with them for their artistic use. Watching my past being thus reinterpreted, revised and transformed by all these talented people upon the stage, I said to myself: "I am no longer an individual. I am a collaboration. I am in the public domain."

After the play had opened successfully on Broadway, I went to England. This was my third visit since the end of the war; and this time, I knew, I must go over to Germany as well. It was a definite

obligation--but how I dreaded it! I dreaded meeting the people I'd known and facing the fact that there was practically nothing I could do to help them. I dreaded seeing familiar places in ruins. Though my mind was made up, my unconscious still protested: I developed symptoms of duodenal ulcer, and nearly broke my leg on a staircase. Throughout the flight from London, I expected a crash, and was almost disappointed when we landed safe at Tempelhofer Feld in a mild snowstorm--"a psychosomatic snowstorm, obviously," one of my friends commented, later.

I had arrived prepared--overprepared--for a shock; and the drive through the streets wasn't depressing as I'd anticipated. As it was night, you couldn't see much, anyhow, and it so happened that the houses along our route were less badly damaged than elsewhere. Indeed, the end of the drive brought a shock of a different kind; for I found myself among the new neon-lighted shops and bars on the Kurfuersten-damm, and entered a modernistic hotel where I was surrounded by thick-necked, cigar-smoking businessmen who might have stepped right out of the cartoons of Georg Grosz. It was not these people, who had changed; for now I could afford to live with them. During my former Berlin existence as a down-at-heel English teacher, I used to know such places only from the outside, peering into them as I passed along the sidewalk with disapproval, moral superiority and envy.

But in those days (February, 1952) the Kurfuerstendamm was one of the still few areas of relative intact prosperity. At the end of it, the nineteenth-century-Gothic Memorial Church looked more Gothic than ever in its jaggedly pinnacled ruins. The Tauentzienstrasse beyond was like an avenue of shattered monuments. Through wide gaps between formless mounds of rubble, you got views over the great central desert of destruction, and saw the Sieges Saeule rising forlornly from the treeless, snow-covered plain of the Tiergarten, which was dotted with bizarre remnants of statuary: a uniformed general, a naked nymph on a horse. In the background, the skeleton of a railroad station showed up starkly; and against the blue winter sky, a red flag fluttered from the Brandenburger Tor, entrance to the Soviet sector. There was something doubly strange about this landscape. It is strange enough to see a vast city shattered and dead. It is far stranger to see one that is briskly and teeming inhabited amidst its ruins. Berlin seemed convinced that it was alive; and, after a few hours there, you began to agree that it certainly was.

The street where I used to live is behind the Nollendorf-platz, about ten minutes' walk from the hotel where I was staying. I knew that my old landlady, "Frl. Schroeder," was still there; we had been corresponding, but I hadn't told her that I was coming to Berlin for fear of a last-minute disappointment. Even before the war, this was a decayed and forbidding district; but when I saw it again I was really awestruck. The fronts of the buildings were pitted with shrapnel and eaten by rust and weather, so that they had that curiously blurred, sightless look you see on the face of the Sphinx.

Only a very young and frivolous foreigner, I thought, could have lived in such a place and found it amusing. Hadn't there been something youthfully heartless in my enjoyment of the spectacle of Berlin in the early thirties, with its poverty, its political hatred and its despair? I felt extremely middle-aged that morning. The house next to ours had been hit: on the third floor, a handsome tiled stove still stood in the corner of a half-room which jutted out over the abyss. With reverent feet, I entered the dank courtyard, whose floor the sun never strikes, and climbed the musty stairs, dark even in the daytime, to Frl. Schroeder's door. The scream she uttered on recognising me must have been heard all over the building.

She looked wonderful; better, now, in her seventies than in her fifties, and considerably slimmer. (Her

only objection to my description of her in my stories was that I'd said she "waddled.") Yet she had been through as bad a time as any average Berliner: serious illness, poverty--forcing her to move into this much smaller flat, where she nevertheless had to have one lodger in the only spare bedroom and another sleeping in the kitchen--then the war, and the last awful year of bombing, when she and the other tenants lived almost continuously in the cellar. "There were forty or fifty of us down there. We used to hold each other in our arms and say at least we'd all die together. I can tell you, Herr Issyvoo, we prayed so much we got quite religious."

And then, with the fall of Berlin, came the Russian soldiers, searching the houses for arms. Frl. Schroeder thought she had nothing to fear until, at the last moment, she discovered to her horror that an Italian lodger, who had run away, had left a sporting rifle in his room. Caught with it, she would certainly have been shot; probably the whole building would have been burned down. So she and her woman friend took the rifle apart, hid the pieces under their clothes and set out for the canal, into which they planned to drop them. This they finally succeeded in doing, but only after a hair-raising encounter with some more Russians, who chased them with erotic intentions.

"Every time I went out on the street, they'd be after me," said Frl. Schroeder, not without a certain complacency. "So I used to screw up my eyes--like this--and make a hump in my back, and limp. You ought to have seen me, Herr Issyvoo! Even those Russians didn't want me any more. I looked like a regular old hag!"

By the time she had finished her stories, we were both quite exhausted with laughing and crying, and had drunk a whole bottle of Liebfraumilch.

Frl. Schroeder could only give me news of two of my old friends. Bobby the bartender had come through the war without a scratch, and had gotten married. Otto Nowak, now a black-market operator, had shown up recently at the flat, wanting to buy some carpets.

"He hadn't changed one bit. He was very well dressed--quite the fine gentleman. There's a rich woman somewhere in the background, I shouldn't wonder. Oh, you can rely on him to look after himself! And he's as fresh as ever. I soon sent him about his business."

As I listened to all this, I marvelled, as one always does, at the individual's ability to be himself and survive, amidst a huge undifferentiated military mess. This was Frl. Schroeder's History of World War II--and its only moral was: "Somehow or other, life goes on in spite of everything."

When we said Goodbye, she gave me the brass dolphin-clock which is referred to on the second page of Goodbye to Berlin, where I ask, prophetically, how it could ever be destroyed. It couldn't, apparently--for a bomb-blast had hurled it across the room and only slightly scratched its green marble base. It stands now on my writing table in a Californian garden--and I like to think that it will survive me, and anything that may be dropped on this neighbourhood, in the near or distant future. Meanwhile, I treasure it, as a souvenir of my dear friend and as a symbol of that indestructible something in a place and an environment that resists all outward change.

The indestructible something--that, I soon realised, was what I had had to come back to Berlin to look for. And I seemed to sense it almost at once, in the very air of the city and in the sound of its inhabitants' voices. Berlin in winter, like New York, has an atmosphere that is immensely exhilarating. Evening after evening, I left the hotel and wandered from bar to bar, overstimulated and

sleepless. And all I wanted was to speak and hear German. I felt I could never tire of the rich, confident, well-remembered tones of the Berliner accent; and I was surprised and pleased to discover how little the idiom and the slang had altered. Berliners love to talk--with a blunt directness which is both rude and friendly--and even in their grumbling there is a note of pleasure.

Comparing the two cities--the Berlin I knew in the early thirties and the Berlin I revisited in the early fifties--I have to admit that the latter is, in many respects, a far more exciting setting for a novel or a sequence of stories. Life in the Berlin of 1952 had an intensely dramatic doubleness. Here was a shadow-line cutting a city in half--a frontier between two worlds at war--across which people were actually being kidnapped, to disappear into prisons or graves. And yet this shadow-frontier was being freely crossed in the most humdrum manner every day, on foot, in buses, or in electric trains, by thousands of Berliners commuting back and forth between their work and their homes. Many men and women who lived in West Berlin were on the black list of the East German police; and, if the Russians had suddenly marched in, they couldn't have hoped to escape. Yet, in this no man's land between the two worlds, you heard the usual talk about business and sport, the new car, the new apartment, the new lover. "My God," I exclaimed to one of my acquaintances, after he had been holding forth on such topics for an hour or more, "one would think you lived in Minneapolis!" This was said, and taken as a compliment. Berliners, in those days, were justifiably a little proud of their sang-froid. They still have reason to be.

How would Mr. Norris have thrived in these troubled waters? Would he, perhaps, have found the fish rather too large and the current too strong for him? Would Sally Bowles have set her cap at the New York Rich of the reconstruction period, or preferred the American, British and French officers? Would Ottobach Nowak have stuck to the black market, or entered the circles of the neo-Nazis? Could Bernhard Landauer have rebuilt his firm amidst the wreckage--and would he have cared to? All that is not for me to say. The ways of my own life have led me elsewhere. But I hope that some young foreigner has fallen in love with this later city, and is writing what happened or might have happened to him there.

Christopher Isherwood Santa Monica California July, 1954

THE LAST OF MR. NORRIS

for W. H. Auden

CHAPTER ONE

My first impression was that the stranger's eyes were of an unusually light blue. They met mine for several blank seconds, vacant, unmistakably scared. Startled and innocently naughty, they had reminded me of an incident I couldn't quite place; something which had happened a long time ago, in a school do with the upper fourth form classroom. They were the eyes of a schoolboy surprised in the act of breaking one of the rules. Not that I had caught him, apparently, at anything except his own thoughts; perhaps he imagined I could read them. At any rate, he seemed not to have heard or seen me cross the compartment from my corner to his own, for he started violently at the sound of my voice; so violently, indeed, that his nervous recoil hit me like a repercussion. Instinctively I took a pace backwards.

It was exactly as though we had collided with each other bodily in the street. We were both confused, both ready to be apologetic. Smiling, anxious to reassure him, I repeated my question: "I wonder, sir,

if you could let me have a match?"

Even now, he didn't answer at once. He appeared to be engaged in some sort of rapid mental calculation, while his fingers, nervously active, sketched a number of flurried gestures round his waistcoat. For all they conveyed, he might equally have been going to undress, to draw a revolver, or merely to make sure that I hadn't stolen his money. Then the moment of agitation passed from his gaze like a little cloud, leaving a clear blue sky. At last he had understood what it was that I wanted. "Yes, yes. Er--certainly. Of course."

As he spoke he touched his left temple delicately with his finger-tips, coughed and suddenly smiled. His smile had great charm.

"Certainly," he repeated. "With pleasure."

Delicately, with finger and thumb, he fished in the waistcoat-pocket of his expensive-looking soft grey suit, extracted a gold spirit-lighter. His hands were white, small and beautifully manicured.

I offered him my cigarettes.

"Er--thank you. Thank you."

"After you, sir."

"No, no. Please."

The tiny flame of the lighter flickered between us, as perishable as the atmosphere which our exaggerated politeness had created. The merest breath would have extinguished the one, the least incautious gesture or word would have destroyed the other. The cigarettes were both lighted now. We sat back in our respective places. The stranger was still doubtful of me. He was wondering whether I hadn't gone too far, delivered himself to a bore or a crook. His timid soul was eager to retire. I, on my side, had nothing to read. I foresaw a journey of utter silence, lasting seven or eight hours. I was determined to talk.

"Do you know what time we arrive at the frontier?"

Looking back on the conversation, this question does not seem to me to have been particularly unusual. It is true that I had no interest in the answer; I wanted merely to ask something which might start us chatting, and which wasn't, at the same time, either inquisitive or impertinent. Its effect on the stranger was remarkable. I had certainly succeeded in arousing his interest. He gave me a long, oblique glance, and his features seemed to stiffen a little. It was the glance of a poker-player who guesses suddenly that his opponent holds a straight flush and that he had better be careful. At length he answered, speaking slowly and with caution: "I'm afraid I couldn't tell you exactly. In about an hour's time, I believe."

His glance, now vacant for a moment, was clouded again. An unpleasant thought seemed to tease him like a wasp; he moved his head slightly to avoid it. Then he added, with surprising petulance: "About these frontiers... such a horrible nuisance." I wasn't quite sure how to take this. The thought crossed my mind that he was perhaps some kind of mild internationalist; a member of the League of Nations.

Union. I ventured encouragingly: "They ought to be done away with."

"I quite agree with you. They ought, indeed." There was no mistaking his warmth. He had a large blue fleshy nose and a chin which seemed to have slipped sideways. It was like a broken concertina. When he spoke, it jerked crooked in the most curious fashion and a deep cleft dimple like a wound surprisingly appeared in the side of it. Above his ripe red cheeks, his forehead was sculpturally white like marble. A queerly cut fringe of dark grey hair lay across it, compact, thick and heavy. After a moment's examination, I realised, with extreme interest, that he was wearing a wig.

"Particularly," I followed up my success, "all these red-tape formalities; the passport examination, and so forth."

But no. This wasn't right. I saw at once from his expression that I'd somehow managed to strike a new and disturbing note. We were speaking similar but distinct languages. This time, however, the stranger's reaction was not mistrust. He asked, with a puzzling air of frankness and unconcealed curiosity: "Have you ever had trouble here yourself?" It wasn't so much the question which I found odd, as the tone in which he asked it. I smiled to hide my mystification. "Oh no. Quite the reverse. Often they don't bother to open anything; and as for your passport, they hardly look at it." I'm so glad to hear you say that."

He must have seen from my face what I was thinking, for he added hastily: "It may seem absurd to me, but I do so hate being fussed and bothered."

"Of course. I quite understand."

I grinned, for I had just arrived at a satisfactory explanation of his behaviour. The old boy was engaged in a little innocent private smuggling. Probably a piece of silk for his wife or a box of cigars for a friend. And now, of course, he was beginning to feel scared. Certainly he looked prosperous enough to pay any amount of duty. The rich have strange pleasures.

"You haven't crossed this frontier before, then?" I felt kindly and protective and superior. I would cheer him up, and, if things came to the worst, prompt him with some plausible lie to soften the heart of the customs officer.

"Of recent years, no. I usually travel by Belgium. For a variety of reasons. Yes." Again he looked vague, paused and solemnly scratched his chin. All at once, something seemed to rouse him to a consciousness of my presence: "Perhaps, at this stage in the proceedings, I ought to introduce myself. Arthur Norris, Gent. Or shall we say. Of independent means?" He tittered nervously, exclaimed in alarm: "Don't get up, I beg."

It was too far to shake hands without moving. We compromised by a polite seated bow from the wais

"My name's William Bradshaw," I said.

"Dear me, you're not by any chance one of the Suffolk Bradshaws?"

"I suppose I am. Before the War, we used to live near Ipswich."

"Did you really, now? Did you indeed? I used at one time to go and stay with a Mrs. Hope-Lucas. She

had a lovely place near Matlock. She was a Miss Bradshaw before her marriage."

"Yes, that's right. She was my great-aunt Agnes. She died about seven years ago."

"Did she? Dear, dear. I'm very sorry to hear that... Of course, I knew her when I was quite a young man; and she was a middle-aged lady then. I'm speaking now, mind you, of 'ninety-eight."

All this time I was covertly studying his wig. I had never seen one so cleverly made before. At the back of the skull, where it was brushed in with his own hair, it was wonderfully matched. Only the parting betrayed it at once, and even this would have passed muster at the distance of three or four yards.

"Well, well," observed Mr. Norris. "Dear me, what a very small place the world is."

"You never met my mother, I suppose? Or my uncle, the admiral?"

I was quite resigned, now, to playing the relationships game. It was boring but unexacting, and could be continued for hours. Already I saw a whole chain of easy moves ahead of me--uncles, aunts, cousins, their marriages and their properties, death duties, mortgages, sales. Then on to public schools and university, comparing notes on food, exchanging anecdotes about masters, famous matches and celebrated rows. I knew the exact tone to adopt.

But, to my surprise, Mr. Norris didn't seem to want to play this game, after all. He answered hurriedly. "I'm afraid not. No. Since the War, I've rather lost touch with my English friends. My affairs have taken me abroad a good deal."

The word "abroad" caused both of us naturally to look out of the window. Holland was slipping past our viewpoint with the smoothness of an after-dinner dream: a placid swampy landscape bounded by an electric tram travelling along the wall of a dike.

"Do you know this country well?" I asked. Since I had noticed the wig, I found myself somehow unable to go on calling him sir. And anyhow, if he wore it to make himself look younger, it was both tactless and unkind to insist thus upon the difference between our ages.

"I know Amsterdam pretty well." Mr. Norris rubbed his chin with a nervous, furtive movement. He had a trick of doing this and of opening his mouth in a kind of snarling grimace, quite without ferocity, like an old lion in a cage. "Pretty well, yes."

"I should like to go there very much. It must be so quiet and peaceful."

"On the contrary, I can assure you that it's one of the most dangerous cities in Europe."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Deeply attached as I am to Amsterdam, I shall always maintain that it has three fatal drawbacks. In the first place, the stairs are so steep in many of the houses that it requires a professional mountaineer to ascend them without risking heart failure or a broken neck. Secondly, there are the cyclists. They positively overrun the town, and appear to make it a point of honour to ride without the faintest consideration for human life. I had an exceedingly narrow escape only this morning. An

thirdly, there are the canals. In summer, you know... most insanitary. Oh, most insanitary. I can't tell you what I've suffered. For weeks on end I was never without a sore throat."

By the time we had reached Bentheim, Mr. Norris had delivered a lecture on the disadvantages of most of the chief European cities. I was astonished to find how much he had travelled. He had suffered from rheumatics in Stockholm and draughts in Kaunas; in Riga he had been bored, in Warsaw treated with extreme discourtesy, in Belgrade he had been unable to obtain his favourite brand of tooth-paste. In Rome he had been annoyed by insects, in Madrid by beggars, in Marseilles by taxi-horns. In Bucharest he had had an exceedingly unpleasant experience with a water-closet. Constantinople he had found expensive and lacking in taste. The only two cities of which he greatly approved were Paris and Athens. Athens particularly. Athens was his spiritual home.

By now, the train had stopped. Pale stout men in blue uniforms strolled up and down the platform with that faintly sinister air of leisure which invests the movements of officials at frontier stations. They were not unlike prison warders. It was as if we might none of us be allowed to travel any farther.

Far down the corridor of the coach a voice echoed: "Deutsche Pass-Kontrolle."

"I think," said Mr. Norris, smiling urbanely at me, "that one of my pleasantest memories is of the mornings I used to spend pottering about those quaint old streets behind the Temple of Theseus."

He was extremely nervous. His delicate white hand fiddled incessantly with the signet ring on his little finger; his uneasy blue eyes kept squinting rapid glances into the corridor. His voice rang false; high pitched in archly forced gaiety, it resembled the voice of a character in a pre-war drawing-room comedy. He spoke so loudly that the people in the next compartment must certainly be able to hear him.

"One comes, quite unexpectedly, upon the most fascinating little corners. A single column standing in the middle of a rubbish-heap..."

"Deutsche Pass-Kontrolle. All passports, please."

An official had appeared in the doorway of our compartment. His voice made Mr. Norris give a slight but visible jump. Anxious to allow him time to pull himself together, I hastily offered my own passport. As I had expected, it was barely glanced at.

"I am travelling to Berlin," said Mr. Norris, handing over his passport with a charming smile; so charming, indeed, that it seemed a little overdone. The official did not react. He merely grunted and turned over the pages with considerable interest, and then, taking the passport out into the corridor, held it up to the light of the window.

"It's a remarkable fact," said Mr. Norris, conversationally, to me, "that nowhere in classical literature will you find any reference to the Lycabettos Hill."

I was amazed to see what a state he was in; his fingers twitched and his voice was scarcely under control. There were actually beads of sweat on his alabaster forehead. If this was what he called "being fussed," if these were the agonies he suffered whenever he broke a by-law, it was no wonder that his nerves had turned him prematurely bald. He shot an instant's glance of acute misery into the corridor.

Another official had arrived. They were examining the passport together, with their backs turned towards us. By what was obviously an heroic effort Mr. Norris managed to maintain his chatty, informative tone.

"So far as we know, it appears to have been overrun with wolves."

The other official had got the passport now. He looked as though he were going to take it away with him. His colleague was referring to a small black shiny notebook. Raising his head he asked abruptly "You are at present residing at Courbierestrasse 168?"

For a moment I thought Mr. Norris was going to faint.

"Er--yes... I am...."

Like a bird with a cobra, his eyes were fastened upon his interrogator in helpless fascination. One might have supposed that he expected to be arrested on the spot. Actually, all that happened was that the official made a note in his book, grunted again, and turning on his heel went on to the next compartment. His colleague handed the passport back to Mr. Norris and said: "Thank you, sir," saluted politely and followed him.

Mr. Norris sank back against the hard wooden seat with a deep sigh. For a moment he seemed incapable of speech. Taking out a big white silk handkerchief, he began to dab at his forehead, being careful not to disarrange his wig.

"I wonder if you'd be so very kind as to open the window," he said at length, in a faint voice. "It seems to have got dreadfully stuffy in here all of a sudden."

I hastened to do so.

"Is there anything I can fetch you?" I asked. "A glass of water?"

He feebly waved the offer aside. "Most good of you... No. I shall be all right in a moment. My head isn't quite what it was." He sighed: "I'm getting too old for this sort of thing. All this travelling... very bad for me."

"You know, you really shouldn't upset yourself so." I felt more than ever protective towards him at that moment. This affectionate protectiveness, which he so easily and dangerously inspired in me, was to colour all our future dealings. "You let yourself be annoyed by trifles."

"You call that a trifle!" he exclaimed, in rather pathetic protest.

"Of course. It was bound to have been put right in a few minutes, anyhow. The man simply mistook you for somebody else of the same name."

"You really think so?" He was childishly eager to be reassured.

"What other possible explanation is there?"

Mr. Norris didn't seem so certain of this. He said dubiously: "Well--er--none, I suppose."

"Besides, it often happens, you know. The most innocent people get mistaken for famous jewel thieves. They undress them and search them all over. Fancy if they'd done that to you!"

"Really!" Mr. Norris giggled. "The mere thought brings a blush to my modest cheek."

We both laughed. I was glad that I had managed to cheer him up so successfully. But what on earth, wondered, would happen when the customs examiner arrived? For this, if I was right about the smuggled presents, was the real cause of all his nervousness. If the little misunderstanding about the passport had upset him so much, the customs officer would most certainly give him a heart attack. I wondered if I hadn't better mention this straight out and offer to hide the things in my own suitcase, but he seemed so blissfully unconscious of any approaching trouble that I hadn't the heart to disturb him.

I was quite wrong. The customs examination, when it came, seemed positively to give Norris pleasure. He showed not the slightest signs of uneasiness; nor was anything dutiable discovered in his luggage. In fluent German he laughed and joked with the official over a large bottle of Coty perfume: "Oh, yes, it's for my personal use, I can assure you. I wouldn't part with it for the world. Do let me give you a drop on your handkerchief. It's so deliciously refreshing."

At length it was all over. The train clanked slowly forward into Germany. The dining-car attendant came down the corridor, sounding his little gong.

"And now, my dear boy," said Mr. Norris, "after these alarms and excursions and your most valuable moral support, for which I'm more grateful than I can tell you, I hope you'll do me the honour of being my guest at lunch."

I thanked him and said that I should be delighted.

When we were seated comfortably in the restaurant-car, Mr. Norris ordered a small cognac: "I have made it a general rule never to drink before meals, but there are times when the occasion seems to demand it."

The soup was served. He took one spoonful, then called the attendant and addressed him in a tone of mild reproach.

"Surely you'll agree that there's too much onion?" he asked anxiously. "Will you do me a personal favour? I should like you to taste it for yourself."

"Yes, sir," said the attendant, who was extremely busy, and whisked away the plate with faintly insolent deference. Mr. Norris was pained.

"Did you see that? He wouldn't taste it. He wouldn't admit there was anything wrong. Dear me, how very obstinate some people are!"

He forgot this little disappointment in human nature within a few moments, however. He had begun to study the wine list with great care.

"Let me see... Let me see... Would you be prepared to contemplate a hock? You would? It's a lottery, mind you. On a train one must always be prepared for the worst. I think we'll risk it, shall we?"

~~The hock arrived and was a success. Mr. Norris had not tasted such good hock, he told me, since his lunch with the Swedish Ambassador in Vienna last year. And there were kidneys, his favourite dish.~~ "Dear me," he remarked with pleasure, "I find I've got quite an appetite... If you want to get kidneys perfectly cooked you should go to Budapest. It was a revelation to me... I must say these are really delicious, don't you agree? Really quite delicious. At first I thought I tasted that odious red pepper, but it was merely my overwrought imagination." He called the attendant: "Will you please give the chef my compliments and say that I should like to congratulate him on a most excellent lunch? Thank you. And now bring me a cigar." Cigars were brought, sniffed at, weighed between the finger and thumb. Mr. Norris finally selected the largest on the tray: "What, my dear boy, you don't smoke them? Of course, but you should. Well, well, perhaps you have other vices?"

By this time he was in the best of spirits.

"I must say the older I get the more I come to value the little comforts of this life. As a general rule, I make a point of travelling first class. It always pays. One gets treated with so much more consideration. Take to-day, for instance. If I hadn't been in a third-class compartment, they'd never have dreamed of bothering me. There you have the German official all over. 'A race of non-commissioned officers,' didn't somebody call them? How very good that is! How true..."

Mr. Norris picked his teeth for a few moments in thoughtful silence.

"My generation was brought up to regard luxury from an aesthetic standpoint. Since the War, people don't seem to feel that any more. Too often they are merely gross. They take their pleasures coarsely, don't you find? At times, one feels guilty, oneself, with so much unemployment and distress everywhere. The conditions in Berlin are very bad. Oh, very bad... as no doubt you yourself know. In my small way, I do what I can to help, but it's such a drop in the ocean." Mr. Norris sighed and touched his napkin with his lips.

"And here we are, riding in the lap of luxury. The social reformers would condemn us, no doubt. At the same time, I suppose if somebody didn't use this dining-car, we should have all these employees on the dole as well... Dear me, dear me. Things are so very complex, nowadays."

We parted at the Zoo Station. Mr. Norris held my hand for a long time amidst the jostle of arriving passengers.

"Auf Wiedersehen, my dear boy. Auf Wiedersehen. I won't say good-bye because I hope that we shall be seeing each other in the very near future. Any little discomforts I may have suffered on that odious journey have been amply repaid by the great pleasure of making your acquaintance. And now I wonder if you'd care to have tea with me at my flat one day this week? Shall we make it Saturday? Here's my card. Do please say you'll come."

I promised that I would.

CHAPTER TWO

Mr. Norris had two front doors to his flat. They stood side by side. Both had little round peep-holes in the centre panel and brightly polished knobs and brass nameplates. On the left-hand plate was

engraved: Arthur Norris. Private. And on the right-hand: Arthur Norris. Export and Import.

After a moment's hesitation, I pressed the button of the left-hand bell. The bell was startlingly loud; must have been clearly audible all over the flat. Nevertheless, nothing happened. No sound came from within. I was just about to ring again when I became aware that an eye was regarding me through the peep-hole in the door. How long it had been there, I didn't know. I felt embarrassed and uncertain whether to stare the eye out of its hole or merely pretend that I hadn't seen it. Ostentatiously, I examined the ceiling, the floor, the walls; then ventured a furtive glance to make sure that it had gone. It hadn't. Vexed, I turned my back on the door altogether. Nearly a minute passed.

When, finally, I did turn round it was because the other door, the Export and Import door, had opened. A young man stood on the threshold.

"Is Mr. Norris in?" I asked.

The young man eyed me suspiciously. He had watery light yellow eyes and a blotched complexion the colour of porridge. His head was huge and round, set awkwardly on a short plump body. He wore a smart lounge suit and patent-leather shoes. I didn't like the look of him at all.

"Have you an appointment?"

"Yes." My tone was extremely curt.

At once, the young man's face curved into oily smiles. "Oh, it's Mr. Bradshaw? One moment, if you please."

And, to my astonishment, he closed the door in my face, only to reappear an instant later at the left-hand door, standing aside for me to enter the flat. This behaviour seemed all the more extraordinary because, as I noticed immediately I was inside, the Private side of the entrance hall was divided from the Export side only by a thick hanging curtain.

"Mr. Norris wishes me to say that he will be with you in one moment," said the big-headed young man, treading delicately across the thick carpet on the toes of his patent-leather shoes. He spoke very softly, as if he were afraid of being overheard. Opening the door of a large sitting-room, he silently motioned me to take a chair, and withdrew.

Left alone, I looked round me, slightly mystified. Everything was in good taste, the furniture, the carpet, the colour scheme. But the room was curiously without character. It was like a room on the stage or in the window of a high-class furnishing store; elegant, expensive, discreet. I had expected Mr. Norris' background to be altogether more exotic; something Chinese would have suited him, with golden and scarlet dragons.

The young man had left the door ajar. From somewhere just outside I heard him say, presumably into a telephone: "The gentleman is here, sir." And now, with even greater distinctness, Mr. Norris' voice was audible as he replied, from behind a door in the opposite wall of the sitting-room: "Oh, is he? Thank you."

I wanted to laugh. This little comedy was so unnecessary as to seem slightly sinister. A moment later

Mr. Norris himself came into the room, nervously rubbing his manicured hands together.

"My dear boy, this is indeed an honour! Delighted to welcome you under the shadow of my humble roof-tree."

He didn't look well, I thought. His face wasn't so rosy today, and there were rings under his eyes. He sat down for a moment in an armchair, but rose again immediately, as if he were not in the mood for sitting still. He must have been wearing a different wig, for the joins in this one showed as plain as murder.

"You'd like to see over the flat, I expect?" he asked, nervously touching his temples with the tips of his fingers.

"I should, very much." I smiled, puzzled because Mr. Norris was obviously in a great hurry about something. With fussy haste, he took me by the elbow, steering me towards the door in the opposite wall, from which he himself had just emerged.

"We'll go this way first, yes."

But hardly had we taken a couple of steps when there was a sudden outburst of voices from the entrance hall.

"You can't. It's impossible," came the voice of the young man who had ushered me into the flat. And a strange, loud, angry voice answered: "That's a dirty lie! I tell you he's here!"

Mr. Norris stopped as suddenly as if he'd been shot. "Oh dear!" he whispered, hardly audible. "Oh dear!" Stricken with indecision and alarm, he stood still in the middle of the room, as though desperately considering which way to turn. His grip on my arm tightened, either for support or merely to implore me to keep quiet.

"Mr. Norris will not be back until late this evening." The young man's voice was no longer apologetic but firm. "It's no good your waiting."

He seemed to have shifted his position and to be just outside, perhaps barring the way into the sitting-room. And, the next moment, the sitting-room door was quietly shut, with a click of a key being turned. We were locked in.

"He's in there!" shouted the strange voice, loud and mena'cing. There was a scuffling, followed by a heavy thud, as if the young man had been flung violently against the door. The thud roused Mr. Norris to action. With a single, surprisingly agile movement, he dragged me after him into the adjoining room. We stood there together in the doorway, ready, at any moment, for a further retreat. I could hear him panting heavily at my side.

Meanwhile, the stranger was rattling the sitting-room door as if he meant to burst it open: "You damned swindler!" he shouted, in a terrible voice. "You wait till I get my hands on you!"

It was all so very extraordinary that I quite forgot to feel frightened, although it might well be supposed that the person on the other side of the door was either raving drunk or insane. I cast a questioning glance at Mr. Norris, who whispered reassuringly: "He'll go away in a minute, I think."

The curious thing was that, although scared, he didn't seem at all surprised by what was taking place. It might have been imagined, from his tone, that he was referring to an unpleasant but frequent recurring natural phenomenon; a violent thunder-storm, for instance. His blue eyes were warily and uneasily alert. His hand rested on the door handle, prepared to slam it shut at an instant's notice.

But Mr. Norris had been right. The stranger soon got tired of rattling the sitting-room door. With an explosion of Berlin curses, his voice retreated. A moment later, we heard the outside door of the flat close with a tremendous bang.

Mr. Norris drew a long breath of relief. "I knew it couldn't last long," he remarked with satisfaction. Abstractedly pulling an envelope out of his pocket, he began fanning himself with it. "So upsetting," he murmured. "Some people seem to be utterly lacking in consideration... My dear boy, I really must apologise for this disturbance. Quite unforeseen, I assure you."

I laughed. "That's all right. It was rather exciting."

Mr. Norris seemed pleased. "I'm very glad you take it so lightly. It's so rare to find anyone of your age who's free from these ridiculous bourgeois prejudices. I feel that we have a great deal in common."

"Yes, I think we have," I said, without, however, being quite clear as to which particular prejudices he found ridiculous or how they applied to the angry visitor.

"In the course of my long and not uneventful life, I can truthfully say that for sheer stupidity and obstructiveness, I have never met anyone to equal the small Berlin tradesman. I'm not speaking, nor do I mean to mind you, of the larger firms. They're always reasonable: more or less..."

He was evidently in a confidential mood and might have imparted a good deal of interesting information, had not the sitting-room door now been unlocked and the young man with the large head reappeared on the threshold. The sight of him seemed to disconnect instantly the thread of Mr. Norris' ideas. His manner became at once apologetic, apprehensive and vague, as though he and I had been caught doing something socially ridiculous which could only be passed off by an elaborate display of etiquette.

"Allow me to introduce: Herr Schmidt--Mr. Bradshaw. Herr Schmidt is my secretary and my right hand. Only, in this case," Mr. Norris tittered nervously, "I can assure you that the right hand knows perfectly well what the left hand doeth."

With several small nervous coughs he attempted to translate this joke into German. Herr Schmidt, who clearly didn't understand it, did not even bother to pretend to be amused. He gave me a private smile, however, which invited me to join him in tolerant contemptuous patronage of his employer's attempts at humour. I didn't respond. I had taken a dislike to Schmidt already. He saw this, and, at that moment, I was pleased that he saw it.

"Can I speak to you alone a moment?" he said to Mr. Norris, in a tone which was obviously intended to insult me. His tie, collar and lounge suit were as neat as ever. I could see no sign whatever of the violent handling he had apparently just received.

"Yes. Er--yes. Certainly. Of course." Mr. Norris' tone was petulant but meek. "You'll excuse me, m

dear boy, a moment? I hate to keep my guests waiting, but this little matter is rather urgent."

He hurried across the sitting-room and disappeared through a third door, followed by Schmidt. Schmidt was going to tell him the details of the row, of course. I considered the possibility of eavesdropping, but decided that it would be too risky. Anyhow, I should be able to get it out of Mr. Norris one day, when I knew him better. Mr. Norris did not give one the impression of being a discreet man.

I looked round me and found that the room in which I had all this time been standing was a bedroom. It was not very large, and the available space was almost entirely occupied* by a double bed, a built-in wardrobe and an elaborate dressing-table with a winged mirror, on which were ranged bottles of perfume, lotions, antiseptics, pots of face cream, skin food, powder and ointment enough to stock a chemist's shop. I furtively opened a drawer in the table. I found nothing in it but two lipsticks and an eyebrow pencil. Before I could investigate further, I heard the door into the sitting-room open.

Mr. Norris re-entered fussily. "And now, after this most regrettable interlude, let us continue our personally conducted tour of the royal apartments. Before you, you behold my chaste couch; I had it specially made for me in London. German beds are so ridiculously small, I always think. It's fitted with the best spiral springs. As you observe, I'm conservative enough to keep to my English sheets and blankets. The German feather-bags give me the most horrible nightmares."

He talked rapidly with a great show of animation, but I saw at once that the conversation with his secretary had depressed him. It seemed more tactful not to refer again to the stranger's visit. Mr. Norris evidently wanted the subject to be dropped. Fishing a key out of his waistcoat pocket, he unlocked and threw open the door of the wardrobe.

"I've always made it a rule to have a suit for every day of the week. Perhaps you'll tell me I'm vain, but you'd be surprised if you know what it has meant to me, at critical moments of my life, to be dressed exactly in accordance with my mood. It gives one such confidence, I think."

Beyond the bedroom was a dining-room.

"Please admire the chairs," said Mr. Norris, and added--rather strangely as I thought at the time: "I may tell you that this suite has been valued at four thousand marks."

From the dining-room, a passage led to the kitchen, where I was introduced to a dour-faced young man who was busy preparing the tea.

"This is Hermann, my major-domo. He shares the distinction, with a Chinese boy I had years ago in Shanghai, of being the best cook I have ever employed."

"What were you doing in Shanghai?"

Mr. Norris looked vague. "Ah. What is one ever doing anywhere? Fishing in troubled waters, I suppose one might call it. Yes... I'm speaking now, mind you, of nineteen hundred and three. Things are very different nowadays, I'm told."

We returned to the sitting-room, followed by Hermann with the tray.

"Well, well," observed Mr. Norris, taking his cup, "we live in stirring times; tea-stirring times."

~~I grinned awkwardly. It was only later, when I knew him better, that I realised that these aged jokes (he had a whole repertoire of them) were not even intended to be laughed at. They belonged merely to certain occasions in the routine of his day. Not to have made one of them would have been like omitting to say a grace.~~

Having thus performed his ritual, Mr. Norris relapsed into silence. He must be worrying about the noisy caller again. As usual, when left to my own devices, I began studying his wig. I must have been staring very rudely, for he looked up suddenly and saw the direction of my gaze. He startled me by asking simply: "Is it crooked?"

I blushed scarlet. I felt terribly embarrassed.

"Just a tiny bit, perhaps."

Then I laughed outright. We both laughed. At that moment I could have embraced him. We had referred to the thing at last, and our relief was so great that we were like two people who have just made a mutual declaration of love.

"It wants to go a shade more to the left," I said, reaching out a helpful hand. "May I..."

But this was going too far. "My God, no!" cried Mr. Norris, drawing back with involuntary dismay. An instant later he was himself again, and smiled ruefully.

"I'm afraid that this is one of those--er--mysteries of the toilet which are best performed in the privacy of the boudoir. I must ask you to excuse me."

"I'm afraid this one doesn't fit very well," he continued, returning from his bedroom some minutes later. "I've never been fond of it. It's only my second best."

"How many have you got, then?"

"Three altogether." Mr. Norris examined his finger-nails with a modestly proprietary air.

"And how long do they last?"

"A very short time, I'm sorry to say. I'm obliged to get a new one every eighteen months or so, and they're exceedingly expensive."

"How much, roughly?"

"Between three and four hundred marks." He was seriously informative. "The man who makes them for me lives in Köln and I'm obliged to go there myself to get them fitted."

"How tiresome for you."

"It is, indeed."

"Tell me just one more thing. However do you manage to make it stay on?"

"There's a small patch with glue on it." Mr. Norris lowered his voice a little, as though this were the greatest secret of all: "Just here."

"And you find that's sufficient?"

"For the ordinary wear and tear of daily life, yes. All the same, I'm bound to admit that there have been various occasions in my chequered career, occasions which I blush to think of, when all has been lost."

After tea, Mr. Norris showed me his study, which lay behind the door on the other side of the sitting room.

"I've got some very valuable books here," he told me. "Some very amusing books." His tone coyly underlined the words. I stooped to read the titles: *The Girl with the Golden Whip*. *Miss Smith's Torture-Chamber*. *Imprisoned at a Girls' School*, or *The Private Dairy of Montague Dawson*. *Flagellant*. This was my first glimpse of Mr. Norris' sexual tastes.

"One day I'll show you some of the other treasures of my collection," he added archly, "when I feel I know you well enough."

He led the way through into a little office. This, I realised, was where the unwelcome visitor must have been waiting at the time of my own arrival. It was strangely bare. There was a chair, a table, a filing cabinet, and, on the wall, a large map of Germany. Schmidt was nowhere to be seen.

"My secretary has gone out," Mr. Norris explained, his uneasy eyes wandering over the walls with certain distaste, as if this room had unpleasant associations for him. "He took the typewriter to be cleaned. This was what he wanted to see me about, just now."

This lie seemed so entirely pointless that I felt rather offended. I didn't expect him to confide in me yet; but he needn't treat me like an imbecile. I felt absolved from any lingering scruples about asking pointed questions, and said, with frank inquisitiveness: "What is it, exactly, that you export and import?"

He took it quite calmly. His smile was disingenuous and bland.

"My dear boy, what, in my time, have I not exported? I think I may claim to have exported everything which is--er--exportable."

He pulled out one of the drawers of the filing cabinet with the gesture of a house agent. "The latest model, you see."

The drawer was quite empty. "Tell me one of the things you export," I insisted, smiling.

Mr. Norris appeared to consider.

"Clocks," he said at length.

"And where do you export them to?"

He rubbed his chin with a nervous, furtive movement. This time, my teasing had succeeded in its object. He was flustered and mildly vexed.

"Really, my dear boy, if you want to go into a lot of technical explanations, you must ask my secretary. I haven't the time to attend to them. I leave all the more--er--sordid details entirely in his hands. Yes..."

CHAPTER THREE

A few days after Christmas I rang up Arthur (we called each other by our Christian names now) and suggested that we should spend Silvesterabend together.

"My dear William, I shall be delighted, of course. Most delighted... I can imagine no more charming or auspicious company in which to celebrate the birth of this peculiarly ill-omened New Year. I'd ask you to have dinner with me, but unfortunately I have a previous engagement. Now where do you suggest we shall meet?"

"What about the Troika?"

"Very well, my dear boy. I put myself in your hands entirely. I fear I shall feel rather out of place amidst so many young faces. A greybeard with one foot in the tomb... Somebody say 'No, no!' Nobody does. How cruel Youth is. Never mind. Such is life...."

When once Arthur had started telephoning it was difficult to stop him. I used often to lay the receiver on the table for a few minutes knowing that when I picked it up again he would still be talking away as fast as ever. To-day, however, I had a pupil waiting for an English lesson and had to cut him short.

"Very well. In the Troika. At eleven."

"That will suit me admirably. In the meantime, I shall be careful what I eat, go to bed early and generally prepare myself to enjoy an evening of Wein, Weib, und Gesang. More particularly Wein. Yes. God bless you, dear boy. Good-bye."

On New Year's Eve I had supper at home with my landlady and the other lodgers. I must have been already drunk when I arrived at the Troika, because I remember getting a shock when I looked into the cloakroom mirror and found that I was wearing a false nose. The place was crammed. It was difficult to say who was dancing and who was merely standing up. After hunting about for some time, I came upon Arthur in a corner. He was sitting at a table with another, rather younger gentleman who wore a pair of eyeglass and had sleek dark hair.

"Ah, here you are, William. We were beginning to fear that you'd deserted us. May I introduce two of my most valued friends to each other? Mr. Bradshaw--Baron von Pregnitz."

The Baron, who was fishy and suave, inclined his head. Leaning towards me, like a cod swimming up through water, he asked: "Excuse me. Do you know Naples?"

"No. I've never been there."

"Forgive me. I'm sorry. I had the feeling that we'd met each other before."

"Perhaps so," I said politely, wondering how he could smile without dropping his eyeglass. It was rimless and ribbonless and looked as though it had been screwed into his pink well-shaved face by means of some horrible surgical operation.

"Perhaps you were at Juan-les-Pins last year?"

"No, I'm afraid I wasn't."

"Yes, I see." He smiled in polite regret. "In that case I must beg your pardon."

"Don't mention it," I said. We both laughed very heartily. Arthur, evidently pleased that I was making a good impression on the Baron, laughed too. I drank a glass of champagne off at a gulp. A three-man band was playing: Gruss' mir mein Hawaii, ich bleib' Dir treu, ich hob' Dich gerne. The dancers, locked frigidly together, swayed in partial-paralytic rhythms under a huge sunshade suspended from the ceiling and oscillating gently through cigarette smoke and hot rising air.

"Don't you find it a trifle stuffy in here?" Arthur asked anxiously.

In the windows were bottles filled with coloured liquids brilliantly illuminated from beneath in magenta, emerald, vermilion. They seemed to be lighting up the whole room. The cigarette smoke made my eyes smart until the tears ran down my face. The music kept dying away, then surging up fearfully loud. I passed my hand down the shiny black oil-cloth curtains in the alcove behind my chair. Oddly enough, they were quite cold. The lamps were like alpine cowbells. And there was a fluffy white monkey perched above the bar. In another moment, when I had drunk exactly the right amount of champagne, I should have a vision. I took a sip. And now, with extreme clarity, without passion or malice, I saw what Life really is. It had something, I remember, to do with the revolving sunshade. Yes, I murmured to myself, let them dance. They are dancing. I am glad.

"You know, I like this place. Extraordinarily!" I told the Baron with enthusiasm. He did not seem surprised.

Arthur was solemnly stifling a belch.

"Dear Arthur, don't look so sad. Are you tired?"

"No, not tired, William. Only a little contemplative, perhaps. Such an occasion as this is not without its solemn aspect. You young people are quite right to enjoy yourselves. I don't blame you for a moment. One has one's memories."

"Memories are the most precious things we have," said the Baron with approval. As intoxication proceeded, his face seemed slowly to disintegrate. A rigid area of paralysis formed round the monocle. The monocle was holding his face together. He gripped it desperately with his facial muscles, cocking his disengaged eyebrow, his mouth sagging slightly at the corners, minute beads of perspiration appearing along the parting of his thin, satin-smooth dark hair. Catching my eye, he swam up toward me, to the surface of the element which seemed to separate us.

"Excuse me, please. May I ask you something?"

"By all means."

"Have you read *Winnie the Pooh*, by A. A. Milne?"

"Tes, I have."

"And tell me, please, how did you like it?"

"Very much indeed."

"Then I am very glad. Yes, so did I. Very much."

And now we were all standing up. What had happened? It was midnight. Our glasses touched.

"Cheerio," said the Baron, with the air of one who makes a particularly felicitous quotation.

"Allow me," said Arthur, "to wish you both every success and happiness in nineteen thirty-one. Every success..." His voice trailed off uneasily into silence. Nervously he fingered his heavy fringe of hair. A tremendous crash exploded from the band. Like a car which has slowly, laboriously reached the summit of the mountain railway, we plunged headlong downwards into the New Year.

The events of the next two hours were somewhat confused. We were in a small bar, where I remember only the ruffled plumes of a paper streamer, crimson, very beautiful, stirring like seaweed in the draught from an electric fan. We wandered through streets crowded with girls who popped teasers in our faces. We ate ham and eggs in the first-class restaurant of the Friedrichstrasse Station. Arthur had disappeared. The Baron was rather mysterious and sly about this; though I couldn't understand why. He had asked me to call him Kuno, and explained how much he admired the character of the English upper class. We were driving in a taxi, alone. The Baron told me about a friend of his, a young Etonian. The Etonian had been in India for two years. On the morning after his return, he had met his oldest school-friend in Bond Street. Although they hadn't seen each other for so long, the school-friend had merely said: "Hullo. I'm afraid I can't talk to you now. I have to go shopping with my mother."

"And I find this so very nice," the Baron concluded. "It is your English self-control, you see." The taxi crossed several bridges and passed a gas-works. The Baron pressed my hand and made me a long speech about how wonderful it is to be young. He had become rather indistinct and his English was rapidly deteriorating. "You see, excuse me, I've been watching your reactions the whole evening. I hope you are not offended?" I found my false nose in my pocket and put it on. It had got a bit crumpled. The Baron seemed impressed. "This is all so very interesting for me, you see." Soon after this, I had to stop the taxi under a lamp-post in order to be sick. '

We were driving along a street bounded by a high dark wall. Over the top of the wall I suddenly caught sight of an ornamental cross. "Good God," I said. "Are you taking me to the cemetery?"

The Baron merely smiled. We had stopped; having arrived, it seemed, at the blackest corner of the night. I stumbled over something, and the Baron obligingly took my arm. He seemed to have been here before. We passed through an archway and into a courtyard. There was light here from several windows, and snatches of gramophone music and laughter. A silhouetted head and shoulders leant out of one of the windows, shouted: "Prosit Neujahr!" and spat vigorously. The spittle landed with a soft

splash on the paving-stone just beside my foot. Other heads emerged from other windows. "Is this you, Paul, you sow?" someone shouted. "Red Front!" yelled a voice, and a louder splash followed. The time, I think, a beer-mug had been emptied.

Here one of the anassthetic periods of my evening supervened. How the Baron got me upstairs, I don't know. It was quite painless. We were in a room full of people dancing, shouting, singing, drinking, shaking our hands and thumping us on the back. There was an immense ornamental gasolier converted to hold electric bulbs and enmeshed in paper festoons. My glance reeled about the room picking out large or minute objects, a bowl of claret-cup in which floated an empty match-box, a broken bead from a necklace, a bust of Bismarck on the top of a Gothic dresser--holding them for an instant, then losing them again in general coloured chaos. In this manner, I caught a sudden startling glimpse of Arthur's head, its mouth open, the wig jammed down over its left eye. I stumbled about looking for the body and collapsed comfortably on to a sofa, holding the upper half of a girl. My face was buried in dusty-smelling lace cushions. The noise of the party burst over me in thundering waves like the sea. It was strangely soothing. "Don't go to sleep, darling," said the girl I was holding. "No, of course I won't," I replied, and sat up, tidying my hair. I felt suddenly, quite sober.

Opposite me, in a big armchair, sat Arthur, with a thin, dark, sulky-looking girl on his lap. He had taken off his coat and waistcoat and looked most domestic. He wore gaudily striped braces. His shirt sleeves were looped up with elastic bands. Except for a little hair round the base of the skull, he was perfectly bald.

"What on earth have you done with it?" I exclaimed. "You'll catch cold."

"The idea was not mine, William. Rather a graceful tribute, don't you think, to the Iron Chancellor?"

He seemed in much better spirits, now, than earlier in the evening, and, strangely enough, not at all drunk. He had a remarkably strong head. Looking up, I saw the wig perched rakishly on Bismarck's helmet. It was much too big for him.

Turning, I found the Baron sitting beside me on the sofa.

"Hullo, Kuno," I said. "How did you get here?"

He didn't answer, but smiled his bright rigid smile and desperately cocked an eyebrow. He seemed on the very point of collapse. In another moment, his monocle would fall out.

The gramophone burst into loud braying music. Most of the people in the room began to dance. There were nearly all young. The boys were in shirt-sleeves; the girls had unhooked their dresses. The atmosphere of the room was heavy with dust and perspiration and cheap scent. An enormous woman elbowed her way through the crowd, carrying a glass of wine in each hand. She wore a pink silk blouse and a very short pleated white skirt; her feet were jammed into absurdly small high-heeled shoes, of which bulged pads of silk-stockinged flesh. Her cheeks were waxy pink and her hair dyed tinsel golden, so that it matched the glitter of the half-dozen bracelets on her powdered arms. She was as curious and sinister as a life-size doll. Like a doll, she had staring china-blue eyes which did not laugh, although her lips were parted in a smile revealing several gold teeth.

"This is Olga, our hostess," Arthur explained.

"Hullo, Baby!" Olga handed me a glass. She pinched Arthur's cheek: "Well, my little turtle-dove?"

The gesture was so perfunctory that it reminded me of a vet. with a horse. Arthur giggled: "Hardly what one would call a strikingly well-chosen epithet, is it? A turtle-dove. What do you say to that, Anni?" He addressed the dark girl on his knee. "You're very silent, you know. You don't sparkle this evening. Or does the presence of the extremely handsome young man opposite distract your thoughts?" "William, I believe you've made a conquest. I do indeed."

Anni smiled at this, a slight self-possessed whore's smile. Then she scratched her thigh, and yawned. She wore a smartly cut little black jacket and a black skirt. On her legs were a pair of long black boots laced up to the knee. They had a curious design in gold running round the tops. They gave to her whole costume the effect of a kind of uniform.

"Ah, you're admiring Anni's boots," said Arthur, with satisfaction. "But you ought to see her other pair. Scarlet leather with black heels. I had them made for her myself. Anni won't wear them in the street; she says they make her look too conspicuous. But sometimes, if she's feeling particularly energetic, she puts them on when she comes to see me."

Meanwhile, several of the girls and boys had stopped dancing. They stood round us, their arms interlaced, their eyes fixed on Arthur's mouth with the naive interest of savages, as though they were expected to see the words jump visibly out of his throat. One of the boys began to laugh. "Oh yes," he mimicked. "I spik you Englisch, no?"

Arthur's hand was straying abstractedly over Anni's thigh. She raised herself and smacked it sharply with the impersonal viciousness of a cat.

"Oh dear, I'm afraid you're in a very cruel mood, this evening! I see I shall be corrected for this. Anni is an exceedingly severe young lady." Arthur sniggered loudly; continued conversationally in English. "Don't you think it's an exquisitely beautiful face? Quite perfect, in its way. Like a Raphael Madonna. The other day I made an epigram. I said, Anni's beauty is only sin-deep. I hope that's original? Is it? Please laugh."

"I think it's very good indeed."

"Only sin-deep. I'm glad you like it. My first thought was, I must tell that to William. You positively inspire me, you know. You make me sparkle. I always say that I only wish to have three sorts of people as my friends, those who are very rich, those who are very witty, and those who are very beautiful. You, my dear William, belong to the second category."

I could guess to which category Baron von Pregnitz belonged, and looked round to see whether he had been listening. But the Baron was otherwise engaged. He reclined upon the farther end of the sofa in the embrace of a powerful youth in a boxer's sweater, who was gradually forcing a mugful of beer down his throat. The Baron protested feebly; the beer was spilling all over him.

I became aware that I had my arm round a girl. Perhaps she had been there all the time. She snuggled against me, while from the other side a boy was amateurishly trying to pick my pocket. I opened my mouth to protest, but thought better of it. Why make a scene at the end of such an enjoyable evening? He was welcome to my money. I only had three marks left at the most. The Baron would pay for

everything, anyhow. At that moment, I saw his face with almost microscopic distinctness. He had, as noticed now for the first time, been taking artificial sunlight treatment. The skin round his nose was just beginning to peel. How nice he was! I raised my glass to him. His fish-eye gleamed faintly over the boxer's arm and he made a slight movement of his head. He was beyond speech. When I turned round, Arthur and Anni had disappeared.

With the vague intention of going to look for them, I staggered to my feet, only to become involved in the dancing, which had broken out again with renewed vigour. I was seized round the waist, round the neck, kissed, hugged, tickled, half undressed; I danced with girls, with boys, with two or three people at the same time. It may have been five or ten minutes before I reached the door at the farther end of the room. Beyond the door was a pitch-dark passage with a crack of light at the end of it. The passage was crammed so full of furniture that one could only edge one's way along it sideways. I had wriggled and shuffled about half the distance, when an agonised cry came from the lighted room ahead of me.

"Nein, nein. Mercy! oh dear! Hilfe! Hilfe!"

There was no mistaking the voice. They had got Arthur in there, and were robbing him and knocking him about. I might have known it. We were fools ever to have poked our noses into a place like this. We had only ourselves to thank. Drink made me brave. Struggling forward to the door, I pushed it open.

The first person I saw was Anni. She was standing in the middle of the room. Arthur cringed on the floor at her feet. He had removed several more of his garments, and was now dressed, lightly but with perfect decency, in a suit of mauve silk underwear, a rubber abdominal belt and a pair of socks. In one hand he held a brush and in the other a yellow shoe-rag. Olga towered behind him, brandishing a heavy leather whip.

"You call that clean, you swine!" she cried, in a terrible voice. "Do them again this minute! And if I find a speck of dirt on them I'll thrash you till you can't sit down for a week."

As she spoke she gave Arthur a smart cut across the buttocks. He uttered a squeal of pain and pleasure and began to brush and polish Anni's boots with feverish haste.

"Mercy! Mercy!" Arthur's voice was shrill and gleeful, like a child's when it is shamming. "Stop! You're killing me."

"Killing's too good for you," retorted Olga, administering another cut. "Ill skin you alive!"

"Oh! Oh! Stop! Mercy! Oh!"

They were making such a noise that they hadn't heard me bang open the door. Now they saw me however. My presence did not seem to disconcert any of them in the least. Indeed, it appeared to add spice to Arthur's enjoyment.

"Oh dear! William, save me! You won't? You're as cruel as the rest of them. Anni, my love! Olga! Just look how she treats me. Goodness knows what they won't be making me do in a minute!"

"Come in, Baby," cried Olga, with tigerish jocularly. "Just you wait! It's your turn next. Ill make you

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