



VINTAGE **GREENE**

The Human Factor

VINTAGE CLASSICS

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About the Author

Graham Greene was born in 1904. On coming down from Balliol College, Oxford, he worked for four years as sub-editor on *The Times*. He established his reputation with his fourth novel, *Stamboul Train*. In 1935 he made a journey across Liberia, described in *Journey Without Maps*, and on his return was appointed film critic of the *Spectator*. In 1926 he had been received into the Roman Catholic Church and visited Mexico in 1938 to report on the religious persecution there. As a result he wrote *The Lawless Roads* and, later, his famous novel *The Power and the Glory*. *Brighton Rock* was published in 1938 and in 1940 he became literary editor of the *Spectator*. The next year he undertook work for the Foreign Office and was stationed in Sierra Leone from 1941 to 1943. This later produced the novel, *The Heart of the Matter*, set in West Africa.

As well as his many novels, Graham Greene wrote several collections of short stories, four travel books, six plays, three books of autobiography – *A Sort of Life*, *Ways of Escape* and *A World of My Own* (published posthumously) – two of biography and four books for children. He also contributed hundreds of essays, and film and book reviews, some of which appear in the collections *Reflections* and *Mornings in the Dark*. Many of his novels and short stories have been filmed and *The Third Man* was written as a film treatment. Graham Greene was a member of the Order of Merit and a Companion of Honour. He died in April 1991.

ALSO BY GRAHAM GREENE

Novels

The Man Within
It's a Battlefield
A Gun for Sale
The Confidential Agent
The Ministry of Fear
The Third Man
The End of the Affair
The Quiet American
A Burnt-Out Case
Travels with my Aunt
Dr Fischer of Geneva or
The Bomb Party
The Tenth Man
Stamboul Train
England Made Me
Brighton Rock
The Power and the Glory
The Heart of the Matter
The Fallen Idol
Loser Takes All
Our Man in Havana
The Comedians
The Honorary Consul
Monsignor Quixote
The Captain and the Enemy

Short Stories

Collected Stories
The Last Word and Other Stories

Travel

Journey Without Maps
The Lawless Roads
In Search of a Character
Getting to Know the General

Essays
Collected Essays
Yours etc.
Reflections
Mornings in the Dark

Plays
Collected Plays

Autobiography
A Sort of Life
Ways of Escape
Fragments of an Autobiography
A World of my Own

Biography
Lord Rochester's Monkey
An Impossible Woman

Children's Books
The Little Train
The Little Horse-Bus
The Little Steamroller
The Little Fire Engine

To my sister Elisabeth Dennys,
who cannot deny some responsibility

GRAHAM GREENE

The Human Factor

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

A novel based on life in any Secret Service must necessarily contain a large element of fantasy, for a realistic description would almost certainly infringe some clause or other in some official secrets Act. Operation Uncle Remus is purely a product of the author's imagination (and I trust it will remain so), as are all the characters, whether English, African, Russian or Polish. All the same, to quote Hans Andersen, a wise author who also dealt in fantasy,

‘out of reality are our tales of imagination
fashioned’.

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

CASTLE, ever since he had joined the firm as a young recruit more than thirty years ago, had taken his lunch in a public house behind St James's Street, not far from the office. If he had been asked why he lunched there, he would have referred to the excellent quality of the sausages; he might have preferred a different bitter from Watney's, but the quality of the sausages outweighed that. He was always prepared to account for his actions, even the most innocent, and he was always strictly on time.

So by the stroke of one he was ready to leave. Arthur Davis, his assistant, with whom he shared a room, departed for lunch punctually at twelve and returned, but often only in theory, one hour later. It was understood that, in case of an urgent telegram, Davis or himself must always be there to receive the decoding, but they both knew well that in the particular sub-division of their department nothing was ever really urgent. The difference in time between England and the various parts of Eastern and Southern Africa, with which the two of them were concerned, was usually large enough – even when in the case of Johannesburg it was little more than an hour – for no one outside the department to worry about the delay in the delivery of a message: the fate of the world, Davis used to declare, would never be decided on their continent, however many embassies China or Russia might open from Addis Ababa to Conakry or however many Cubans landed. Castle wrote a memorandum for Davis: 'If Zaire replies to No. 172 send copies to Treasury and FO.' He looked at his watch. Davis was ten minutes late.

Castle began to pack his briefcase – he put in a note of what he had to buy for his wife at the cheese shop in Jermyn Street and of a present for his son to whom he had been

disagreeable that morning (two packets of Maltesers), and a book, *Clarissa Harlowe*, in which he had never read further than Chapter LXXIX of the first volume. Directly he heard a lift door close and Davis's step in the passage he left his room. His lunchtime with the sausages had been cut by eleven minutes. Unlike Davis he always punctually returned. It was one of the virtues of age.

Arthur Davis in the staid office was conspicuous by his eccentricities. He could be seen now, approaching from the other end of the long white corridor, dressed as if he had just come from a rather horsy country week-end, or perhaps from the public enclosure of a racecourse. He wore a tweed sports jacket of a greenish over-all colour, and he displayed a scarlet spotted handkerchief in the breast pocket: he might have been attached in some way to a tote. But he was like an actor who has been miscast: when he tried to live up to the costume, he usually fumbled the part. If he looked in London as though he had arrived from the country, in the country when he visited Castle he was unmistakably a tourist from the city.

'Sharp on time as usual,' Davis said with his habitual guilty grin.

'My watch is always a little fast,' Castle said, apologizing for the criticism which he had not expressed. 'An anxiety complex, I suppose.'

'Smuggling out top secrets as usual?' Davis asked, making a playful pretence at seizing Castle's briefcase. His breath had a sweet smell: he was addicted to port.

'Oh, I've left all those behind for you to sell. You'll get a better price from your shady contacts.'

'Kind of you, I'm sure.'

'And then you're a bachelor. You need more money than a married man. I halve the cost of living . . .'

'Ah, but those awful leftovers,' Davis said, 'the joint remade into shepherd's pie, the dubious meatball. Is it worth it? A married man can't even afford a good port.' He

went into the room they shared and rang for Cynthia. Davis had been trying to make Cynthia for two years now, but the daughter of a major-general was after bigger game. All the same Davis continued to hope; it was always safer, he explained, to have an affair inside the department – it couldn't be regarded as a security risk, but Castle knew how deeply attached to Cynthia Davis really was. He had the keen desire for monogamy and the defensive humour of a lonely man. Once Castle had visited him in a flat, which he shared with two men from the Department of the Environment, over an antique shop not far from Claridge's – very central and W1.

'You ought to come in a bit nearer,' Davis had advised Castle in the overcrowded sitting-room where magazines of different tastes – the *New Statesman*, *Penthouse* and *Nature* – littered the sofa, and where the used glasses from someone else's party had been pushed into corners for the daily woman to find.

'You know very well what they pay us,' Castle said, 'and I'm married.'

'A grave error of judgement.'

'Not for me,' Castle said, 'I like my wife.'

'And of course there's the little bastard,' Davis went on. 'I couldn't afford children and port as well.'

'I happen to like the little bastard too.'

Castle was on the point of descending the four stone steps into Piccadilly when the porter said to him, 'Brigadier Tomlinson wants to see you, sir.'

'Brigadier Tomlinson?'

'Yes. In room A.3.'

Castle had only met Brigadier Tomlinson once, many years before, more years than he cared to count, on the day that he was appointed – the day he put his name to the Official Secrets Act, when the brigadier was a very junior officer, if he had been an officer at all. All he could remember of him was a small black moustache hovering like an unidentified

flying object over a field of blotting paper, which was entirely white and blank, perhaps for security reasons. The stain of his signature after he had signed the Act became the only flaw on its surface, and that leaf was almost certainly torn up and sent to the incinerator. The Dreyfus case had exposed the perils of a wastepaper basket nearly a century ago.

‘Down the corridor on the left, sir,’ the porter reminded him when he was about to take the wrong route.

‘Come in, come in, Castle,’ Brigadier Tomlinson called. His moustache was now as white as the blotting paper, and with the years he had grown a small pot-belly under a double-breasted waistcoat – only his dubious rank remained constant. Nobody knew to what regiment he had formerly belonged, if such a regiment indeed existed, for all military titles in this building were a little suspect. Ranks might just be part of the universal cover. He said, ‘I don’t think you know Colonel Daintry.’

‘No. I don’t think . . . How do you do?’

Daintry, in spite of his neat dark suit and his hatchet face, gave a more genuine out-of-doors impression than Davis ever did. If Davis at his first appearance looked as though he would be at home in a bookmakers’ compound, Daintry was unmistakably at home in the expensive enclosure or on a grouse moor. Castle enjoyed making lightning sketches of his colleagues: there were times when he even put them on to paper.

‘I think I knew a cousin of yours at Corpus,’ Daintry said. He spoke agreeably, but he looked a little impatient; he probably had to catch a train north at King’s Cross.

‘Colonel Daintry,’ Brigadier Tomlinson explained, ‘is our new broom,’ and Castle noticed the way Daintry winced at the description. ‘He has taken over security from Meredith. But I’m not sure you ever met Meredith.’

‘I suppose you mean my cousin Roger,’ Castle said to Daintry. ‘I haven’t seen him for years. He got a first in

Greats. I believe he's in the Treasury now.'

'I've been describing the set-up here to Colonel Daintry,' Brigadier Tomlinson prattled on, keeping strictly to his own wavelength.

'I took Law myself. A poor second,' Daintry said. 'You read History, I think?'

'Yes. A very poor third.'

'At the House?'

'Yes.'

'I've explained to Colonel Daintry,' Tomlinson said, 'that only you and Davis deal with the Top Secret cables as far as Section 6A is concerned.'

'If you can call anything Top Secret in our section. Of course, Watson sees them too.'

'Davis - he's a Reading University man, isn't he?' Daintry asked with what might have been a slight touch of disdain.

'I see you've been doing your homework.'

'As a matter of fact I've just been having a talk with Davis himself.'

'So that's why he was ten minutes too long over his lunch.'

Daintry's smile resembled the painful reopening of a wound. He had very red lips, and they parted at the corners with difficulty. He said, 'I talked to Davis about you, so now I'm talking to you about Davis. An open check. You must forgive the new broom. I have to learn the ropes,' he added, getting confused among the metaphors. 'One has to keep to the drill - in spite of the confidence we have in both of you, of course. By the way, *did* he warn you?'

'No. But why believe me? We may be in collusion.'

The wound opened again a very little way and closed tight.

'I gather that politically he's a bit on the left. Is that so?'

'He's a member of the Labour Party. I expect he told you himself.'

‘Nothing wrong in that, of course,’ Daintry said. ‘And you . . .?’

‘I have no politics. I expect Davis told you that too.’

‘But you sometimes vote, I suppose?’

‘I don’t think I’ve voted once since the war. The issues nowadays so often seem – well, a bit parish pump.’

‘An interesting point of view,’ Daintry said with disapproval. Castle could see that telling the truth this time had been an error of judgement, yet, except on really important occasions, he always preferred the truth. The truth can be double-checked. Daintry looked at his watch. ‘I won’t keep you long. I have a train to catch at King’s Cross.’

‘A shooting week-end?’

‘Yes. How did you know?’

‘Intuition,’ Castle said, and again he regretted his reply. It was always safer to be inconspicuous. There were times, which grew more frequent with every year, when he daydreamed of complete conformity, as a different character might have dreamt of making a dramatic century at Lord’s.

‘I suppose you noticed my gun-case by the door?’

‘Yes,’ Castle said, who hadn’t seen it until then, ‘that was the clue.’ He was glad to see that Daintry looked reassured.

Daintry explained, ‘There’s nothing personal in all this, you know. Purely a routine check. There are so many rules that sometimes some of them get neglected. It’s human nature. The regulation, for example, about not taking work out of the office. . .’

He looked significantly at Castle’s briefcase. An officer and a gentleman would open it at once for inspection with an easy joke, but Castle was not an officer, nor had he ever classified himself as a gentleman. He wanted to see how far below the table the new broom was liable to sweep. He said, ‘I’m not going home. I’m only going out to lunch.’

‘You won’t mind, will you . . .?’ Daintry held out his hand for the briefcase. ‘I asked the same of Davis,’ he said.

‘Davis wasn’t carrying a briefcase,’ Castle said, ‘when I saw him.’

Daintry flushed at his mistake. He would have felt a similar shame, Castle felt sure, if he had shot a beater. ‘Oh, it must have been that other chap,’ Daintry said. ‘I’ve forgotten his name.’

‘Watson?’ the brigadier suggested.

‘Yes, Watson.’

‘So you’ve even been checking our chief?’

‘It’s all part of the drill,’ Daintry said.

Castle opened his briefcase. He took out a copy of the *Berkhamsted Gazette*.

‘What’s this?’ Daintry asked.

‘My local paper. I was going to read it over lunch.’

‘Oh yes, of course. I’d forgotten. You live quite a long way out. Don’t you find it a bit inconvenient?’

‘Less than an hour by train. I need a house and a garden. I have a child, you see – and a dog. You can’t keep either of them in a flat. Not with comfort.’

‘I notice you are reading *Clarissa Harlowe*. Like it?’

‘Yes, so far. But there are four more volumes.’

‘What’s this?’

‘A list of things to remember.’

‘To remember?’

‘My shopping list,’ Castle explained. He had written under the printed address of his house, 129 King’s Road, ‘Two Maltesers. Half pound Earl Grey. Cheese – Wensleydale? or Double Gloucester? Yardley Pre-Shave Lotion.’

‘What on earth are Maltesers?’

‘A sort of chocolate. You should try them. They’re delicious. In my opinion better than Kit Kats.’

Daintry said, ‘Do you think they would do for my hostess? I’d like to bring her something a little out of the ordinary.’ He looked at his watch. ‘Perhaps I could send the porter – there’s just time. Where do you buy them?’

‘He can get them at an ABC in the Strand.’

'ABC?' Daintry asked.

'Aerated Bread Company.'

'Aerated bread . . . what on earth . . .? Oh well, there isn't time to go into that. Are you sure those - teasers would do?'

'Of course, tastes differ.'

'Fortnum's is only a step away.'

'You can't get them there. They are very inexpensive.'

'I don't want to seem niggardly.'

'Then go for quantity. Tell him to get three pounds of them.'

'What is the name again? Perhaps you would tell the porter as you go out.'

'Is my check over then? Am I clear?'

'Oh yes. Yes. I told you it was purely formal, Castle.'

'Good shooting.'

'Thanks a lot.'

Castle gave the porter the message. 'Three pounds did 'e say?'

'Yes.'

'Three pounds of Maltesers!'

'Yes.'

'Can I take a pantechinicon?'

The porter summoned the assistant porter who was reading a girlie magazine. He said, 'Three pounds of Maltesers for Colonel Daintry.'

'That would be a hundred and twenty packets or thereabouts,' the man said after a little calculation.

'No, no,' Castle said, 'it's not as bad as that. The weight, I think, is what he means.'

He left them making their calculations. He was fifteen minutes late at the pub and his usual corner was occupied. He ate and drank quickly and calculated that he had made up three minutes. Then he bought the Yardley's at the chemist in St James's Arcade, the Earl Grey at Jackson's, a Double Gloucester there too to save time, although he usually went to the cheese shop in Jermyn Street, but the

Maltesers, which he had intended to buy at the ABC, had run out by the time he got there – the assistant told him there had been an unexpected demand, and he had to buy Kit Kats instead. He was only three minutes late when he rejoined Davis.

‘You never told me they were having a check,’ he said.

‘I was sworn to secrecy. Did they catch you with anything?’

‘Not exactly.’

‘He did with me. Asked what I had in my macintosh pocket. I’d got that report from 59800. I wanted to read it again over my lunch.’

‘What did he say?’

‘Oh, he let me go with a warning. He said rules were made to be kept. To think that fellow Blake (whatever did he want to escape for?) got forty years freedom from income tax, intellectual strain and responsibility, and it’s we who suffer for it now.’

‘Colonel Daintry wasn’t very difficult,’ Castle said. ‘He knew a cousin of mine at Corpus. That sort of thing makes a difference.’

CHAPTER II

CASTLE was usually able to catch the six thirty-five train from Euston. This brought him to Berkhamsted punctually at seven twelve. His bicycle waited for him at the station – he had known the ticket collector for many years and he always left it in his care. Then he rode the longer way home, for the sake of exercise – across the canal bridge, past the Tudor school, into the High Street, past the grey flint parish church which contained the helmet of a crusader, then up the slope of the Chilterns towards his small semi-detached house in King's Road. He always arrived there, if he had not telephoned a warning from London, by half-past seven. There was just time to say good night to the boy and have a whisky or two before dinner at eight.

In a bizarre profession anything which belongs to an everyday routine gains great value – perhaps that was one reason why, when he came back from South Africa, he chose to return to his birthplace: to the canal under the weeping willows, to the school and the ruins of a once-famous castle which had withstood a siege by Prince Louis of France and of which, so the story went, Chaucer had been a Clerk of Works and – who knows? – perhaps an ancestral Castle one of the artisans. It consisted now of only a few grass mounds and some yards of flint wall, facing the canal and the railway line. Beyond was a long road leading away from the town bordered with hawthorn hedges and Spanish chestnut trees until one reached at last the freedom of the Common. Years ago the inhabitants of the town fought for their right to graze cattle upon the Common, but in the twentieth century it was doubtful whether any animal but a rabbit or a goat could have found provender among the ferns, the gorse and the bracken.

When Castle was a child there still remained on the Common the remnants of old trenches dug in the heavy red clay during the first German war by members of the Inns of Court OTC, young lawyers who practised there before they went to die in Belgium or France as members of more orthodox units. It was unsafe to wander there without proper knowledge, since the old trenches had been dug several feet deep, modelled on the original trenches of the Old Contemptibles around Ypres, and a stranger risked a sudden fall and a broken leg. Children who had grown up with the knowledge of their whereabouts wandered freely, until the memory began to fade. Castle for some reason had always remembered, and sometimes on his days off from the office he took Sam by the hand and introduced him to the forgotten hiding-places and the multiple dangers of the Common. How many guerrilla campaigns he had fought there as a child against overwhelming odds. Well, the days of the guerrilla had returned, daydreams had become realities. Living thus with the long familiar he felt the security that an old lag feels when he goes back to the prison he knows.

Castle pushed his bicycle up King's Road. He had bought his house with the help of a building society after his return to England. He could easily have saved money by paying cash, but he had no wish to appear different from the schoolmasters on either side – on the salary they earned there was no possibility of saving. For the same reason he kept the rather gaudy stained glass of the Laughing Cavalier over the front door. He disliked it; he associated it with dentistry – so often stained glass in provincial towns hides the agony of the chair from outsiders – but again because his neighbours bore with theirs, he preferred to leave it alone. The schoolmasters in King's Road were strong upholders of the aesthetic principles of North Oxford, where many of them had taken tea with their tutors, and there too,

in the Banbury Road, his bicycle would have fitted well, in the hall, under the staircase.

He opened his door with a Yale key. He had once thought of buying a mortice lock or something very special chosen in St James's Street from Chubb's, but he restrained himself – his neighbours were content with Yale, and there had been no burglary nearer than Boxmoor in the last three years to justify him. The hall was empty; so seemed the sitting-room, which he could see through the open door: there was not a sound from the kitchen. He noticed at once that the whisky bottle was not standing ready by the syphon on the sideboard. The habit of years had been broken and Castle felt anxiety like the prick of an insect. He called, 'Sarah', but there was no reply. He stood just inside the hall door, beside the umbrella stand, taking in with rapid glances the familiar scene, with the one essential missing – the whisky bottle – and he held his breath. He had always, since they came, felt certain that one day a doom would catch up with them, and he knew that when that happened he must not be betrayed by panic: he must leave quickly, without an attempt to pick up any broken piece of their life together. 'Those that are in Judaea must take refuge in the mountains . . .' He thought for some reason of his cousin at the Treasury, as though he were an amulet, which could protect him, a lucky rabbit's foot, and then he was able to breathe again with relief, hearing voices on the floor above and the footsteps of Sarah as she came down the stairs.

'Darling, I didn't hear you. I was talking to Doctor Barker.'

Doctor Barker followed her – a middle-aged man with a flaming strawberry mark on his left cheek, dressed in dusty grey, with two fountain-pens in his breast pocket; or perhaps one of them was a pocket torch for peering into throats.

'Is anything wrong?'

'Sam's got measles, darling.'

'He'll do all right,' Doctor Barker said. 'Just keep him quiet. Not too much light.'

‘Will you have a whisky, Doctor?’

‘No, thank you. I still have two more visits to make and I’m late for dinner as it is.’

‘Where could he have caught it?’

‘Oh, there’s quite an epidemic. You needn’t worry. It’s only a light attack.’

When the doctor had gone Castle kissed his wife. He ran his hand over her black resistant hair; he touched her high cheekbones. He felt the black contours of her face as a man might who has picked out one piece of achieved sculpture from all the hack carvings littering the steps of an hotel for white tourists; he was reassuring himself that what he valued most in life was still safe. By the end of a day he always felt as though he had been gone for years leaving her defenceless. Yet no one here minded her African blood. There was no law here to menace their life together. They were secure – or as secure as they would ever be.

‘What’s the matter?’ she asked.

‘I was worried. Everything seemed at sixes and sevens tonight when I came in. You weren’t here. Not even the whisky . . .’

‘What a creature of habit you are.’

He began to unpack his briefcase while she prepared the whisky. ‘Is there really nothing to worry about?’ Castle asked. ‘I never like the way doctors speak, especially when they are reassuring.’

‘Nothing.’

‘Can I go and see him?’

‘He’s asleep now. Better not wake him. I gave him an aspirin.’

He put Volume One of *Clarissa Harlowe* back in the bookcase.

‘Finished it?’

‘No, I doubt whether I ever shall now. Life’s a bit too short.’

‘But I thought you always liked long books.’

‘Perhaps I’ll have a go at *War and Peace* before it’s too late.’

‘We haven’t got it.’

‘I’m going to buy a copy tomorrow.’

She had carefully measured out a quadruple whisky by English pub standards, and now she brought it to him and closed the glass in his hand, as though it were a message no one else must read. Indeed, the degree of his drinking was known only to them: he usually drank nothing stronger than beer when he was with a colleague or even with a stranger in a bar. Any touch of alcoholism might always be regarded in his profession with suspicion. Only Davis had the indifference to knock the drinks back with a fine abandon, not caring who saw him, but then he had the audacity which comes from a sense of complete innocence. Castle had lost both audacity and innocence for ever in South Africa while he was waiting for the blow to fall.

‘You don’t mind, do you,’ Sarah asked, ‘if it’s a cold meal tonight? I was busy with Sam all evening.’

‘Of course not.’

He put his arm round her. The depth of their love was as secret as the quadruple measure of whisky. To speak of it to others would invite danger. Love was a total risk. Literature had always so proclaimed it. Tristan, Anna Karenina, even the lust of Lovelace – he had glanced at the last volume of *Clarissa*. ‘I like my wife’ was the most he had ever said even to Davis.

‘I wonder what I would do without you,’ Castle said.

‘Much the same as you are doing now. Two doubles before dinner at eight.’

‘When I arrived and you weren’t here with the whisky, I was scared.’

‘Scared of what?’

‘Of being left alone. Poor Davis,’ he added, ‘going home to nothing.’

‘Perhaps he has a lot more fun.’

‘This is my fun,’ he said. ‘A sense of security.’

‘Is life outside as dangerous as all that?’ She sipped from his glass and touched his mouth with lips which were wet with J. & B. He always bought J. & B. because of its colour – a large whisky and soda looked no stronger than a weak one of another brand.

The telephone rang from the table by the sofa. He lifted the receiver and said ‘Hello,’ but no one replied. ‘Hello.’ He silently counted four, then put the receiver down when he heard the connection break.

‘Nobody?’

‘I expect it was a wrong number.’

‘It’s happened three times this month. Always when you are late at the office. You don’t think it could be a burglar checking up to see if we are at home?’

‘There’s nothing worth a burglary here.’

‘One reads such horrible stories, darling – men with stockings over their faces. I hate the time after sunset before you come home.’

‘That’s why I bought you Buller. Where *is* Buller?’

‘He’s in the garden eating grass. Something has upset him. Anyway, you know what he’s like with strangers. He fawns on them.’

‘He might object to a stocking mask all the same.’

‘He would think it was put on to please him. You remember at Christmas . . . with the paper hats . . .’

‘I’d always thought before we got him that boxers were fierce dogs.’

‘They are – with cats.’

The door creaked and Castle turned quickly: the square black muzzle of Buller pushed the door fully open, and then he launched his body like a sack of potatoes at Castle’s flies. Castle fended him off. ‘Down, Buller, down.’ A long ribbon of spittle descended Castle’s trouser leg. He said, ‘If that’s fawning, any burglar would run a mile.’ Buller began to bark

spasmodically and wriggle his haunches, like a dog with worms, moving backwards towards the door.

'Be quiet, Buller.'

'He only wants a walk.'

'At this hour? I thought you said he was ill.'

'He seems to have eaten enough grass.'

'Be quiet, Buller, damn you. No walk.'

Buller slumped heavily down and dribbled onto the parquet to comfort himself.

'The meter man was scared of him this morning, but Buller only meant to be friendly.'

'But the meter man knows him.'

'This one was new.'

'New. Why?'

'Oh, our usual man has got the flu.'

'You asked to see his card?'

'Of course. Darling, are *you* getting scared of burglars now? Stop it, Buller. Stop.' Buller was licking his private parts with the gusto of an alderman drinking soup.

Castle stepped over him and went into the hall. He examined the meter carefully, but there seemed nothing unusual about it, and he returned.

'You *are* worried about something?'

'It's nothing really. Something happened at the office. A new security man throwing his weight about. It irritated me – I've been more than thirty years in the firm, and I ought to be trusted by this time. They'll be searching our pockets next when we leave for lunch. He *did* look in my briefcase.'

'Be fair, darling. It's not their fault. It's the fault of the job.'

'It's too late to change that now.'

'Nothing's ever too late,' she said, and he wished he could believe her. She kissed him again as she went past him to the kitchen to fetch the cold meat.

When they were sitting down and he had taken another whisky, she said, 'Joking apart, you *are* drinking too much.'

'Only at home. No one sees me but you.'

'I didn't mean for the job. I meant for your health. I don't care a damn about the job.'

'No?'

'A department of the Foreign Office. Everyone knows what that means, but you have to go around with your mouth shut like a criminal. If you told me – me, your wife – what you'd done today, they'd sack you. I wish they would sack you. What *have* you done today?'

'I've gossiped with Davis, I've made notes on a few cards, I sent off one telegram – oh, and I've been interviewed by that new security officer. He knew my cousin when he was at Corpus.'

'Which cousin?'

'Roger.'

'That snob in the Treasury?'

'Yes.'

On the way to bed, he said, 'Could I look in on Sam?'

'Of course. But he'll be fast asleep by now.'

Buller followed them and laid a bit of spittle like a bonbon on the bedclothes.

'Oh, Buller.'

He wagged what remained of his tail as though he had been praised. For a boxer he was not intelligent. He had cost a lot of money and perhaps his pedigree was a little too perfect.

The boy lay asleep diagonally in his teak bunk with his head on a box of lead soldiers instead of a pillow. One black foot hung out of the blankets altogether and an officer of the Tank Corps was wedged between his toes. Castle watched Sarah rearrange him, picking out the officer and digging out a parachutist from under a thigh. She handled his body with the carelessness of an expert, and the child slept solidly on.

'He looks very hot and dry,' Castle said.

'So would you if you had a temperature of 103.' He looked more African than his mother, and the memory of a famine

photograph came to Castle's mind – a small corpse spread-eagled on desert sand, watched by a vulture.

'Surely that's very high.'

'Not for a child.'

He was always amazed by her confidence: she could make a new dish without referring to any cookery book, and nothing ever came to pieces in her hands. Now she rolled the boy roughly on his side and firmly tucked him in, without making an eyelid stir.

'He's a good sleeper.'

'Except for nightmares.'

'Has he had another?'

'Always the same one. We both of us go off by train and he's left alone. On the platform someone – he doesn't know who – grips his arm. It's nothing to worry about. He's at the age for nightmares. I read somewhere that they come when school begins to threaten. I wish he hadn't got to go to prep school. He may have trouble. Sometimes I almost wish you had apartheid here too.'

'He's a good runner. In England there's no trouble if you are good at any sort of games.'

In bed that night she woke from her first sleep and said, as though the thought had occurred to her in a dream, 'It's strange isn't it, your being so fond of Sam.'

'Of course I am. Why not? I thought you were asleep.'

'There's no "of course" about it. A little bastard.'

'That's what Davis always calls him.'

'Davis? He doesn't know?' she asked with fear. 'Surely he doesn't know?'

'No, don't worry. It's the word he uses for any child.'

'I'm glad his father's six feet underground,' she said.

'Yes. So am I, poor devil. He might have married you in the end.'

'No. I was in love with you all the time. Even when I started Sam I was in love with you. He's more your child than his. I tried to think of you when he made love. He was

a tepid sort of fish. At the University they called him an Uncle Tom. Sam won't be tepid, will he? Hot or cold, but not tepid.'

'Why are we talking about all that ancient history?'

'Because Sam's ill. And because you are worried. When I don't feel secure I remember what it felt like when I knew I had to tell you about him. That first night across the border in Lourenço Marques. The Hotel Polana. I thought, "He'll put on his clothes again and go away for ever." But you didn't. You stayed. And we made love in spite of Sam inside.'

They lay quietly together, all these years later, only a shoulder touching a shoulder. He wondered whether this was how the happiness of old age, which he had sometimes seen on a stranger's face, might come about, but he would be dead long before she reached old age. Old age was something they would never be able to share.

'Aren't you ever sad,' she asked, 'that we haven't made a child?'

'Sam's enough of a responsibility.'

'I'm not joking. Wouldn't you have liked a child of ours?'

This time he knew that the question was one of those which couldn't be evaded.

'No,' he said.

'Why not?'

'You want to look under stones too much, Sarah. I love Sam because he's yours. Because he's not mine. Because I don't have to see anything of myself there when I look at him. I see only something of you. I don't want to go on and on for ever. I want the buck to stop here.'

CHAPTER III

1

'A good morning's sport,' Colonel Daintry remarked half-heartedly to Lady Hargreaves as he stamped the mud off his boots before entering the house. 'The birds were going over well.' His fellow guests piled out of cars behind him, with the forced joviality of a football team trying to show their keen sporting enjoyment and not how cold and muddy they really felt.

'Drinks are waiting,' Lady Hargreaves said. 'Help yourselves. Lunch in ten minutes.'

Another car was climbing the hill through the park, a long way off. Somebody bellowed with laughter in the cold wet air, and someone cried, 'Here's Buffy at last. In time for lunch, of course.'

'And your famous steak-and-kidney pudding?' Daintry asked. 'I've heard so much about it.'

'My pie, you mean. Did you really have a good morning, Colonel?' Her voice had a faint American accent – the more agreeable for being faint, like the tang of an expensive perfume.

'Not many pheasants,' Daintry said, 'but otherwise very fine.'

'Harry,' she called over his shoulder, 'Dicky' and then 'Where's Dodo? Is he lost?' Nobody called Daintry by his first name because nobody knew it. With a sense of loneliness he watched the graceful elongated figure of his hostess limp down the stone steps to greet 'Harry' with a kiss on both cheeks. Daintry went on alone into the dining-room where the drinks stood waiting on the buffet.

A little stout rosy man in tweeds whom he thought he had seen somewhere before was mixing himself a dry martini. He wore silver-rimmed spectacles which glinted in the