ALEKO

BY

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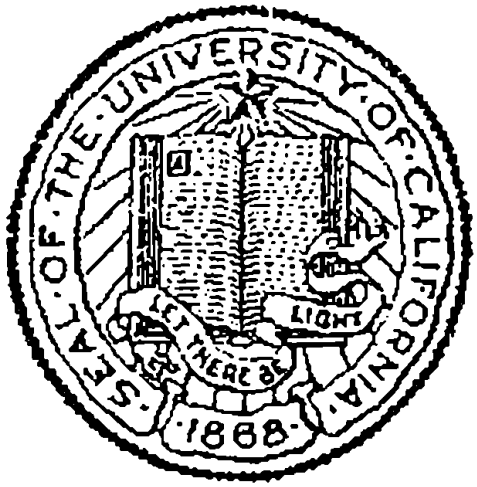

To a very great
Film director
From a very great
film star.

[illegible]

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ON THE TERRACE

I CONFESS I do not know how to describe the island while I myself am a part of it, while I am so intimate with its clean skies and candid sunlight and ageless, ochre soil. I do not know how the impress of these things on me can be matched in ink-scratches on paper. But if you take the map of Greece and pass your finger eastward along the bay of Nauplia, you will cover a speck which may or may not be marked "Pityessa." It lies close off the mountains of the mainland—ten minutes' sail, in fact, if the wind is favourable. Its name means "Island of Pines," and travellers from Athens, running under the gaunt headlands of Hydra, see in front of them a single ridge of green pushing, like a fish's back, out of the water. Later they distinguish the village, a white cluster very thick at the shore-line and tailing away in one direction to terminate, somewhat emphatically, at the school.

The school? Five buildings, five great cubes of cheap stone whose tops were "the Terraces." Eve and I had come prepared to condone something in the architecture: it was the degree of

maladministration that took us more completely by surprise. There was, for example, the Revered Founder, who had worked for goodwill by making the villagers sole heirs to the school's endowments. We had an English Headmaster: but the Law, nationalist and democratic, provided that he should be watched over by a Greek colleague. The old Lambadarios who filled this rôle was more nationalist than democratic. He held that all English customs were unseemly, and especially Association football.

I had judged it best to remain innocent of these parochial feuds. The upstairs flat, round which Eve in beach-pyjamas carried the brush and paint-pot symbolic of a new era, pursued a policy of accommodating neutrality. The boys of my House, brown-skinned and apparently devoid of all notion of pride or honour or friendship, were a sufficient, if not an absorbing, interest. And not least of those first impressions I would preserve the framed strip of sea seen through my window, always patiently blue with its blue, cardboard mountains behind. One looked forward with a certain wonder to the spring coming.

*

It came, with the second school term just ended. Eve, as often, was in Athens, and it happened that for some five days I was left alone with two

young Greeks from Sicily, brothers, whose home was too far for a ten days' holiday. The elder was inclined to misanthropy; he did not join our games, and finally took himself off to Athens, to a dentist he said. It is about the younger that I am going to write. He was sixteen years old. His name was Aléxandros Petsális and they called him Alékos, which, being heard generally in the vocative case, shall be written in this story as Aleko. He was to my knowledge a cheat and a liar and other less nameable things. His relations with me had not been uniformly smooth. But he was vivid, eager, impulsive, he was a sportsman, he had a lovely body and a lovely disarming smile.

The first morning he surprised me by coming into my bedroom in bathing shorts and waking me up.

"Come and swim."

I was evasive.

"I don't know where my slips are."

"They are here," he said, and held them out. While I tied the top tape, he tied the bottom one. In two minutes we were at the sea. He dived in from the high board and I followed him. We never did this in term time.

We dressed and went into breakfast together. After breakfast we played tennis. I took him to lunch at the hotel and we toasted each other in iced beer. We tried chess and backgammon,

We played tennis again and swam again. We dined and had more beer and turned to ping-pong. The weather was hot and cloudless.

I think it was I who first suggested sleeping on the roof-terrace. But he had been telling me how the boys had slept there through the last summer and how he knew the best corners for the sun and how delightful it was. Anyway, we took our mattresses and blankets on to the roof.

I certainly remember it was new and marvellous to me—the delicious exhaustion, sheep-bells and lights in the forest, the little hollow washing sound of the waves, the night air like silk on one's body. But I chiefly remember Aleko saying, almost in the first minutes we were there :

" You and Mrs. Grahame must sleep here when she comes back."

" And you ? "

" I shall sleep down in the dormitory."

I was oddly puzzled by this imaginative altruism.

" Why must we ? " I asked. He was great friends with my wife, I knew. He used to talk to her at table, and she would occasionally point out to me how perfect his legs were. I supposed he often thought of her.

"It's nice here," he answered, in a tone of non-committal remonstrance.

Silence for a moment.

"When is she coming back?" he said.

"I don't know," I told him. A telegram came a day or two later.

There is a high exhilaration in athletic pleasure and fatigue, in drinking sun and sea and air. We went on playing games, tennis in the sun in bathing-things, chess or backgammon in shirt-sleeves on the hotel verandah after lunch. At tennis and chess I overwhelmed him; at swimming and backgammon he had the crown. If he only took one game out of several sets of tennis, he would make rings round me in the water with a fast and beautiful crawl. He had a habit of asking, before any one activity had finished: "What are we going to do next?" He brought the same appetite to everything. Even to walking a mile for good food which we took lightly and fastidiously at the hotel—except that after the morning swim we would have breakfast in the school dining-hall or go up to my rooms and cook eggs and coffee for ourselves with a great deal of laughter and inefficiency.

In the rare intervals that succeeded some game, he would ask me question after question about school in England, Rugger and cricket, life in London or the Cambridge I had just left. But at night, talking in bed, if I said something about

Sicily, he would yawn and smile and announce very decisively :

" I am going to sleep now."

*

We went down together to the harbour to meet Eve. She came, slim and sunny like a flower. To Aleko she said :

" Are you glad to see me ? "

" If you didn't stop us sleeping on the terrace."

The reply was given quizzically, and it may have been the unexpectedness of it that made it sound to me ungracious. I am not absolutely sure, either, whether he said " us " or " me." I think it was " us."

He asked me later if she would mind us continuing to sleep up there. I did not remind him that it had been he who first suggested the contrary.

" What about me ? " I said.

" Oh, you would like it, I know."

I shrugged my shoulders.

" You will have to ask her."

But as we came back all three from dinner at the hotel, he put the question again to me :

" Can we go on sleeping on the terrace ? "

" You had better ask Mrs. Grahame."

" Can we go on sleeping on the terrace, Mrs. Grahame ? "

Again I thought the tone ungracious, much

like that of the schoolboy who, being told to say he is sorry, turns and repeats the prescribed words. The grace was in her consenting, for I heard her say very quickly and readily:

"Of course, if you want to."

He looked into my eyes, dimly smiling, as if to say: "You see how easy!" His part had been so.

But I, when I went into the bedroom to say good-night to her, had to meet passionate reproach. Were we not lovers? Had she not just returned from absence? . . . She was lonely. She was lovely and appealing. She was angry and hurt. But in my heart of hearts I knew I could not break faith with the boy.

"One night," I said, "and then to-morrow . . ."

At midnight, when Aleko was asleep, I came down to her again for a while. And went back.

About eight o'clock the sun woke me as usual. My vigil had not left me as eager to greet it. I opened and shut my eyes and cursed it sleepily. Aleko, still in the shadow of the corner, threw up sheet and blanket at the side of his bed.

"It's too early yet. Come in here out of the sun."

I crept into his bed. Aleko moved to the far side with an arm round his head, so that only our warm feet touched. The sun ate up the

shadow-space. I put the sheet up over my head.

Aleko turned and put an arm round me as if to bring me closer; but almost immediately changed his mind and jumped out of bed.

"You have the corner—I don't mind the sun."

He took off his pyjama jacket and lay without covering in the sun, face upward and stretching himself. At last he said:

"Will Mrs. Grahame ask you into her bed in the mornings?"

"I expect so," I replied.

"Would she give you the corner out of the sun?"

"I don't know. Perhaps she minds the sun like I do."

The shadow-space thinned into inches. I got up, slipped out of my pyjamas and fetched the bathing-shorts from the other side of the terrace. I threw several pillows at Aleko. I leaned over the terrace wall, watching the morning sea flicker blue and white under the diving-board. Aleko changed, came up behind me and rested bare arm and head on my shoulder. We went down to the water.

*

When Eve spoke to me about her sleeping on the terrace the next night, I said I was sure if she asked Aleko nicely he would not mind sleeping down. Curiously to my mind, she left the request

till the last moment, stopping him at the foot of the stairs. I did not hear the words she used, but I caught with relief his free and charming reply:

"Of course, Mrs. Grahame. Nothing at all. I am going down now."

Eve had said the same.

I went up to the terrace seeking slippers and found Aleko there. He was standing in his pyjamas leaning over the terrace wall where I had leaned in the morning, but his face was turned away from me towards the pine forests, dark now under filmy clouds and a crescent moon. I expected him to smile and greet me as always, but he stayed quite still. Only his hair stirred and his unbuttoned pyjama coat.

I came up to the wall beside him, feeling tension. It seemed an age that I stood and listened to the suck and wash of the sea. I turned to Aleko but I could not see his face. Only the rich curve of throat, the poise, the perfect body, an old scar, moonlit, below his breast. God of Friendship, something, something to say!

"It's been great fun, Aleko."

It seemed generous not to ask his confirmation. But another silence fell.

"Why are you so thoughtful, Aleko?"

"I like to be here."

"Shall I ask for you to sleep here alone?"

He laughed, I thought bitterly.

"Alone?—I think it is better to go in the dormitory."

I suddenly realised how deep and unfamiliar he had found the intoxication of the last few days.

"It's the end of all this, Aleko," I said, shaken. "It had to end some time. Don't you understand?"

"You are glad?"

"Of course not. But don't you see . . . ?"

He turned his face ever so slightly towards me till the moon edged his profile. He said—it is almost impossible to write the words and remember the utter normality with which they were spoken:

"You will have many many nights with her. In one day the boys are coming back. Can't you ask her?"

I watched him watching the sea. His hair and lashes were faintly lustrous with the moon, his lips were sombre and dark. He seemed so much less moved than I.

"I don't see how I can," I said. I recalled the previous night.

"She will think," I went on, "that I like you more than her."

"If she says no, I will sleep down."

"But what am I to say? 'Aleko wants it?'"

"Say: 'May we sleep on the terrace?'"

I went down. I don't know what I said, because this time my faith was with her. But with a subtler intuition than his, she had not trusted the simple frankness of his consent. She cried. I took hold of her mattress but she would not let me carry it up. I put it down but I could not leave her. In the end, I carried it up.

My eyes strained into the sudden darkness.

"Aleko," I called.

"Yes?"

"She wants."

He was still standing where I had left him. A slight wind fluttered his pyjama neck and the moon fluffed it with light.

"Good."

I slung the mattress down in the corner next the other two. Aleko had not moved.

"Does he think," Eve asked, "that he is going to stay up here with us?"

The same question had struck me. I faced another moment of ordeal.

"Aren't you taking your bed down, Aleko?" I asked.

"There are plenty downstairs. I'm going to sleep on somebody else's for to-night."

He started walking towards the stairs. I felt a dreadful plucking at the heart. I felt I had destroyed something precious. It must be endured, it was impossible to call him back.

But at the stairhead he turned.

"Will you be coming to undress downstairs?"

Reprieve, reparation! I was overjoyed. Perhaps I had not hurt him as much as I had feared.

"Yes, rather!" I said. "I'll be down in a minute."

But it took me twenty to find any pyjamas. When I pushed open his dormitory door, he was already in bed and it seemed almost asleep. At least he turned to me as if rousing himself and I was the first to smile.

I sat down on an empty bed next but one to his own and took off my jacket and tie and hung them on the bed-rail. There was something extremely odd about undressing in the boys' dormitory alone, with my wife waiting upstairs.

I threw off shoes and socks. There was an open blister on my right heel and I scrutinised it with difficulty and distaste. Aleko was out of bed running through his pockets. He came over with the phial of iodine. It had been in constant use between us recently.

I reached out a hand for it.

"Let me," he said. "You can't see."

"Thanks," I said, and cocked the heel up.

He was in bed again and I was slowly discarding my trousers. There was nothing to say and yet I felt I must do things slowly. The situation

was so tense and trivial, the actors in it so perplexed and mute.

I slipped in the last button of the pyjama top. There was no other prolongation. I looked across at him. He was lying with lips slightly parted and eyes closed.

"Good night," I said.

"In England," he said, "do they never kiss good night?"

I was shaken again by the simple normality of tone.

"Lovers do," I said, "and parents kiss their children."

"Never friends?"

O helpless, helpless fool (thought I) that I was! O lovely, unspoilt Southern boyhood! I crossed to his bed and saw the half-closed eyes and the radiant brown with which the sun had tinged his cheeks and throat. I bent down and kissed him. I do not know but that I had the impulse to kiss him again, eyes and lips and throat. But he had not even moved.

"Sometimes friends, it seems," I said, speaking Greek. "Good night."

Now he was smiling.

"And to-morrow morning?" he inquired, as he had inquired for the five nights past.

"I will wake you," I said. "When the sun rises. You know the time."

"Too early," he said with a laugh—and then

"Turn out the light, will you?"

I turned it out. My hand was at the door handle.

"Did you say it was the end of everything?" he asked. And for the first time there was the mockery of diffidence in his voice.

"I don't know," I replied, and went out.

Up on the terrace, Eve found it strange that I should be preoccupied.

REALITY insists upon sequels: Art extrudes them. The artist strives to arrest the causal sequence, to lapidify, immortalise; and seeing Reality override and efface his little climaces, despairs at times of his art. I despair of my art, even when I am most driven to exercise it. I read what I wrote only a month or so ago with a sentiment approaching incredulity; and as I take up my pen again, having at my side Aleko's photograph and recording the transient commonplaces which have made it important to me, I find myself ironically anticipating those equally transient ones in which, I suppose, it will ultimately be lost to mind.

The six-week summer term began. All day long outside the classroom windows the sea shifted and twinkled, and in the evening lay up against the banking splendours of the sunset luminous and pearly and still. The place disturbed me. Aleko, moving through it, young and beautiful, disturbed me even more, though some deep-seated mental evasion kept me from acknowledging it. It merely seemed strange at first that our five days' friendship should have so little effect on the tyranny of routine: that

Aleko should be expected to leave me if another master came up to talk; that Aleko should stand when I entered a room; that Aleko should have to be punished for disobeying the rules or making commotions. On our terrace there were now the most of three dormitories sleeping. One starry night I told Aleko, who was very much in the middle of them, that I envied them.

"But why don't you come and sleep up here with us, Mr. Grahame?" he said.

"I'm afraid I shouldn't be welcome."

"Yes, you would."

I envisaged a score or so of boys' mattresses.

"Well," I said, "I don't want to."

And this, in one of many senses, was no doubt true. The implications of the remark I should probably have denied, even if I had meant Aleko to see them. With Eve I was more petulant and less reasonable still. She had said to me:

"It's nice for Aleko to have got to know you."

"If you think," I had replied, imagining bitterly, "that it's made the slightest difference to his work or his behaviour, it hasn't."

"You've quite taken him away from me."

"Rubbish! How?"

"He used to have fun with me at table. He used to dance with me at the dances. He never does now. He seems to hate me."

"Oh, that's absurd!" I had said, and the matter had dropped.

But it was simple perversity, and I knew it, to say that Aleko and I were on no different footing from the term before. Then, he had been remote, even antagonistic. Now he was leaving books and balls and clothing in my study, and staying to talk whenever he came for them. He always brought the conversation round to something I was interested in. He would ask questions about photography, and I would try to explain the principles of line and lighting and composition. He wanted me to teach him how to play chess well. He was even more oddly anxious to learn about cricket and we would go out into the grounds for exhibition purposes, but there was a profound dissatisfaction in displaying the off-drive or square-cut with the worm-eaten rejectamenta of our olive garden. In the end, perhaps, he would suggest that we went to swim, and I recall a class or detention that claimed me.

True, our swimming together had largely stopped. Once or twice, mostly Sundays when the school breakfasted late, Aleko would come up to the bedroom to call me, as of old. But at midday, the general bathing hour, I was usually kept a few minutes by work, and when I got down to the water Aleko would be engaging vociferously in a game of water-polo, and at the lunch-bell would go off demonstrating to his friends the exact technique by which defeat could have been transformed into victory. And yet at times

he might wait for me at the gate, slipping his arms out of his peignoir.

"You must put this on if you have a cold."

"Oh, I'm all right."

"No, take it."

And he would hold it while I put it on, and walk up with me to the House discussing the injustices of the prefectorial system or the progress of the school play. It was no obscure sixth sense of mine which had seen in him a Ferdinand for Shakespeare's Tempest.

And we still played tennis. We played as partners now, and as much to our own surprise as to anyone else's, beat the best pairs in the school. We had a way of winning a set from 0—4 or 2—5 against us, I driving very doggedly along the side-lines while Aleko was dropping points, and Aleko discovering a most exhilarating power of recovery if my winners were going out. At times of real crisis, Fortune would take a hand. A smash off the wood, a couple of net-corders, a dazzling but entirely unsound volley, and the exasperation of our opponents would be complete. Those were superb moments. It seemed to us that we had done something so much more than win a game of tennis.

*

Already the greater part of the term had gone. What I have written about it is simply to indicate

the general texture of the life in which Aleko and I met and knew each other: the detail of it escapes me. As I have said, I am chiefly amazed at my failure to perceive the drift of my feelings towards Aleko during this time; yet this, I suppose, is only amazing in retrospect. The fine dust of everyday events blows continually across our vision, and until a crash comes or a calm, we are not sensible of a gradual deviation from the course. Then, too, I think, there are certain emotions which we instinctively recognise as disruptive. Once conscious in ourselves, they clamour for expression, they demand readjustments, they disturb the delicate equilibria which a regulated life has set up; and consequently the whole psychic machinery is at work suppressing them. I did not want to ask myself how dependent I was becoming upon Aleko's company; or how independent of Eve's. I did not want to notice the eagerness with which I looked for Aleko's figure in the corridors, on the courts, at the beach. Aleko to my conscious self was to remain a virtual nonentity, one charming boy out of many. Candour, definition I must at all costs avoid.

And perhaps these defences would have been proof against anything except Aleko's own ingenuous warmth of affection; on that and on Eve's interpretation of it they were finally broken down. There stands out in my mind the occasion

when Eve first named Aleko's affection for me and set a term to my prevarication.

It was a few days before the play and I had got a touch of fever. It started with a sore throat. When I went up after lunch to the table where Eve and Aleko were still talking, to say that I was going to play tennis, Eve declared at once:

"You can't."

"You can," said Aleko, scarcely serious, "if you wear a shade in the sun and rub yourself down afterwards."

Eve turned on him.

"Look here, am I his wife or are you?"

"I am," Aleko said rashly.

I was annoyed with Aleko for not being conciliatory. It was our last chance of playing together before the school tournaments began.

"I've got to play," I said.

"All right," she replied, "if you two know all about it," and walked out of the room.

Aleko and I looked at each other, ashamed.

"You'd better not," he said; and I had already come to the same conclusion.

Next day I was in bed with a temperature. The world receded; the bells, the sporadic shouting, the rattle of the cicadae beat distantly on the consciousness; across the hot pane of my room the tennis players shimmered, striking noiselessly, symbolic of an energy which I doubted I had ever shared. But as often happens in the

South, the fever fell with the sun. I sat up and Eve brought me meat soup and buttermilk. I asked her for my Aristophanes.

The bell had rung for the end of "prep," and she was telling me to put my book away.

There was the slightest of knocks at the door.

"Aleko!"

He came in, tennis-shirt and bare feet, smiling.

"How are you?"

"Better for seeing you," I said, and probably showed it. But Eve did not stay to talk to him. She smiled back at him and then went out of the room.

He came over and stood at the bedside.

"Will you be downstairs to-morrow?"

It was like Aleko to come so unselfconsciously, to give no reason for coming, to be so sure of welcome.

"I certainly hope so. Did you go up to the amphitheatre without me to-day?"

"Yes, twice." He told me about Ariel and Miranda. He told me how the swimming had been. He told me who had won at tennis and who was going to win.

The lights-out bell rang and there was an odd pause. I was expecting good night, but Aleko, never at a loss about taking his leave, seemed for once embarrassed. At length, dropping his eyes:

"Will you go away, Mr. Grahame," he said, "as soon as term ends?"

"I don't expect so," I replied. "There will be your exam. papers."

He began to stare out of the window.

"I've written to ask my father if I can stay here for a little."

"After the end of term?"

"Just for a week."

"And your brother?"

"Oh, Philip will go to Athens."

"But why, Aleko? Don't you want to go home?"

"I want to see my father and mother, of course, but I don't want to stay in Sicily. I like it better here."

"Will your father say yes?"

"I think so. I know how to ask him."

And because he stopped there and continued to stare out of the window, I knew that he was waiting for my verdict, some enthusiasm of approval. I hesitated. I felt that in some obscure way I was resenting this initiative he had taken, counting, as it were, on my complaisance. Then I saw again the dubious, averted face at the window and hated my vanity. This small, astonishing plea for an extra week of school! I would have told him I was very glad that he should be staying with me, but at that instant Eve came back.

He turned abruptly.

"Now I must go."

Momentarily he stood looking down at me, eyes and lips very sober and one brown curl escaping across his forehead. He held out his hand.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Aleko. It was so nice to see you."

"Good night, Mrs. Grahame." And he was gone.

I leaned back on the pillows and tasted a mixed sweetness and gratitude from Aleko's coming, feeling I could look for some special benignity of sleep. But there remained the epilogue. Half over her shoulder as she sorted silks at a drawer, Eve said to me:

"I went out so as to leave you alone together."

"Good God! Whatever for?"

"I thought you would be able to talk more freely."

"What? About marks and masters? What did you think we had to talk about?"

She pushed the drawer home and faced me and spoke a little breathlessly.

"He loves you, Martin."

Loves. A quick, uncharted emotion caught me. I found it strange even to reply.

"Who? Aleko? Don't be absurd!"

"I noticed the way he took your hand."

"That was just a means of facilitating his departure," I said with a short laugh; and added, "Aleko's got too much commonsense."

To this she made no answer; but presently, more deliberately, she spoke again.

"I wouldn't get too friendly with him, if I were you."

Tone and implication piqued me now.

"And why not?"

"He might say things about you. You know he's not to be trusted."

"On the contrary, I trust him absolutely."

"Hasn't he told you brazen lies?"

"In the past."

"Don't you remember the time when you caught him with Louka?"

"Well, what of it?"

"Didn't he copy your last exam. paper word for word from another boy and then deny he'd done it?"

Something in my sense of justice was being outraged by this vindictiveness.

"Yes, he did," I said, "and what matter? He won't do it this time."

*

Nor did he. Certainly my examination was anything but extraordinary, and yet Aleko might be said to have made it so, with that quiet, trivial, significant extraordinariness which the play of character brings to entirely ordinary events. Aleko took examinations light-heartedly; yet

over my composition paper, where no time-limit was enforced, he stayed writing for more than an hour and a half after the others had left. The second lunch bell had gone before he handed his essay in. I glanced at it curiously and found to my surprise that it was only two sheets of foolscap. Aleko was not in the habit of playing the Flaubert.

I started to read. It was the story of a night spent on Etna, describing how he and some friends, after climbing all day, had found no room in the hospice at the summit, and how, following a characteristic attempt to fix the blame upon somebody, they had gone off with blankets to search for a place to sleep. I reached the point of the pitching of the little bivouac with a gratitude for the entire simplicity of the style. And the narrative proceeded:

"My friends soon fell asleep, I could hear their snoring. But it was impossible for me. The moon was so bright, the valley beyond was so beautiful and the trees so fragile with their silver colour on them. It was the first time I was noticing the beautiful things of nature. I gave a look at the moon, and for the first time I noticed she had two eyes, a nose and a mouth, it seemed so strange! Then, far away, among the trees, I heard the sweet song of a bird. I wanted to sing, to follow him, but it was impossible, no voice would come out. Things that I was used

to seeing, that night made me afraid. I could not understand of what I was afraid, nothing was there except my friends, sleeping, and me, awake, but I was afraid. . . ."

The rhythm of the thing suddenly affected me and made me realise that with however tentative an art at his command he had for once escaped the school desk and the examination-room and my horrid little examinations. I was even proud that I was the one who had sat and worked there while he was doing it. I stacked my papers and went into lunch, and after lunch I showed the essay to Eve. I should have liked her to find in it some earnest of Aleko's progress towards honour, a conviction that she had misjudged him. But she only said:

"It's wonderful what love can do," and mocked at me with her eyes.

*

That same night, by chance, I slept with Aleko on the terrace again. I say by chance, although when I promised Mavrides that I would sleep on the terrace with him, I must have guessed that Aleko would come too; and Eve, it appeared, was certain. At all events, it was suggestion, perhaps invitation. Aleko loved me, Eve had said; and even while I scoffed at the idea, I was significantly anxious to put it to the proof.

What happened was this. It is the custom, in fact I think the law, in Greece that a boy goes home as soon as he has finished his own particular examinations, and already half of the school had left in this way and most of the others preferred to sleep under a roof during the period of their annual tribulation. The night of Aleko's English examination I had had the evening "prep" to take, and feeling in consequence both hot and uncomfortable, I went into Aleko's dormitory to see if Aleko would come down with me to swim. Aleko was in bed and resisting the entreaties of a friend of his, Mavrides, who wanted him to move on to the terrace to sleep. Aleko, it appeared, had mathematics the next day and proposed to get up at four in the morning to repair a year's neglect of them. He expressed deep sorrow, but it was as impossible for him to swim as it was to sleep on the terrace. Duty must be put before Pleasure and Algebra before the Claims of Friendship.

I laughed at Aleko's seriousness, it was so obviously assumed. Somehow his refusal cut me. I know I had no desire to swim with anybody but Aleko, but it was then that I turned and said to Mavrides:

"If Aleko is like this, shall we do what we can without him? You swim with me and I'll go up with you to the terrace." He was delighted.

"Good night, Aleko," I called to him. Aleko

loved me, Eve said. I can do without you, I was telling him. You or Mavrides, it is the same to me.

I took my bed up before going to swim and left it in the old corner unmade. I had asked Eve:

"You don't mind me sleeping on the terrace with Mavrides to-night?"

"No, of course not. I suppose Aleko will be there."

I replied, inevitably, no: that Aleko wanted to get up early to work for his examination. I was only going, I said, to keep Mavrides company. I went; and beside Mavrides Aleko was sitting up in bed, and beside Aleko my own bed was lying, made and waiting for me.

"And the mathematics, Aleko?" I inquired, noting how a big moon cast shadows under his brows and chin, and feeling absurdly happy that he was there.

"The night-watchman is coming here to call me," he said. Duty and pleasure had evidently arrived at terms.

"Well, I don't know that we shall have you here," I said, "without an invitation. Who made my bed?"

"I did," said Aleko, and added, as an afterthought: "With Mavrides helping."

I laughed and settled myself between the sheets. The moon, moving westward, struck full

into our faces. I could not help remembering Aleko's night on Etna.

"'For the first time I noticed that she had two eyes, a nose and a mouth. It seemed so strange!'" I quoted, blending malice with flattery.

But a youthful author's climaces are delicate ground. In a trice Aleko had top sheet and blanket off my bed and stood at the edge of the further mattress, withholding them.

"You can have them back when you promise to shut up."

"Not before?" I asked, to provoke.

"Not possibly."

There is, however, a gesture known to Rugby footballers against which the nations of the South have not yet learned to guard. We went over together, mostly hard on the stone, and I recovered my sleeping properties at a blow.

"Oh, damn!" said Aleko.

"Are you hurt?"

"Not a bit." He was rubbing himself vigorously and shaking with laughter.

"Well, I am," I said. "I've taken most of the skin off my knuckles."

He was at once concerned for me.

"I'll fetch you some iodine."

"Have you got any?"

"No."

"Well, I haven't."

"I'll go down to the hospital."

"Oh, Lord, no," I said, "the old hag would think I'd been disembowelled. You can make my bed again if you like. You know, Aleko," I went on, sucking at my fingers, "I loved your essay really. I thought you wrote awfully well."

"I thought so myself," said Aleko with candour. "I *wanted* to do a good composition. I *knew* I was going to write well."

"You certainly gave a long time to it. Did you have a lot of corrections to make?"

"No, I was thinking. I had my head on my arms like this, and I could see everything happening like a picture. It was fun doing it. I wish all my exams. were the same."

Aleko's words set me wondering at the poor farce of Education which we were playing together, Authority on the one hand puffed and ignorant, Aleko on the other pretending to pay attention to masters and copying other people's History answers and accidentally learning the name of the second highest mountain in Peru. Here, it seemed, was a spot created for more perfect things, an enisled seclusion in which the spirit could flower spontaneously and the body grow hard and sunned and beautiful. I began to tell Aleko of the school which I should have liked to build there. I would have had no taint of compulsion. One would play, learn, teach at

whim, and talk through the long summer evenings about everything one could think of. Aleko approved, though his opinion was that under these conditions he, personally, would learn nothing at all.

"If you only leave people to themselves," I said, "they soon begin to want to know things, science, or poetry, or philosophy."

But secretly, I was thinking that Aleko would learn anything I wanted to teach him, and he, if he liked, could teach me Dante and Petrarch by the hour.

I vividly remember the odd little snatch of conversation that ended the discussion.

"But suppose after all," Aleko had said, "there were some people who did absolutely nothing."

"I should expel them," I replied. "Also those who put hair-grease on their hair."

Aleko burst out laughing.

"What would you like them to put?"

"Nothing."

"Don't you put anything on your hair?"

"No, I certainly don't."

"Not even water?"

"Not even water."

"It's all right for you, your hair's so soft and golden. For dances and things I have to stick mine down with *something*."

"But why, Aleko?"—Silly boy, didn't he

know he destroyed the breathless lift and burnish of it ?—" You spoil it."

He twisted his head away suddenly and spoke into the sheets.

" There's no one here who cares enough about me to mind."

O Aleko, what are you asking me ?

My mind flashed the implied question and in a flash obliterated it. How much do you care about Aleko ? No matter, no matter. . . . Think quickly about something else.

" Don't talk nonsense, Aleko," I said almost roughly. " It's time you went to sleep."

Aleko answered quietly :

" Perhaps it is," and wriggled himself into a more natural position. " Good dreams ! "

" I don't need them," I replied, laughing.

" Well, anything else you want ! "

" Thank you, Aleko—good night."

And for the rest, although I had rarely felt less like sleep myself, I was content to follow the slow, westward course of the moon and the rhythm of Aleko's breathing.

Eve over breakfast did not try to conceal her prescience.

" And did Aleko go up with you after all ? "

" Well, as a matter of fact he did in the end. I suppose he thought he would be missing something."

"I thought as much. And did you sleep next to each other?"

"Yes, we did."

"Ah! Who decided that, I wonder?"

"I've no idea," I said, embarrassed and curt. "It was already done when I went up—Mavrides in the corner and Aleko next to him and my bed on the outside."

She contrived to refine upon the retort I had been prepared for:

"Trust Aleko to see that nobody else slept near you!"

*

Perpetually new situations are the stock-in-trade of the fictionist. History, we are told, repeats itself; and it is true that even within the compass of this small chronicle I notice a certain antiphony of events whose effect upon me is one of quasi-deliberate irony. I remember the first time Eve consented to Aleko's sleeping on the terrace with me, how paradoxical it seemed that she should grudge what she had apparently freely given; and yet immediately afterwards, Aleko had done the same. I remember when I left Aleko then, how much he had taken it to heart. Now Aleko was leaving me and I was to be not less mysteriously unmanned.

Mathematics and geography were Aleko's last examinations, and I learned from the school office

that he was due to leave with his brother next day. Eve wanted me to go with a picnic party she had joined, but I felt that I could not possibly go away, or enjoy myself if I did. Aleko was shut up writing, but for all that I must see him as soon as he came out. Our time together had become so tragically short. I could count the hours now. There was the space between the examinations. After the examinations I was giving my form a dinner at the hotel and he would be sitting next to me at table. After dinner till midnight there was dancing at the school and he might stay aside and talk to me. But at first dawn the little exiling steamer would scream its way into the harbour and Aleko would be gone.

So they left me alone. There was nothing I could set my mind to. I had resigned myself to spending most of the morning balancing on the two back legs of my study chair when all at once Aleko spoke from the open window behind me.

"I've done, Mr. Grahame, and I think I got everything right."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "What a scandal! I should have failed you *à priori* if I'd been teaching you mathematics."

But Aleko could afford to ignore this academic belittlement of his achievement.

"Well," he said, "I'm free again till half-past four."

"Aleko?"

"Yes."

"You never told me what your father said about your staying here."

Aleko dropped his lashes and made a grimace.

"He said we were both to come home by the first boat."

"Did he say why?"

"Oh, expense and . . . things."

He stood against a background of sunlight and running sea and far-off chiselled mountains, and I saw with a sudden anguish that all these things owed their vigour and loveliness to his. And to-morrow dawn was the end. To-morrow dawn. Was there no way of salving some fragment of Aleko's presence here? I thought of my camera, but I had always failed at taking Aleko's portrait hitherto, through a too great impatience with the limitations of my medium. I had wanted Aleko himself, nothing less; and in the picture merely the shape remained, the vitality had disappeared. Perhaps if I found the courage to create a thing of independent beauty, with Aleko for inspiration rather than subject . . .

"What are you doing now, Aleko?"

"Nothing."

"I would like to take some photographs of you. Shall we go sailing?"

"I shall be back in time for my exam?"

"What, at half-past four? Oh, yes, quite easily."

We went into the village together to get a sailing-boat. Then we set the prow into the sun.

*

The evening came and Eve went down somewhat early to the hotel to decorate our festival dinner-table. To Aleko, who had given expression to his knowledge of geographics in a space of approximately twenty-five minutes and gone upstairs to his dormitory to pack, I brought in the camera and films, which he had promised to take for me to Athens. The untidy bed and stuffed valises struck at my heart.

"I've got a beastly meeting now, Aleko. Shall you wait and walk down with me?"

"Yes, of course."

"You can tell the others to go on without us. Where shall I find you?"

"Here, or somewhere about. Just call 'Aleko' and I shall come."

So we walked down once more together, eastward, into the gathering twilight. The verandah of the hotel was deserted, and inevitably we paused there a minute before going in to dinner, and looked back. The island pines stood starkly, the mountains of the Argolid defined themselves, a depthless barrier, across the sunset.

"My last night," Aleko murmured, so that I just caught the words.

"In Sicily too there must be lovely nights."

"It isn't that," he answered. The sea paled and paled, and in the east, round Hydra, grew black.

"We've had a good term, Aleko," I said, wondering how far I understood him, "and we thought after last holidays that everything was going to end. These things never end unless you want them to."

He considered a little, and then laughed.

"Do you remember the time we beat Takis and Voulgaris 6—2 against that awful sun?"

"I certainly do," I said. "You never played better than that, Aleko."

"It was nice doing the Tempest with you too."

"Oh, Aleko," I said, "you say you don't understand poetry, but don't you remember—

The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve

Look at the end of the sunset—don't you understand now?

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep

Oh, Aleko, don't you understand that ? "

He did not answer me but said after a while :

" Will you sing me the song I liked ? "

" Not here, Aleko—I'm ashamed."

" You've sung for other people."

And at that I had to begin to sing, but softly, conscious for the moment only of an English voice and an English melody and the clean, luminous air.

> Where the bee sucks, there suck I ;
> In a cowslip bell I lie ;
> There I couch when owls do cry . . .

Ariel, Ariel, song and mystery, vistas of childhood days, green meadows, quaint wishes, hushed fears.

A disturbing thought obtruded.

" Aleko, I forgot to tell Mrs. Grahame where everybody was to sit at table."

" Who do you want to sit by ? "

" Guess, Aleko."

" Should I be one ? "

I burst out laughing.

" What a fool I am asking you to guess. Come on, let's go in to dinner."

" I'm afraid Mrs. Grahame won't put us together."

" I think she will. Why not ? "

" She doesn't like me to be with you."

The long table was lit with candles, and at my left hand was the card with Aleko's name!

*

Dinner brought a delicious, overlapping relaxation.

"What are you going to drink, Aleko?"

"You know what I am going to drink."

The candle flames danced longer and lower. Soup, fish, entrée, joint—the succession of courses bravely mimicked a more sophisticated civilisation. For toasts there was the red wine of Santorin. Aleko, temperate, put the merest spot into the bottom of his glass.

He passed me his card to sign, and when I had done so, put it away into a pocket-book. On mine, which had gone the round of the table and reached him last, he wrote:

"Alekos to his dear master and dear friend," and then, as if taking courage, brought out his own again.

"Not your name only, Mr. Grahame."

My impulse was to reassure him. My mind canvassed the scenes of the Tempest and halted in Miranda's longest speech. I hesitated, embarrassed, and glanced up at Eve. She was chattering gaily at the far end of the table, bright-eyed, soft-haired, but remote, remote, like some spirit. Even as I watched, the light

around her seemed to diffuse into haze. Aleko, present and warm, held all the approaches to my senses.

I wrote :

> I would not wish
> Any companion in the world but you

and looked in another direction while he read it.

He said, very, very simply :

" Thank you."

*

At midnight punctually the school lights went out, and Eve had just lit the lamp in our bedroom when Aleko came in, very resolute, and said good-bye, first to me and then to Eve. Then, going out, he stood momentarily in the doorway.

" Will you be coming down to the dormitory ? " he asked me.

" Yes, I will," I said, but with curious hesitancy considering I had known it could not end like this.

I turned to the business of undressing. Was it slumber I felt creeping over me ? In a few minutes I was going to say good-bye to Aleko—I must keep my mind on that. I must keep my sensitivity, my power of feeling keenly. I was going to say good-bye to Aleko. . . . Go then, for God's sake, and get it over !

"I suppose," I said, with exaggerated unconcern, "I must go now and give Aleko his more sentimental farewell."

I felt the hostility.

"Must you go?"

"Well, yes—didn't you hear me say I would?"

"I wouldn't stay too long at any rate."

There was a hint of the disagreeable in this last remark which I was aware of but did not stop to analyse. I made my way downstairs and into Aleko's dormitory. He was not there. Only a group of boys talking by the door, who spoke very warmly to me as I went in.

I waited by the window at the foot of Aleko's bed. The night was hot and close. Over the high pine-ridges the enormous orange rim of the moon showed and struck into the room. The group at the door disappeared. Waiting on, I began to feel a dull excitement which I attributed to the wine I had drunk. My eyes were heavy but now I did not want to sleep.

At last Aleko came in. He smiled at me. I stood rooted to the spot, suddenly realising that my emotions were in turmoil about me, and he passed behind me and I heard him starting to undress.

"What are you thinking about?" he said.

Strangely I recalled that I had always told Eve this was a lover's question. I turned, still unnerved, to answer. He had taken off all his

clothes, and like fire to flax as the old poet said, the sight of that lovely body stripped and breathing in the moonlight set something alight in me, something devouring and yet not wholly sensual, that burned and made dizzy. For seconds it was as though the integument of flesh had been seared off me and I left like the weightless, poised ash a flame leaves. I stared and stared at Aleko and wondered if I swayed or trembled.

What was it he had just asked me? "What are you thinking about?"

What was I thinking about?

"Nothing," I replied. The sound registered itself ironically on my ears. Why should I not say the truth or show it?

There emerged to consciousness the persuasion that I must not even go near him, that I had had an experience which could not be expressed until it was shared, and that Aleko would never share it. He had put on his bathing shorts by now and thrown himself on the bed, and I, full of this instinct to hold myself aloof, stood indecisively a couple of yards away, averting my eyes as if the second vision of so much beauty would have turned me to stone. Slowly and desperately I remembered the imminence of our parting. His boat left at five; my watch showed ten minutes to one.

I looked round; he had followed my gesture.

"I wish," he said, "I wish . . . Two days or four days more."

It came to me that he too wanted comfort. For what and in what measure I had little notion. I knew that he was fond of me, but I did not know how much, and at that moment I would have chosen rather not to know, for fear of his falling short. I went, however, and sat down on the edge of his bed, with one foot on the bedstead and my arms round my knee. His proximity stirred me beyond words.

"Aleko," I said, and my secret was at the very verge of my lips, "three months ago I wouldn't have minded if you had gone to the ends of the earth. Now . . . I mind very much."

He turned over on his side, coming still closer to me, and raised his head on his elbow. It would have been the most natural thing in the world to put an arm over his shoulder, but the spell held me tight.

"There will be the next Christmas holidays," he said.

"Six months? We may have become enemies by then."

"Enemies? I don't think so." My heart jumped at the superb assurance in his voice.

"Six months is a long time."

Silence fell. I could hear the blood beating in my ears, and six months seemed a veritable age. I saw almost in dream the passage of the

seasons, I saw the melons swell and the grapes ripen and the calm Greek autumn pass to completion. By October another term would have begun. Another Aleko, a stranger . . .

"Sometimes there's no boat from Brindisi," Aleko said, "and I shall come back for a week in September."

Dear Aleko! He was trying so hard to find what did not exist to be found. Inevitably we were to be parted and there was no solace for that.

I felt a sudden fierce resentment that we should be parted against our will. I could imagine the summer spent with Aleko, working and sleeping near each other, talking in the sunlight, me happy and inspired by his friendship, him growing by mine into a thoughtful and an honourable man. And to whom was I losing him? To the lewd and insensitive and destructive, it seemed, to the day-to-day materialism of a little provincial town in Sicily.

Sicily. . . .

It was hard to keep awake. Poor Aleko—I had forgotten!

"I'll go now, Aleko, because you must be very tired."

"No, I'm not tired—I'll sleep on the boat." His eyes were open and shining and I did not move.

A long, long silence, while the time ebbed

and ebbed away. The afternoon came up before me, Aleko trimming sail with the wind tossing his hair, Aleko with bright, wet limbs in search of sea-urchins, Aleko's laughter running down the pine-groves. I was nearly, nearly asleep.

"It's twenty past two," I whispered. "Two and a half more hours and the boat goes."

I got up, but we were not to be alone for the farewell because the door opened, and the Senior Prefect, whose dormitory it was, came in. We greeted each other across Aleko's bed, but he was not going away. I looked down again at Aleko. Intrusion had robbed the last moments of their more exquisite pain.

"Aleko dear, good night."

Silently he put out his hand, as though the first touch was to be the final memory between us; and it was I who drew my hand away.

I stumbled up the stairs. A troubled sleep was broken by shouting and the clatter of doors, and I sat up in bed and strained my ears, and faintly through the window came Aleko's voice and died away in the distance. A far-off siren screamed and then I knew it was no use listening any more.

*

When I woke in the morning there was breakfast at my side and the dreadful heaviness of fatigue and despair all over me; and Eve, fully

dressed, had her elbows on the window-sill and her chin cupped in her hands and was speaking to me in a small, hard voice.

"You must think I'm very easily deceived.—No, don't say anything, you know quite well what I mean. You didn't care what I said, you stayed with him over an hour last night. I thought you were going to sleep down there.

". . . I'm going away, if you want to know. Next year it would be intolerable.

". . . He considers himself my rival now. That boy! Do you suppose he could get an idea like that by himself? He thinks it's *his* right to be with you and do things for you, and you encourage him. You say you tell me everything. How am I to know how much you leave out?

". . . I don't believe what you tell me.

". . . He thinks I want to separate you. He thought last night I wanted to keep you apart at table. What right has he got to think that? If you wanted, you could easily put him in his place. You don't want. Well, I'm not going to stay here to be insulted and humiliated any longer."

I was aghast, guilty.

"My dear."

"Don't speak to me! You want to argue. It's no use arguing." She moved quickly toward the door.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going on the mountain." The sound of her light feet echoed in the corridor and I was alone. To be alone was the only state I felt I could endure, and yet I would have called her back had I had the resources for doing so. I was miserably unhappy. A keen mind and a healthy body will make capital even out of unhappiness, but for the moment I was neither: eyes, limbs and brain were loaded down. I was abjectly unhappy.

I just tasted the coffee. I put on my clothes and dragged myself down to the study. As I opened the door, a gust of hot wind blew off Aleko's racquet-cover across my feet. I sat down in front of the desk. It seemed to me that, having lost one love and betrayed another, I had utterly no desire to act or think again. I sat on and on, imagining that I was already a corpse. Then, out of chaotic moods and fantasies, there came up the memory of a friend, and I started to write him a letter.

He would be in London painting pictures, and Aleko would be off Poros now, asleep perhaps, and Eve was alone on the mountain.

I sealed and stamped my letter.

"Look here, child and fool," I said to myself aloud, "you've got yourself into a condition where you can't distinguish love from stomach-ache. Go and walk yourself into a reasonable entity again."

I took my letter with me to post. But as I gained the road and saw the deserted bathing platform running out to sea, a great hunger came over me of seeing Aleko again. The blue, intimate sea of our friendship was remote now, forlorn; the sun from which we had drawn vitality seemed to crush and desiccate. From the village I struck up the hillside, walking quickly, vaguely hoping to find Eve; and the sun, getting higher, smote upon me through olive and pine, and parched my throat, and sent the sweat pouring down my sides and thighs. I struggled over the nearer ridges and crossed the rough terraces on which the upland shepherds planted their few square feet of corn. There was no longer a patch of shade. The heaviness that had lain over my eyes all morning made the intensely lighted world unreal. And all the while my thoughts ran monotonously on Aleko's name, just the letters and sound of it, my mind being too dazed to shape an image or summon a coherent memory.

The sun had passed the zenith when I reached the easternmost point of the main ridge. Green and grey islands lay all around me in a motionless sea, but I was in no mood to wonder at them. I set myself immediately to climb down. The small stones slid from beneath my feet, the dust spirted up my trouser-legs. It was useless to rest. At about a quarter to four I pushed open

the door of my study again, and while the hands of my watch stole round to quarter to five, sat there, confused and entirely weary, scribbling disjointed words, the sweat drying acridly over my body.

Then Eve came. She stood first on the threshold, hesitant, wide-eyed and lovely. I knew she had come to take me away, but my parched, remorseful lips could not find a word to utter. I searched within myself for some tenderness, but the sources of my love were equally dry. Simply I wanted to be taken away.

She came up to me and put her hands, her slender, royal hands, on my hair, and I felt her tears dropping. My cheek, brushing the silk of her blouse, was aware of the subtler silk of the skin behind. Dimly under the crust of my apathy and despair, the older, deeper love stirred. She turned my face up to hers.

"Have you had lunch?"

"O Eve," I said.

"Have you had lunch, baby?"

Eternal womanhood! I found myself laughing while tears were in my eyes.

LETTER FROM ALEKO

June 19th, 1932.

DEAR MR. GRAHAME,

We have just arrived at Brindisi, and we had a very good journey. We passed by Pityessa because the Canal of Corinth is closed.

I have done what you told me about the camera and the films. The tachydromos is going to bring you the films.

I hope you are going to have good holidays.

ALEKO.

LETTER TO ALEKO

June 23rd, 1932.

DEAR ALEKO,

I'm not going to post this letter. It won't be the first time I've treated a letter in this way, but it's quite an unusual pleasure to be able to make up my mind about it beforehand—I can say what I please with no shame.

It's not, Aleko, that I distrust your English or your intelligence or your affection or your tact (although I've no doubt I should have to adapt my style to the first two of these), or that I'm too proud to tell you in writing that I love you. Only I'm sure I am going to write a kind of poetry, and poetry, as you have always told me, you wouldn't understand. Even if you were glad to read it, it would embarrass you, you wouldn't know how to reply. Of course, I don't think a whit the less of you for that. Poetry's merely one man's way of compromising with his emotions, like getting drunk or going Jesus. All this "I love you" business (which is poetry), this dissection of the emotions and flowery comment on them, is piffle, eyewash, nothing to do with love. Much better simply to say "We have just arrived at Brindisi," because I know

quite well that Aleko would never take the trouble to impart this information to anybody else, in fact it wouldn't even enter his head to do so.

But the truth is, Aleko, you had become so large a part of my happiness that now you are gone my writing about you is as necessary as stitches after surgery. I can't help myself. I must have your memory, your created ghost, or my vital spirits will drain out of me. I swear I wake in the mornings with a sense of loss quite nameless and unendurable until the rising consciousness whispers, "You remember, Aleko has left you," and I can focus my wits and begin to think of you again. And at nights, when I lean out over that terrace wall of ours watching stars and sea, and the summer wind wrestles silkily with my body, it seems an almost cosmic tragedy that Aleko is no longer moving near me but is the breadth of many, many seas away. I am not, you see, an entirely suitable subject for these amputations.

In a word, I want you back. I am a poet under protest, I like to live my life, not to dream it. And with your going I find myself suddenly condemned to dreams. I can't walk twenty yards to the shore without dreaming. Here Aleko rested his arm. Here Aleko trod on a splinter. Here Aleko used to sit and read *La Domenica del Corriere*. When I cross a passage it is to

remember Aleko there. When I speak it is to be conscious of Aleko's voice. If thoughts are immortal, Aleko, I must have given you a hundred thousand immortalities. I've scattered them round like entelechies to make an inanimate world benign. I've made (which is more to the point) no inconsiderable fool of myself.

And what folly, what exquisite, inescapable folly! Even my pen and paper abash me when I come to the depths of it! Tell me first, Aleko, was it love or vanity that made you envy me my hair and my feet? Alas! I can find evidence in support of both views—I shall choose the sweeter one. And now to confess: an austere Providence ordained that I should not see my own hair, but I have stood by the diving board for half an hour at a time simply staring at my toes because Aleko used to say he liked them. Fortunately nobody knew what I was looking at, though even if they had known I suppose they would have found it difficult to infer that this was my way of grieving for an absent friend.

Is that effeminate, do you think, because I have a horror of effeminacy? I don't mind calling it feminine, because we all have a touch of the feminine in us, you too, Aleko, with your strange, thoughtful tenderness and your stranger fancy that I need to be taken care of. (What gave you that, Eve or your own observation?)

But effeminacy, Aleko?—perhaps we may remember those days in March and February when the snows were melting on the mountains and we went down after a run or a football match to swim, the wind biting across our wet skin and the waves all spumy and cold, you and I alone generally, sometimes Mavrides, sometimes perhaps somebody else, saying we were keeping bright the honour of the nations that won Marathon and Waterloo? Didn't I love you then, Aleko? I suppose I didn't. How peculiar!

God! that I should be writing of manly virtues while all the time my own go oozing away at the thought of four more months of separation! July, August, September, October. . . . Suppose you could see me as I sit sometimes towards night, out on a spit of rock, with the sea coming up on both sides of me, again, again, again, and falling back with a forlorn splashing sound which I know will go on for ever. . . . But it is no use asking. Over you my pen has no power, and in any case I am not going to post the letter. I am going to put it away into a drawer. Now, quickly, before I weaken too far. I love you, Aleko, very dearly.

REVISED LETTER TO ALEKO

June 23rd, 1932.

It was nice, Aleko, to have your note. The photographs reached me safely, thank you, and O Aleko, at last, at last, there are good ones of you. The best of all is of you. One of my masterpieces, in fact, and I shall enlarge and frame it for my room. There are also some good ones of our boat and of the school.

I have done absolutely nothing since you left. The place is pretty quiet now, only five people have exams. to finish. I have begun to swim in the afternoons, about tea-time.

Oh, I lost my return match with Voulgaris 6—4, 6—3, 8—6. I played very badly.

Write soon.

M. G.

LETTER FROM A FRIEND

June 21st, 1932.

My dear Martin,

I have read your letter: twice to discover what had happened to yourself, and a third time to discover what had happened to your style. And having completed these researches, I find myself more perturbed by the symptoms of distemper in your prose than in your soul.

That I should offer advice upon either the one or the other strikes me as presumptuous and, considering your temperament, not a little rash; but you appear to expect it of me and I must take the more valiant course of incurring your displeasure. You should return to England. I feel that this island of yours is too aggressively beautiful. A place in which every æsthetic need is satisfied and nothing left to the imagination is no place for the youthful and aspiring writer. Shun it, take flight. Who ever heard of a painter going to live in Switzerland or any other "artists' paradise"?

And what of Anacreon, of Sappho? you will say. Ah! where did the Greeks sing save in Greece and where save in England the English poets? English springs from our soil and is

beautified by the lips of our ignorant. He is never truly literate who is not in touch with illiteracy. The English spoken in our streets is what Shakespeare heard and Congreve—you are reading your language, not hearing it lively in the sewers. (I am even at this moment assailed by the English of the sewers in a most intolerable ecstasy beneath-stairs of the spoken word: I can scarce hear my phrases as they leave my pen.)

But to be soberer: I am sorry you have quarrelled with Eve, but I cannot believe that the breach is serious. The only sound reason for quarrelling with one's wife is that she bores one. That she should freeze one's blood and petrify the sources of one's nether spring are, I conceive, legitimate grounds for separation: to be alienated by excess of natural ardour is an entirely preposterous thing.

And if I needed further assurance that by now you have become reconciled, I could find it in the reflection that you live upon an island. Islands, like beds, are narrowly circumscribed; and are intended by nature for two purposes only, for seclusion and the hermit, or for intimacy and the lover. Of course I have no exact idea to what extent your differences derive from the Apotheosis of Aleko. You are a crazy creature; and it is, I suppose, quite vain for me to urge you against further encounters that will prove your hurt and disturb the tolerance of Eve.

I cannot write of myself: perhaps some other time; some other time certainly. I am invaded by an almost intolerable languor. We are not now that strength which in old days moved earth and heaven. Perhaps it is the heat here by the dome of Paul: perhaps I need a change. I do produce, I can conceive, but at intervals. The future I regard vaguely as the womb pregnant with some renascence or some extinction: in each there would doubtless be compensation for the other.

Ah! when shall we meet?

Ever your
NORTON.

LETTER TO A FRIEND

June 27th, 1932.

MY DEAR NORTON,

I am sure of your love: else I might be bitter at the cruelty of your detachment. Do you hope to cool high fever with epigram? How sadly we are out of touch! You blame my island. It's not the island. This pine-smell and beached fishing-boats and blue, dividing sea—I could leave it all without a pang. It is Aleko. It's Aleko and not Aleko. It's something odd in myself. I despair of explaining.

Think, if you like, that I was in Greece and dreaming of the sunlight on an old Greek gymnasium, the naked runners, the lovers, the young men discussing Music or Truth or Self-control. And here, in the same sunlight, I had all around me the boyhood of a later Greece. I saw them half-living the old Doric life, growing apart from woman and the world, bathing and playing games, being taught Mathematics and Homer. And I had lived that life myself. I understood its ideals—courage, beauty, friendship. I understood its driving-power—a sensuality untapped and chaste, chaste almost by accident and burning day and night. I understood this life, it had

a keen, mysterious appeal for me, and yet I was excluded from it. I had no living point of contact with it. Even when I took some part in it, as when I was confided in or asked to join a game, I knew quite well that this was by special invitation and courtesy, and that I didn't really belong to it. And at night I shut it behind me and went upstairs to Eve, to a chatter of new frocks and the next day's breakfast, to little babbling caresses, to soft arms and soft, passionate thighs.

Then, without warning, Aleko. I can only guess what it was which attracted Aleko to me. I'm not much surer about why I was attracted to him. Perhaps wherever we had met we should have loved each other. But suppose, just suppose, that the night I told you about when Aleko was persuading me to stay on the terrace with him instead of going down to Eve, he had been able to say: "Why do you want to spend the days with me and the nights in another world? Why do you try to live two lives and succeed in living neither? With me now you have the chance to realise your Doric ideals. You can work with me, get hurt with me, sleep without women and eat what's put before you. Why do you go away? You know you can't get the ecstasy without the sacrifice. And perhaps the two of us could find the secret of perfect living in this place." And suppose I had

had enough insight to answer to that: "I should like, Aleko, to leave everything and live your life, but I can't. I waver between two worlds because I was made that way, and possession of the one merely exacerbates in me the desire for the other. I dare not possess yours like that." Should we have explained anything then?

At least there would have been truth in my reply. I belong to Doris: I belong also (let us say) to Sybaris. Chastity exalts me: venery exalts me (I confess more readily to the latter because I had a Nonconformist education!). I despise comfort and luxury: I also worship them. The impulse alternates. At the moment I love Aleko the Dorian: and all the world's spiritual wealth seems to lie in chastity and ordeal and his companionship. To-morrow I shall know I was deceived. Even as you say "Come back to England," I recognise the dormant, antipathetic desire. I recall the joy of choosing rare sherries over the soup, of the lantern-lighted Cam in May Week, of the society of brilliant men, of Eve's rooms off St. James's in which she used to wait for me, in which she moved so proudly, so exquisitely, it seemed incredible that she should love me. I must win back to that world. And here meanwhile in this wilderness Eve, as you guessed, has reconciled herself to me, unconditionally, without words or

apologies, shelving, in the manner of women, all the important issues.

For Eve is not a Dorian. She is, after all, a woman; and she appreciates her own loveliness. She will put on her bathing costume to play squash with me, and if I score six points in a line with the service, the tears come into her eyes on purpose to be kissed away, and if she makes the sort of winner I spectacularly fail to reach, she laughs and pouts at me, provokingly golden, until the thrill runs up my body and I could throw her down and enjoy her beauty on the spot. And that, I submit, is not Dorian. It isn't even squash. Obviously no one but a fool would want it to be; and yet I, who find her an intruder in Doris, am seemingly that fool. I don't excuse myself. It merely makes me unhappy.

And Aleko in Sybaris? Ah! I know only too well the answer to that question. Do you remember when Robert Myers got engaged to a girl from the Channel Islands? He met her when he was on vacation from Cambridge, and they explored together every cliff and cove in Guernsey, she like some nymph, he told me, with her shy talk and blown hair, and he breathless and spellbound. He asked her to marry him, and she came up to London to see him. Then I heard it had all been broken off. Someone else told me the sequel, very sympathetically. "She

didn't understand his civilisation. She had no idea how to wear an evening dress and she used to make a noise when she drank her soup. You know Robert's fastidious sophistication. It wasn't a mere caprice that he threw her over. It was a sort of tragedy, a broken illusion." I have no illusions about Aleko. The glory of young limbs is for rock and island, for the wild nature of which it is a part. It is not for display, but for action; and the love it inspires is creative—not procreative—energetic and ideal. I can be friends with Aleko in Doris. But that he should assume long trousers and a tie, that he should part his hair and put a hat on it, that he should wrangle over lire with Jews or touch that silly prurience which passes in the world for love—I wince at the invading thought. At the Customs House of civilisation we part ways. Aleko surrenders his heritage almost entire (for there is, one might say, a prohibitive tariff on all but venal beauty); while I, equipped by birth and education for a high complexity of life, pass through to the fuller exploitation of mine.

That, you must admit, was a worthy metaphor. But don't suggest that the resonance of my own verbosity is carrying me away, because it isn't. If I had written merely: "I found my work here rather dull at first and was always glad to escape from it; now, since I have known Aleko, it has become so absorbing that I am inclined to

neglect my wife" (which I admit is what my letter boils down to), you would simply have said "Commonplace devil!" and dismissed me from your mind. And you would have been wrong. If at one time, with the memory of my school-days' hero-worships and romantic friendships before me, I judged my situation to be commonplace, I have long since ceased to do so. Neither I nor Aleko nor Eve nor the place nor this composite impact of emotion is commonplace. That is why I look for metaphors and symbols.

And even these, I suppose, are deceptively rational on paper. Love of any kind is apt to resent analyses, and mine has turned out to be pretty much of the head-over-heels variety. I have all the classical symptoms of the disease and others of my own. I'm become fantastically jealous. I can scarcely bear to hear his name mentioned now, even if it is only the matron asking me about a lost shirt of his. As for listening, as I sometimes have to, to some frog-faced and libidinous woman describing him as "a beautiful boy," I feel I could rise forthwith from my seat and cleave her to the pelvis. The fact is, he is popular and I grudge it him. I become half-persuaded that everybody is concealing an interest like mine.

It is probably fortunate that behind an extreme of emotional instability I have a reasoning apparatus that works coldly and even cynically.

It keeps my worst follies from escaping into my overt behaviour. It is a brake against passion and a probe for insincerity. It reminds me of my inconstancy and Aleko's faults. At the same time I see it as one of the justifications of our friendship that Aleko does not show me his faults. He has, for example, the reputation of being disputatious. Eve says that she cannot make the most obvious statement at table without his contradicting her. But he never reveals this trait to me. To me he brings questions and a degree of diffidence which nobody else in the school would credit him with: the pride of self-assurance that remains seems to me an entirely rare and admirable thing.

But I must stop, I positively must stop. The rhythm of my paragraphy demands that I proceed for a sentence or two, or you would be shot through the epistolary windscreen; so I will add that I am for ever marvelling at the purposeless poignancies of youth, that anyway youth is gone before we can so much as catch our breath at it, and that for the sake of our sanity nothing in life must be allowed to seem too serious. The music dies on the air. It had a disturbing loveliness, but let's pretend there's no cause to weep.

I commend myself to your love.

MARTIN.

SECOND LETTER FROM ALEKO

June 28th, 1932.

DEAR MR. GRAHAME,

I received your letter of 23rd June which arrived here yesterday.

I was very pleased that you took some good photographs and that the masterpiece was of me. But why did you not send it to me as you promised? I thought that you would be very glad to give it to me.

But perhaps you do not mind very much about what you promise to me. I am not surprised if you have almost forgotten that you had a friend called Aleko, now that he has gone away. I think that you have very many friends who like you, and that if you have somebody with whom you can swim and play tennis, it does not matter who. I understand that I am not very clever, and Mrs. Grahame said once that you do not really care about people who are not clever.

I am doing nothing now except to eat and to sleep, and that does not make me very happy. Philip tells me that I am a stupid not to want to be at home, but he is stupid because I do not want to be neither anywhere else. I do not know

what to do all the time. Sometimes I go out on my bicycle but I do not like it very much.

You must have been playing badly if you lost to Voulgaris in three sets. I expect that you are playing tennis the most of the time and that you are not very much missing

Your

ALEKO.

P.S.—Write soon an answer.

SECOND LETTER TO ALEKO

July 8th, 1932.

MY VERY DEAR ALEKO,

Cheer up and don't talk nonsense. The reason why I didn't send you my photographs was because I had already sent them back to Athens for copies and enlargements. Of course you shall have them. And what do you mean by saying that I have forgotten you? If I really told you how much I had missed you, you wouldn't believe me. You wouldn't, Aleko, believe me. Also, if it gives you any pleasure to hear it, there is absolutely nobody now for me to play tennis with, and for three days at least, I have been down quite alone to swim.

So don't write me any more letters like the last. Write instead about Life in Catania—tell me, are you staying there all the holiday or are you going away? Write about shoe-polish, stomach-ache, Mussolini, buffaloes, or the best way of annoying Philip. Only live well and be happy. I feel it isn't safe for you to get so downhearted when you are so close to Etna: there was once a pre-Socratic philosopher who jumped down the crater.

Here is a special story for you (copyright reserved). I said to Mrs. Grahame, coming back from dinner at the hotel last night: "I wonder what Aleko is doing now." She said: "Arguing with the Catanians about the quality of the spaghetti."

Your letter, you must know, was eight days on the way, and I sincerely hope mine won't take as long.

Yours ever,

MARTIN GRAHAME.

THIRD LETTER FROM ALEKO

19 *July*, 1932.

DEAR MR. GRAHAME,

I received your last letter of the eighth July, that arrived here yesterday.

To hear that neither you are passing a very nice holiday made me very sorry. But do not mind very much, there are only two months more, and after that we are going to be another time together. You tell me that you have nobody with whom to play tennis or swim. Why ? Cannot you play tennis with the Head, and cannot you swim with Mrs. Grahame ?

I am glad about the photographs and I am sending you some (very bad) ones of mine, which are of my house and family, so that you can judge about life in Catania for yourself. I will take care not to step inside Etna.

About what Mrs. Grahame thought I was doing she was wrong, because I never spoke with Catanians about spaghetti. Meanwhile I eat it eight days out of the seven.

I am going to stay in Catania all the holidays and I have decided that I am not going to get bored with it. Because I had the good fortune to find some *other* good friends with whom to

play (I was remembering just then one good friend which I left somewhere in Greece). I play with them a game that is something like tennis. Yesterday our Greek team played a match against the Italian one. We won 6—2, 2—6, 4—1 (they went away because they were afraid). Hear now what also happened yesterday to your poor friend during the afternoon. The sea was quite rough and a good wind for a sail was blowing. So with two friends of mine, we went and took a small boat with a big sail. All went very well till 150 metres from the shore, then suddenly, without knowing how, I found myself under the boat. Immediately about ten boats came up and took us to shore. And so ended my first sea tragedy.

I wish both you and Mrs. Grahame a very good time.

Your

ALESSANDRO PETSALIS.

THIRD LETTER TO ALEKO

July 27th, 1932.

DEAR ALEKO,

I was horrified to hear that my last letter took ten days to reach you. I am writing this in a great hurry so that it may catch Friday's aeroplane.

I have to tell you that I am leaving Greece for a time. So it isn't much use you writing to me for a week or two. I am going in to Athens to-morrow.

Thanks for the photographs. I was particularly thrilled by the one of the blank white wall (or is it a Sicilian skyscape ?) Ah ! wait till you see mine !

M. G.

I OBSERVE with relief that my suitcase scales considerably less than the regulation fifteen kilos.

"Your passport, sir? You are going to Brindisi?"

I say yes.

"You must show a permit from the Bank of Greece for your money. You must declare all your money."

I contrive to produce for inspection six drachmae, six lire and a two-shilling piece. It is tacitly agreed that the permit would have been an impertinence.

"Your camera must be sealed and handed to the pilot."

Here I protest. Anybody can take aerial photographs over Greece. I have inquired.

"Not on this route, sir. Between Athens and Patras you are flying over the naval base at Salamis. Between Patras and Brindisi you are submitting to Italian control." The camera is impounded.

I walk out on to the quay. At twenty yards distance the plane rocks to a choppy sea, the long grey wings spread inertly, the nose, meeting the little wave thrusts, sobs and chokes like a

punt's nose pushing up-stream. I stare with a sort of incredulity. This August wind, this dynamic shape of steel—what is it all about? I am going to Brindisi. In four hours I shall be there. But what for? I do not know.

Eve had said:

"Shall you go to Sicily?"

"No," I had replied, stamping on the wish. Once, casually, Aleko had suggested it, but never since we had been friends. I could not dream of going without his welcome, without, indeed, his imperious invitation. I was too completely a foreigner.

"I wouldn't if I were you," Eve went on, in exasperating pursuance of her own thoughts. "Aleko would misunderstand."

"It's much too far away," I had said shortly.

A party of six or seven men, all apparently talking at once, bears down upon me from the customs house, and I assume that I am to have considerable company for the journey. But no, there is a mêlée of valedictory embrace, and finally a single fellow-passenger detaches himself and is rowed out with me to the plane. He is an Italian, well-fed, smiling, and (though still panting slightly from the paroxysm of farewell) even to me not incommunicative. I disclaim French nationality. I disclaim German nationality. But it is no use, he arrives at the inevitable discovery.

"Very good! Very good! You are a student? No? You make interesting holidays in Greece, eh? Ah! you live here. It is the first time you travel by aeroplane? No? You fly last year from London to Athens! Very good! Very good! Yes, I fly yesterday from Constantinople. You like flying? You have bad effects in the stomach, eh?"

But fate deprives him of an answer to this last question because the double engine speaks and I stop my ears up. We move forward, throwing spray. We gather speed: the engine note has become a frenzy of sound and the floor throbs like a drum against the corrugations of the sea. It is as though we are rushing to some blind destruction. But we lift clear at last, the spray streams off the panes. The Attic coast rides away northward and the crags of Salamis flatten under our wing.

I put my watch back two hours and make it ten past eight. At Brindisi I shall be staying at the hotel from which Aleko wrote me his first letter; in fact, I have an introduction to the manager encouraging him to cash my cheque. I shall lunch there—perhaps Aleko did. I shall go out and take photographs. I shall sleep . . .

The plane swings obliquely across the Canal, whose edges are clean and sheer again after their latest landslide. The high wind makes

air-pockets, and to my infinite distress my fellow-voyager is sick into his handkerchief. I pass him one of the paper bags supplied by the company.

In a single broad sweep we take the sea again within the breakwater at Patras. We refuel and strike across the Arta marshes. I pass more paper bags. Out of a blue spatter of islets there emerges a more generous outline, the sun-hazed western cliffs of Corfu. Brindisi of course will be intolerable at this time of year. Somewhere, somehow, I shall have to escape from it. If perhaps I wrote Aleko a letter from so near, he might ask me to go and see him. But wait! there would be one, two, three days at least before an answer came, and I should eat my heart out and swelter. And suppose the answer said nothing, how could I face it? Or suppose it said "Come" and it seemed as though I had asked for it?

No land is in sight now—we are crossing the Ionian Sea.

In one of Eve's crueller moments, she had asked me:

"Has Aleko ever invited you to his home?"

"Yes," I had replied unsuspecting, remembering that early, casual remark.

"He has asked me too—often. And do you know that his *last* housemaster was just going to stay down there when he died? Aleko's pretty free with his invitations, don't you think?"

"Yes," I had assented miserably. Why hadn't I answered no to the first question? He had never really asked me. He had been as shy to give the invitation as I should have been to accept. Perhaps he had been even a little ashamed. Perhaps some of Eve's teasing at table had gone deeper than his laughter had suggested.

"Why do you eat this stuff, Aleko?" she would say.

"It's good, Mrs. Grahame."

"Good!" she cries. "And what do *you* know about good food, pray?" Eve's idea of a dinner begins with iced fruit cocktail and ends with coffee and liqueurs.

"I have good food at home," retorts Aleko.

"Oh! I bet you do! Father Petsalis and Mother Petsalis and all the little Petsalises all gathering round and gobbling up their plates of macaroni!"

And Aleko laughs with everybody else and gives the impression that he can very well look after himself. If Mrs. Grahame doesn't like macaroni, so much the worse for Mrs. Grahame. But youth, for all that, has shames which the macaroni symbolises. It is ashamed of being held captive at a father's hearth: it is ashamed of a father's civilisation. And if Aleko, presenting in imagination his father to his friend—the Greek merchant, the exporter of fruit, to the poet and

Sybarite, the relatively young and eccentric Englishman—shrinks from incurring responsibility for the adjustment, I don't blame him. It is not a slight. It may even be flattery.

And now, dimly, the Italian coast appears, and a white speck against it is revealed as a southward-flying aeroplane with the high sun on its wings. The hour verges on noon. I can see Brindisi now—a distant, greyish streak at the sea's edge. It must be Brindisi. I am glad, this noise is so unremittingly intense.

I would give a lot to know Aleko's picture of me. It would shock my vanity, no doubt. I see myself as at the gateway of a career, appearing occasionally in big headlines, married to a brilliant and beautiful wife; but I'm sure it doesn't matter twopence to Aleko whether or not Eve loves me or a hundred thousand people gasp at my prose. To Aleko, I am a schoolmaster, one of many; but I talk to him, I play tennis better than his friends. I touch a latent imagination, and so qualify for his special regard. Oh, damn my folly! Why do I bother my head about him at all?

Over the old Italian port we are circling, dropping. I forget my vexation. It is strangely exciting to come upon a new country from the sky, to see roads and railways tilt up and vanish across the panes, to watch the buildings grow, to notice the tiny upturned faces of people. A

hundred yards above the sea one realises one's velocity; one realises too the braking power of the water that brings the machine up dead within a few seconds of contact. We are down, we are still. And I am in Italy.

*

Travelling for pleasure is a fatuous business.

I had, in the first place, a headache. I made the discovery when I got up from my seat and took the cotton-wool out of my ears. My ears were choked and singing.

A blurred gabble of voices came to me down the hatchway as I climbed into the sun. The launch which had drawn alongside us was full of officials all of whom seemed (to my disordered fancy) to bear a resemblance to Napoleon. But behind them and beyond, white and splendid in the roadstead and surrounded by a score of little painted satellite craft, lay one of the monsters of the Imperial Airways fleet; and I asked for my camera.

Gabble, gabble, they told me without doing anything. Did they think it was too much trouble? Surely they knew that if an Englishman descended to gesticulation he wanted something pretty badly. I gesticulated with fervour and persuasiveness. It was no use: the boat ran up to the jetty and I was shown a notice which in the third of four languages informed me that

IT IS FORBIDDEN TO PHOTOGRAPH THE PORT OF BRINDISI

"At least I can *have* my camera, I suppose," I said to a man who wore the Imperial Airways badge.

"If you don't break the seal."

"Can't I take the town of Brindisi from the port?"

"No."

"Well, then, I have a special attachment for taking my own face."

"You can't do it here, sir."

He had a squashed-in nose and may have resented my having come to Italy in somebody else's aeroplane. I said, to enlist sympathy:

"The needs of society must be somewhat complex if I can't let a fiftieth of a second's worth of Brindisi sunshine through a beastly little bit of glass."

But he only gaped and looked stupider; so I gave it up.

Definitely I had a headache: brought on, I guessed, by the noise, lack of food, the exasperations of travel. Already I was trying to repel the crowd of self-styled porters and guides and interpreters who throng the ports and railway centres of the world, unclean, scrounging busybodies who pester in swarms like flies round a wounded animal. Nothing more accentuates the

friendlessness of a foreign country than this rascally importunity at its gates. I pushed clear at last and re-entered the launch. My head pumped as I did so.

They told me at the hotel that the manager was away, and a youngster with a white face and uneasy manner offered me money in the name of the American Express.

"Five pounds," I said, without gratitude, "would be enough for the moment."

"Where do you want to go to?"

"The dining-room."

"You are not," he exclaimed with a concern in his voice which was tinged, I supposed, with pecuniary interest, "staying in Brindisi?"

"I don't know," I replied, and permitted myself the luxury of a dream: "I may go to Sicily."

"There is a train at six-forty-two."

God! that the fellow should know so little about the labyrinths of the human spirit! Hadn't Alcibiades once said "I may go to Sicily" and an empire fallen as a result? Hadn't Plato said "I may go to Sicily" and forty years of revolution followed? There is a train at six-forty-two! So might this little agent have trembled before Cæsar and said: "There is a ferry across the Rubicon, sire, at nightfall—allow me to secure your ticket."

"That's no good," I told him, "I can't possibly

travel to-night." I found myself marvelling that I could so simply conceal the sudden excitement of my thoughts.

"There is no day train."

"Is there a day train for Naples?" I asked, and I perceived that Naples had much the same emotional quality as Birmingham for me.

"No, but perhaps you will decide things later when the office opens and I bring you your money."

I went into the dining-room. The clock stood at one, but I remembered that it was three in Athens and that I hadn't eaten since breakfast, seven hours ago. I promptly refused macaroni. The senseless gabble-gabble all around me plucked at my nerves and I realised that I had no appetite.

Lunch over, it seemed in a queer and literal way that there was nothing else to live for. My head raced and pounded and yet I would not go to rest. I felt driven to seek some occupation. Aimlessly I read the English papers in the lounge (Borotra had beaten Vines in the Davis Cup), I spoke to a polite and venal concierge, I walked the blazing streets with my camera until I could have cried from pain. I crept back to the hotel. And then, if there had been a way, I swear I would have returned to Athens.

But I went instead to lie down. And happening to picture myself standing at night in

one of the lighted squares of Naples, alone, ignored, while the alien crowds passed and repassed me and the traffic beat in strange accord with the pulsing in my head—

I would go to Sicily! The idea swam into my mind steady and complete, as though the decision on it had been taken a long time before on some other plane of consciousness. Wasn't the soil of Sicily free to whoever wished to travel on it? And if I *did* choose to interrupt a journey, if I *did* step off the train at a certain station on the chance of seeing a friend, it was a mere caprice almost proof against rebuff. "I couldn't pass so near your home without looking you up," I should tell Aleko (as though it had at least occurred to me that it was possible to do the contrary). No, I couldn't stay the night, I must push on with my programme. Perhaps on my way back, if he wanted it very much . . .

The little agent was at the door.

"You may book me through to Catania," I said. Amazing, irrevocable simplicity!

"First class?"

"Is there a sleeping-car?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Then I shall go third."

"Third?"

He put the question in a tone which suggested either that he had lost the thread of the argument or that he considered the occasion

demanded a special train. Alas! if the communication of my risen spirits depended on the size of his commission, it was evident that I must leave him disappointed.

"Seeing I've got to spend a damned uncomfortable night in any case," I gently explained, "I don't want to pay any more for it than I can help."

And the voucher was filled in.

It was a time for action. I put on my worst available clothes, ordered tea and took a stiff dose of a self-extolling saline. I paid my bill, I distributed largesse. And then, inadvertently leaving a hat, two elegant ties and the bottle containing the analgesic as hostages behind me, I was rattled off in a disintegrating taxi to the station. The train was in.

*

It is a perpetual marvel to me that things happen. The human mind, which plays at ease amongst abstractions and memories, boggles at the very actuality of change and becoming; much as the eye of a traveller may pause for long minutes on a single tree on the skyline and yet be hopelessly bewildered in trying to focus on the succession of objects which are flashing past a few feet away. So I, watching the sun dip behind Italian vineyards, struggled with the

thought that I had stood in Athens that morning and would be treading the shores of Sicily the next. And a nameless exaltation ran in my veins. It was hard to believe that I was the same person, that some apotheosis had not overtaken me.

I did not think yet of Aleko. There was time and to spare for that. I wanted to sip, as it were, at my beatitude before taking its full flavour. I began to remember how shrunken seas and mountains had looked under the great, brooding wing of the seaplane, and then, unwittingly, I remembered a summer evening at school, one Sunday, when I had taken Theocritus to read on the cricket field and the smell of the new-mown grass had mixed with visions of cloudless love and sweet Sicilian pastures dropping to the Mediterranean of my dreams. And the tide of my exaltation ran still more strongly, like a secret energy storing itself inside me.

I surveyed myself and my surroundings with a sort of gleeful disembodiment. The muscles round my eyes dragged and I felt the sleeping devil in my head, but I myself was above fatigue. My glance ran down the arm which propped me against the corridor window: I noted with a detached precision the frayed sleeve of the old Rugger blazer I was wearing, the watch at my wrist which told me that the sun had set two hours before his time, the fingers curved over

the sash and already grimy from the driving grit. From all these I was entirely remote. Outside the train, the night rushed by me. Inside, the air hung like a hot fog and men had their jackets off.

Something after eight the lights of Taranto came up to us, reflected in water. I took a firmer hold on reality and transported myself and my belongings across the platform to another train, diffidently handling lire. I consulted the memorandum with which my little agent had equipped me:

Messina,	arr.	8.50 a.m.
	dep.	9.12 a.m.
Catania,	arr.	12.10 p.m.

read the remaining items on it. Even that scrap of paper had taken on the quality of fantasy which had invested all my doings. It seemed at the same time momentous and unreal. I stared at it as the signatory of a treaty might stare at the scribble with which he has just ended a war. I crisped it, like a banknote, in my fingers to assure myself of its genuineness. By noon the next day, it promised, I was to arrive in Catania. Clearly I owed it to the distinction of the event to try and get some rest. Yes, I should rest. I waited to show my ticket once, and then, with an immorality probably undreamed of in a

country where every third man apes the Napoleon, I went off to look for a comfortable place to sleep.

I found this to my satisfaction in a second-class compartment of which a youngish lawyer-like person was the only occupant. I rolled up my blazer, faced it with a silk pyjama jacket and laid my head upon it. Immediately my senses seemed to swim away from me. I suppose I was very tired. But it was not sleep, it was a state more pleasurable than sleep for it was full of Aleko, Aleko on the tennis courts laughing and laughing as our score crept higher, Aleko walking jauntily from the boathouse with an oar on his shoulder and the sun striking a sheen from his skin, Aleko in the pine woods with me, rehearsing Ferdinand in a pair of football shorts which left his legs bare to the scratches of the brambles. "No, not like that, Aleko. Say it with a sudden pride—'Myself am Naples!' Draw yourself up. You are a king."

I am obscurely conscious that the fellow opposite me is pulling the blinds down. Click! the light is out. Surely he is not taking his shoes off! He is, and oh! horror beyond enduring! he has planted his feet right under the cushion of my seat. I must get up, I must go out, in protest. But the impulse is illusory: not a muscle of my body has stirred. I would

bear almost anything now rather than move myself. Let me return to the sweetness of my thoughts.

To-morrow Aleko and I are to meet again. I see myself walking unannounced into the room. I catch his quick, first smile, the delight of his surprise. We give our hands and forget to unclasp them and stand so at the open window, looking out over Sicily and breathing the clear air together. The light is in his eyes and hair. The others who are near him, his family, grow vague, vague and melt into the shadows of the background. We are standing alone.

The scene changes. We are walking on a lonely shingle beach. I say over and over again to Aleko: "Italians are noisier than Englishmen, therefore Italian aeroplanes are noisier than English ones." No, no, that is wrong somewhere. I rack my brains for the suppressed minor premiss.

And now we are actually flying, myself near the front window with the controls under my hand, and Aleko beside me. Fortunately we are alone in the plane, there is no one being sick behind us. But the noise becomes overpowering —clank, clank, clank, clank, clank. . . .

It is the train crossing its sleepers, beating into the clammy night. Damn that unnatural blighter with his feet up under my nose!

Aleko, Aleko. . . . It is strange how hard, how

hard it is to keep one's mind from wandering, even for a person whom one loves. . . .

*

I started and woke. A thin piping of daylight ran round the edges of all the blinds. I was amazed that I had slept so long. The atmosphere in the compartment was hot and fetid and my travelling companion was still asleep; so I stepped out into the corridor and saw green, rising hills and little villages very white and still in the dawn. I moved to the end of the carriage where a window was open on the other side of the train. And there, almost at my feet, lay the palest of summer seas, tender like silk and scarcely even lapping on the sand. The air brushed like cool silk across my face.

I took in the morning in deep breaths. The night's elation came back to me with the memory of it, but more terrestrially. I was no longer abstracted from my surroundings. I knew that I belonged to my body now and to the grinding of the train and to the fisher-folk grouped silently on the sea-shore. It was like drinking joy with my five senses. (O Aleko, what *are* you going to say to me?)

The sun struck suddenly along the water, and I felt my hands grey with travel and my chin rough in my palms. It was clear that I should

bring these things into accord with the freshness within and about me. I pushed open the lavatory door, and a welcome and entirely unexpected smell of disinfectant reminded me that I had been in Greece for a year. Appropriately and resolutely the portrait of Mussolini stared at the portrait of Victor Emmanuel across the water closet. I paid tribute. I shaved. And returning to my window, I saw a dim bulk of hills slanting into the sea southward and knew that it was Sicily, the land of Theocritus, Aleko's home.

I believe I can record a sense of physical shock, followed swiftly by an effort at mental orientation; but my first analysable reaction was an impulse to run away. It came upon me so urgently and absorbingly that I found my nails biting into my palms with the shame which my imagination pictured for me if I persisted in my course. It was as though I could not so much as show myself to Aleko without the whole of my doting folly becoming apparent. Inevitably I was exposing myself to his contempt. I could almost feel him mocking, and the happiness I had just seen in front of me took on the cruelty of the mirage.

I stared at the shining, tideless sea and reasoned with myself. Can't you, I asked myself, trust your simple instincts? Will he be glad to see you or not? Can you possibly think that you

have less evidence of his affection than he of yours? Won't your nonchalance entirely deceive him, won't he search anxiously for your reassurances, won't your every concession seem a condescension to him? Don't you know in your heart that you will be master of this situation and dictate its ebb and flow? My courage warmed again as I fled from the extremes of humility to the extremes of pride.

And now we ran between white houses into the station at Reggio. I was approaching the last stage of my journey. We embarked on the ferry. Across the strait the faint outlines of Messina broadened and defined themselves to meet us. I stepped ashore—how easy, how extraordinary! A clock struck nine.

I was a little travel-worn and I bought a supplementary ticket for my Sicilian train. The sun was already hot. I stood at the window watching great cliffs climb steeply out of the track, while the engine spat coal-dust into my face. We drove down avenues of plump cactus-plant and the sea glinted to the left. Two breathless, rocky bays passed us. At Taormina we stopped to take up water.

The cliffs fell away at last and there were little rolling slopes of coarse grass where the shepherds of Theocritus might have grazed their flocks. We bore away from the sea and entered lemon-groves, green like a northern river. Etna, blunt

and bare, crept up the sky. I went finally and sat down, not because I felt tired of watching, but because I fancied a change of occupation would make the time go more quickly. Involuntarily my eyes closed themselves.

Catania within an hour. I found myself planning the silly details of my arrival, the hand in which I should hold my suit-case, the directions I should give to the cabman. I would write a note to Aleko as soon as I got to the hotel. He would come to see me, of course, but meanwhile I should have had a bath and changed my clothes and had something to eat. I should wait in my room for him, writing letters or something if he were very long, to keep my mind on ordinary things. But he would come, of course, immediately he knew. I should hear him running up the stairs, I should half turn to face the opening door, tilting my chair back. . . .

It was oozily hot in the carriage, and heat and fatigue gave me an abominable feeling of being dirty. I forced open my eyes again. Three-quarters of an hour more. A bath and a change. . . .

The sea was far away to the left now and we were climbing. I wondered how long it would be before I should see Catania from the train. I pictured a little whitewashed town falling to the seashore. I wondered if I should stay there,

yes, surely I should stay there, Aleko would never consent to letting me go.

Twice my heart jumped as we turned a bend and saw houses ahead. We were practically due now. I washed my hands and got my bag down.

Then I saw chimneys. Left and below, between the pale sea and an ocean of lemons and vines, was a city, and along the water's edge a crowd of smoke-stacks, and the masts of shipping, like thin wires, in the harbour. I was bitterly disappointed. I felt as if this bigness and grime warred somehow against my purpose. I had not known Aleko in these surroundings before.

But I was there, there. The suburbs went past me and level-crossings lurched under my feet. A train will not pause merely to allow the adjustment of one's thoughts. We drew in. Three different hotel buses were waiting for me outside the station.

As soon as I got to my hotel, I took a sheet of notepaper to write to Aleko. I wrote simply "How are you?" in the middle of the sheet, without signing my name, and addressed the envelope and sent out the messenger with it. I took some lunch, I went up to my room, I lay for a moment on the bed and I fell unwittingly and immediately asleep.

The telephone rang at my ear. I leapt up, snatched at the receiver, feeling I could scarcely trust myself to speak. But—

"The messenger, sir, has brought your letter back."

God damn these unspeakably ineffectual swine!

"Brought my letter back?"

"Yes, sir, the name of Mr. Alexander Petsalis was unknown at the address which you gave."

"Did he find the address?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you absolutely certain he found the address?"

"Yes, sir. He inquired also at the houses near by. It is a very poor quarter of the town. Are you sure you didn't make a mistake in the address?"

How sure I was! But this was absurd.

"Do you mind coming up to my room for a minute?"

"Very good, sir."

I looked at my watch: it was close on four. I felt oddly after my sleep, like someone who is beginning to be affected by wine. And I cursed the whole hotel, I cursed its inmates and staff categorically. Three precious hours had been wasted.

The concierge arrived, with the messenger in tow behind him. I was handed back my envelope.

"Look here," I said, "I've been writing to this address for a couple of months. It's impossible that I should have it wrong."

The messenger was clearly of the opinion that he had done everything that lay within the power of man.

"Who is the gentleman you want?" asked the concierge.

Leading question! I looked up to answer, and as I did so, the vision came back of Aleko running up the stairs and me tilting my chair round to greet him, and I knew that yet another of my dreams had gone awry.

"He is," I said, "sixteen years old and goes to school in Greece, and I am his English master. Go and look up Petsalis in the telephone directory and ring up everybody of that name in Catania."

I waited, cold with anxiety lest this too should fail and I be left utterly to my own resources; but in five minutes an answer came.

"We have found your friend, sir, and the car is coming for you at five o'clock."

"At five o'clock."

"Yes, sir."

A car is coming. I threw off my clothes and went into the bathroom, immeasurably shy of the thought that I should be at the mercy of this unknown hospitality. My letter lay unopened on the night-table. Already circumstances had slipped beyond my control.

I went back to bed and tried to sleep again, but I could not keep myself from glancing at my watch, and as five approached, I began to

listen nervously for the telephone. Five passed, and half-past five. A second dread came over me as I imagined myself spending that night without having seen what I had come so far to see, and my pride hurt mortally into the bargain. I was pitifully overtired for further disappointment.

Just at six, with the effect of crisis, the whirr of the bell came. I dressed and hurried down. Plumb in the middle of the road (thanks to the original disposition of Catania's tram-track) the chauffeur held open the door of a large and empty car. The descending sun drove down long shadows from the buildings and enveloped me in a tangible heat. We seemed to go a long way. We crossed a cobbled bridge whose sunken, industrial grime recalled the manufacturing towns of Yorkshire. The marquees and bathing structures of a pleasure beach began to evince themselves on the left. We swung round a palisaded shrubbery and beached on sand. Aleko in bathing costume was standing a few yards off.

I fumbled for the door handle, my eyes elsewhere. I don't remember getting out of the car. But I do remember how I stood in fine sand and took Aleko's hand, and how, for quite a ridiculous length of time, neither of us could say a word.

August 3rd.

. . . Though it must be August 4th that I am writing on, because it is obviously long past midnight. Incredible and delicious day! My lunacy has apparently been so fantastic that nobody has noticed it. To jump a couple of seas and descend without warning upon an unknown and conventional Sicilian household is to invite at least a period of what might be called wary inspection. But no! I was received like a king, and even Philip was cordial.

But why didn't you tell us you were coming? demanded Father in effect, once we had decided that Greek was a more suitable vehicle for communication than French or German—and we would have killed the fatted vitello! I explained to him that I had not even known myself. I told the outlines of my story. I described to the general admiration my crossing from Greece by aeroplane. George, the youngest son, wanted details about speed and horse-power. Mama, plain, kindly, and speaking no known language, sat mutely smiling as the narrative was interpreted and probably embellished for her by the boys. There was a further silent witness in

Paolo, the chauffeur, who was introduced to me later, not formally but with a hushed pointing of fingers, as a hero who had already suffered four convictions for dangerous driving, but whose personality was nevertheless so sympathetic to them all that it was impossible even to think of dismissing him from their service. Paolo had a mild, sad face, as though the craving for speed were a thing which came upon him from without.

I began to hear of my own reputation: how Aleko talked of me incessantly; how he waited for my letters and refused to let anyone else see them; how he had moped about when he had first arrived home; how he was expecting certain photographs from me and wondering why they never came. Aleko of course was looking profoundly uncomfortable during this recital. I gave him a grin, as if to assure him that one couldn't help fathers carrying on like this, though inwardly at that moment I was grateful that they did.

. . . Did it strike one? This blank hotel bedroom is merely for a few hours' sleep; the car is coming for me at half-past eight. I am in a state of serene contentment. I confess I had been half afraid that Aleko would disappoint me somehow, my longing for him had grown so unreasonably intense. But the moment I was with him my whole happiness returned, though

for the life of me I couldn't find anything sensible to say. We stood there tongue-tied on that sand until I felt that people would think us mad if we stood like that any longer.

"Where's Philip?" I said at length. I could scarcely have produced a more inept remark.

"Oh, Mr. Grahame!"

We might equally well have laughed or cried!

"For God's sake," I said, "don't call me Mr. Grahame now."

"What can I call you then? I can't call you Martin."

"Yes, you can. Call me anything you like."

"I've got into the habit," said Aleko, prevaricating. "Do you want to see Philip?"

We walked behind a barrage of beach cabins, with the sand washing over the turn-ups of my white trousers. Aleko opened the note I had written him and laughed. When I told him of my order to ring up every Petsalis in Catania he laughed still more. The address I had put was their town address, he said, and nobody was living there at the moment. They were living in their summer house now, outside the city, and they spent the whole day in their cabin on the plage. It was pure luck that his father had got even my telephone message.

I asked Aleko to dine with me at the hotel. He said he must have his father's permission, but I fancy they were rather glad to let him go, no adequate preparations being possible for entertaining me instead. We dined on the roof-garden, six storeys above Catania's main street, and Aleko, rather proudly, had the ordering of the food. There was little we needed to talk about, though I could not get tired of hearing him say that he was glad and surprised to see me.

"And to think, Aleko, that only yesterday I was in Athens!"

"Does Mrs. Grahame know where you are?"

"Not yet."

"You had better not tell her. Can't you say that you went to Naples?"

I laughed, he was so concerned and sober about it. I went down to my room and brought him the photographs. We looked at them together as we were waiting for the car. I promised to inscribe them for him.

"What shall we do to-morrow?" he said. The question was as historic for us as the Birra Messina on the table. A waiter came up to tell us of the arrival of the car.

"This," said Aleko, "is our best car—the Chrysler." Father and Philip and George were awaiting us. It was decided that we should

go in search of coolness in one of the upland villages.

"Paolo's record for this journey is ten minutes forty seconds," whispered Aleko, "but don't tell anybody."

The heavy summer night swept past us. Incident: Aleko put his arm round me, as one does in a car, and Philip knocked it away. I wonder, most consumedly, why. Father asked us what our programme for the next day was. There was an immediate and furious debate, in which the very existence of Syracuse and Palermo and Taormina might have been at stake.

. . . I ought to be perceptibly falling asleep, but it seems I am not.

August 4th.

I have told him that I am going home. I am a fool, a fool, a fool. The occasion was so extravagantly trivial. I asked him, as we were driving back from Taormina, if he would come to dinner with me to-night, and he replied no, that it was "not worth while." Not worth while! I shrugged my shoulders and said "All right," as though it didn't matter a bean to me one way or the other. But when they asked me to stay to dinner there, I said that I was tired and would prefer to dine at the hotel. And I told Aleko that I should leave Catania Saturday—the day after to-morrow.

Did he understand why? No. There is the folly of it. Not worth while! It hurts me, and because I am too proud to run the risk of his confirming it, I am too proud to give him the chance to retract. Three words, and as soon as they are uttered I do my utmost to dismiss them from his thoughts, while for long hours they rankle in mine. I am going back. I don't tell him he hurt me. I try to hurt him in return. And if he also is too proud to show it . . . ? The sickening folly of it! I told him I was going back and I know, I know I shan't be able to change my mind. If I haven't hurt him it's better that I should go, and if I have he will never let me find it out.

Not worth while—what did he mean, why should he say that? A thousand reasons. A slip in a foreign language. He may have known that I was going to be invited to his home. It may have been difficult to ask his father's permission to go out again to dinner. Philip may have been unpleasant. Ah! Philip! Philip is an enigmatical factor in the situation.

I am half remorse and half bitter anger for that twist in my character which makes me cheat myself of a pleasure because it is not handed to me on a silver plate. I *see* the falseness of my pride and yet I cannot divest myself of it. Should I, in Aleko's place, have said to him "Stay, because I love you"? Not for the world.

One would be so shamed and defenceless against the reply. Did I expect Aleko to say it? No. And yet I am going away and both of us are to suffer.

I am so sure now that my decision was absurd. It sprang out of Aleko's words and Aleko's words sprang out of nothing. We were on the sands this morning till the sand got too hot for our feet, and Aleko talked to me very eagerly about climbing Etna as though it would be weeks before we were again parted. He had me under his especial protection. He gave me, in spite of competition, his own bathing costume to wear. He took me miles along the plage to find diving. I was *his* guest, it seemed, and he was glad of it.

His body was literally golden, like the sand.

Lunch was under the cabin-awning—hors d'œuvre, sausages with beer, and fruit—and Aleko helped me in laughing at the countless apologies for it. In the afternoon I was taken by the boys to Taormina, and Aleko sat by me in the car and Aleko carried my camera-case and Aleko advised me on the stop I was to use and saw that the strip was duly torn from the film-pack. But it was "not worth while" to come to dinner with me. Why the hell not?

At all events I am earlier to bed to-night. And seeing the bedroom has mosquitoes, I might

perhaps be glad that it is only for one more night. I wonder about Eve, a thousand miles away, whether she is sleeping yet, alone. Her bedroom is all hung with little silks, it is sweet with powder-smells and scents I bought her in Paris. How lovely she is when her hair spreads out on the pillow—like a film-star. She teases me with her laughter. She has a dear tenderness when I am low and disconsolate and forsaken. She would put her arms round me now and whisper baby-things to me until I was asleep.

I don't know what she will say when I go back. I wish I was a different kind of creature.

August 5th.

Two minutes to write in—or more, according to lateness of car. In spite of strong central government in the country, the car is again late. 8.20 p.m. Supposed to be going to dinner with the family, it being my last night.

General but polite surprise that I was leaving Catania so soon, not because I was leaving Catania but because I proposed to go straight back to where I had come from. Took a certain pleasure in insisting on that. Hoped at heart that it would sting Aleko and create a sufficiently meteoric impression on his people.

This morning: rushed off round Etna. Some dispute as between Etna and Syracuse, but the

boys wanted Etna. Highly entertaining. If ever I suggested possibility of a photograph in any place, simultaneous yell of "Aspetta, Paolo!" the unhappy Paolo would jam on his brakes as though an abyss had opened out in front of him, car would jerk and jib, and we be thrown out on to the road, generally to find that I had committed an error of judgment. These far-off, dusty valleys of lemon and the bare cone of Etna in full sun are poor stuff for the photographer.

Went to Cyclops' rocks this afternoon and punctured a tyre on way back. Great excitement. Paolo couldn't work the tyre off the rim . . . road deserted . . . getting dark . . . tyre in middle of highway and everybody shoving everybody else out of the way in order to get a finger into the job.

"Aspetta, aspetta!"

"Aspetta, cretino!"

"You are an ass, Aleko," I said. "You haven't the faintest idea what you're doing."

Rare moment of self-realisation in Philip.

"We're like a scene from Wodehouse," he said, disentangling himself from a fight over a spanner. George, meanwhile, employs foot-pump to spray dust up our trouser-legs. Interlude, in which George is dealt with.

8.40. Damned car has probably blown up in the roadway. I spend my life waiting for cars.

Fortunately dinner on the Mediterranean never starts before ten.

What strikes me as so odd is the way Aleko and I have been able to go through the day talking and eating and laughing as though nothing whatever had happened. I suppose we shan't even begin to find out what is in each other's minds until we are alone together, and we shan't be alone together to-night. Perhaps to-morrow—my boat doesn't leave until the evening. Somehow I don't seem to care very much now.

I CONFESS that I rewrite the remainder of my diary in the light of after events. I do not want to misrepresent the facts; I want to put them into perspective. I want to set them out so that they shall at least be capable of bearing that interpretation of them which has since become inevitable to me. So much passed me by at the time.

Aleko met the car that evening, alone. If I had planned to maintain a certain aloofness in his presence, it melted away under the candour of his voice as helplessly as snow in summer. He took me into the garden. There was a table spread in front of the porch of the house and the view was over the whole of Catania. At the bottom of the garden the paths were all roofed over by climbing plants against the sun, and in these little secret alleys we walked round and round until the dinner should be ready.

I had, as we walked, the double persuasion that this seclusion was very precious and that the next moment it was going to be broken into. And I was at a loss how to use it. I wanted to talk as intimately as I dared and yet guard against

the jar of interruption. I did not even know what to say; I had not expected that we should be left to ourselves so completely.

"What time does your father get back, Aleko?"

"O, about six."

"Do you always dine late?"

Surely it was a waste of time to be saying the things that could have been said in the company of a hundred. The beauty of the night and of the boy at my side stung me out of futility.

"Come to England, Aleko."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

He laughed.

"To-morrow? Impossible."

"Why not, Aleko? I decided to come to Sicily in less time than that."

"Ah! but you are free. My father wouldn't let me."

"Do you always do what your father tells you? I never did."

"I have to."

"I wonder what you would think of England, Aleko. You've never seen the evening sun on English meadows. You've never seen rain like mist, falling and falling and falling and falling. You've never played football in it and gone down into sweet mud to stop a forward rush. O, Aleko!"

"I think I should like it."

"Perhaps you would, Aleko, if it makes me homesick to think of it. And yet in the days I was there, if you had asked me what was my dream of perfection, I should have said a night like this, somewhere in the South, with no wind and a lot of stars and the sea like a lake always and I think——"

"What?"

"O, nothing—someone to love."

"Have you had many lovers?"

"No," I replied, and the conversation came to an abrupt stop. I knew exactly why it came to a stop. It was because I did not know how to make him understand. He was welcome to the whole of my love history if I could have found the terms to tell it in. But I wanted him to listen and sympathise, I wanted the authentic sympathy of someone who shared my strange ideals and follies. And I wanted it all to lead somehow to talk of himself and me, who loved in this strangely tacit way, as though the naming of it would snap the taut and fragile relation which was spun between us. I am not an Erotic Idealist, and physical love can be a sweet and satisfying thing, but I seemed in that moment to be touching a more perilous ecstasy and I was desperately afraid to disperse it. And so I said nothing. Once and twice after my answer we made the round of the trellised paths in

silence, and then George came to call us to dinner.

*

The meal was wholesome and provincial. Aleko had bare elbows on the table and chattered away in Greek, and the porch lamp, which threw a flat, pallid light into the surrounding foliage, had little effect on the warm richness of his skin. I noticed that he sometimes looked and smiled at me when he was talking to other people.

For my part, I spilt a glass of water—not, happily, a tragedy of deportment in a latitude where the whole of Nature conspires to absorb the offending element—and answered questions about my sisters, my schooldays and my marriage. Was my marriage, seeing that I was so young, against the wishes of my parents? Was it not! However, for my scorn of family authority, as well as for my habit of travelling in aeroplanes, I atoned a little later by telling Aleko's father that Aleko and I, being athletes, disapproved of smoking. He liked that. He thought it an admirable co-application of economy and hygiene. I pleased him again by talking of my earliest longings to visit Sicily.

Dinner over, he in turn talked of Sicily: its climate and people, its courage and hospitality and industriousness. He talked with such fervour and continuity that although for Aleko's sake I

did not grudge my attention, I had eventually to remind him that it was already one o'clock and that I had to be getting back. On the contrary, he replied, I must do him the honour of spending my last night under his roof: there were no means of recalling the car.

"I can walk," I said, fulfilling obligations to etiquette.

"Out of the question, my friend. We shall make up a bed for Philip in George's room, and you shall sleep with Aleko."

Aleko went off to find his mother.

*

"Really, Aleko, this is all most extraordinary."

"Blue or pink?" rejoined Aleko from the cupboard.

"Let me see first—God! you don't expect me to wear either of these horrors!"

"Well, you can have the brown ones I'm wearing if you like, or—some of Philip's."

"O, no! if it's only a question of how hideous I make myself, let me have the pink."

"Why is it all most extraordinary?"

"Why do you never clean your teeth at nights?"

"Because I don't need to."

"Why do you possess pink pyjamas?"

"O, shut up! Why is it all most extraordinary?"

"Well, don't you think it is? I thought I'd as good as said good-bye to you earlier in the evening, and now I am here. Isn't that extraordinary?"

"I shouldn't think so. The point is, are you glad?"

"Why do you ask, Aleko? Don't pretend you don't know the answer."

"I don't—how should I?"

"Well then, I would rather be talking to Aleko and sleeping with Aleko than catching mosquitoes in my hotel bedroom or thinking of Aleko in my bedroom in Greece. Does that satisfy you? I would rather be here at this moment than anywhere else in the world. Look at your Sicilian stars. I could make a poem of them."

"Not a poem, please. I think there are much too many English ones already."

"You are a vandal, Aleko, and a philistine. You don't know what poetry can do. It can take this room now, or the way your hair falls over your forehead, or the way you're taking your shoes off, and keep it alive, before people's senses, for thousands of years. Don't you remember the sonnet of Shakespeare we did, where he promised his friend—But thy eternal summer shall not fade? Perhaps I might be able to give

you an immortality like that. I *will* be able, Aleko. I shall see that people don't easily forget you. I shall publish your new picture in Athens and London and New York, and everybody will wonder who you are."

He gave me a half smile, which I did not understand.

"Why," he said, "do you want to do all these things for me?"

"I don't know," I replied in retreat. "I talk too much."

I got into bed and Aleko turned out the light and followed my example. The two beds were close together and the moon showed up everything in the room, so that I could see quite clearly his partly dropped lashes and the darkness that stole into his eyes.

"Martin?"

"Yes?"

"I love you." He said it in Greek.

It seemed to me like the breath which takes off a flower's petals, the toppling over of an imponderably delicate structure. I found myself studying with an unnatural intentness the nearer folds which my blanket made, while my mind searched anxiously for an answer. There was only one answer, but cowardice and perversity kept me from giving it. I was feeling the pitiful resentment of the weakling who sees his affairs being taken out of his hands. If he had asked

me next "Do you love me?" I was determined on some trivial ground to evade the question. But he waited a little while and then said:

"You kissed me once."

"Yes."

Yes, I did, I did. But I could never do it again. It would mean too much if I did it again.

He went back to Greek, as though to be especially sure of what he was saying.

"Do you never want to do other things as well?"

It was supreme difficulty that I prevented myself from asking him to repeat the question. I heard it with a degree of unpreparedness which masked itself as incredulity. But in reality every word went home. It was a Southern morality confronting mine. And dreading to be hypocrite or sentimentalist or anything else contemptible, I experienced an acute anxiety to face the issue, to speak the truth. Was it possible to speak the truth? Queer how the moonlight broke in waves on the bed. . . .

"No, I don't think so. Besides, Aleko, everybody says it's wrong."

A silence followed of great embarrassment, in which I continued to look along the blanket and felt for the first time somewhat in the position of the woman who, having encouraged you to make advances, turns round suddenly and tells

you that you have "spoilt everything." I had a moment's fury that he should have made me play the woman in the piece. But my reason, coldly and more kind, was insisting that he was exactly the same person whom I had loved ten minutes before. The room was bathed in the same cold light. Surely nothing had changed there or disappeared.

I daresay if I had lifted my eyes I should have found Aleko not so much embarrassed as perplexed. The situation, even if unique, must have seemed relatively simple to him. He could not have guessed at the chaos in my thoughts. Perhaps he expected me to explain: it was beyond my power to do so. At all events we both waited until I felt it growing harder and harder to resume speech. It was Aleko who spoke. He turned a little and sighed and with a touch almost of the defiant:

"At least," he said, "can I come and sleep in your bed?"

"Why yes, Aleko, there's no harm in that."

I moved to make room and he got in beside me.

"Perhaps you'd better lock the door first," I suggested.

"It's locked already."

I could not help it, I burst out laughing; and Aleko, aggrieved, turned his back on me and pretended to go to sleep without saying another word. A tenderness almost paternal came to me,

and I put an arm over his body: my hand fell where I was just sensible of his heart beating. As I tried to realise my felicity the night swam further and further away. A twilight consciousness told me that I would not have changed my place with the rulers of the world.

*

History fails to record the emotions of the great Athenian philosopher when he awoke in circumstances exactly similar to mine. Alcibiades' account of the story would imply that he had no emotions, and I have no doubt at all that Aleko would have said the same of me. I should have been credited with the same remote chastity, the same caustic indifference. If I had escaped the further charge of being actually semi-divine, it would have been because Aleko lacked something of the antique, mythopœic imagination.

I woke, in point of fact, by degrees. There is a subtle and rare delight in disentangling oneself from one's dreams to realise the proximity of a lovely human creature. I put a hand out before opening my eyes to assure myself of his presence and I remember how the pyjama-stuff slid coolly over his skin. He was asleep. I would have been willing to maintain my own state of somnolence indefinitely, but a doubt grew on me as I lay that all was not well with us. No, I

was going away that night. The idea stung sharply. It was too late to change my mind, however: I should have been accepting hospitality on false pretences. I did not even want to change my mind. The little personal drama between Aleko and myself had played itself to a sort of climax and I was too much of an artist to wish to see it prolonged. Or too introspectively blind to have it brought down, for Aleko's sake, to a firmer, more intelligible level.

I was ashamed of the previous night and of my own responsibility for it; yet there is little that is commendable or constructive in the shame which expresses itself by pretending to ignore the conditions out of which it has been produced. I got out of bed under stress of it, but when Aleko woke I was concerned to act as though nothing had happened. I flicked shaving-soap at him and talked about bacon. In morning sunshine the deeps of the spirit are easily forgotten.

"And the cream, Aleko. That thick in the bottle. Fancy that you've never seen milk with real cream."

The essential traffic of life is in trivialities. We grow accomplished at them, till friendships are made and unmade over remarks on the weather and even love-making becomes a banter. Aleko and I went down to breakfast, where eggs

and coffee were served to us, exclusively, I believe, in my honour. Aleko reminded me that I had promised to inscribe his photographs, and choosing the one, I wrote those verses of Theocritus which have been translated:

No man can recapture
Youth, for Youth hath wings upon his shoulders,
And our feet are slow to catch the flying.

I had to translate them myself, for Aleko's knowledge of the language of his fathers was by no means of an encyclopædic nature, and Aleko then translated them into Italian for his mother, adding, one presumes for her information, that they were the work of one Theocritus, "a poet who wrote about Sicily." Philip, standing by, merely commented acidly upon the photograph. "You needn't think, Aleko, that you ever look as beautiful as this."

*

The car which took Aleko and me to the beach called by instructions at the office to pick up Aleko's father.

I knew already from a wealth of filial experience the symptoms exhibited by fathers who suddenly feel it their duty to discuss their son's morals. When Mr. Petsalis developed a furtive anxiety to separate me from Aleko on the pretext of showing me his office, I guessed what was to

come. I even did my best to precipitate the ordeal.

"Do you hope," I said, turning ledgers, "that Philip or Aleko will inherit here?"

"The business is good enough," he replied, and dropped, as I expected, to a confidential tone: "Are you pleased with my boys, Mr. Grahame?"

"I think I must be," I said. "I came a thousand miles to see Aleko."

He thought that over. He wondered, perhaps, whether he would be wrong in taking me literally, for I had smiled in order to put him at his ease. At length, however, he said:

"It is a great blessing for parents whose children are abroad to have a friend and a protector for them like you. We are happy and proud about it. But Aleko, Mr. Grahame. You know him—tell me the truth. Are you satisfied with his . . . character?"

He spoke with an urgency which made both his gratitude and his concern indubitably sincere. It was my turn to stop to think. In the days when I composed my "Housemaster's Remarks" for sixty or so school reports, I had rather plumed myself upon what I regarded as the speed, succinctness and discrimination of my judgments. I found now that of the boy I knew best I had nothing to say. His "character"? He had vices, no doubt; but what would be an enormity

in Watford or Golders Green becomes of strangely little account at a day's distance from civilisation. I . . . satisfied? What right had I to be anything but satisfied? I loved him.

"Absolutely," I said, and hoped to be of comfort.

"You know that he . . . had to leave his first school?" Urgency again and a great effort.

I saw then that parents suffered for their children. Love and suffer is the law: I and this shrewd old lemon-trader were equally subject to it. And in the realisation of a common bond I would have withdrawn my shallow reassurances and told him of my dreams and doubts about Aleko if I could have spoken with persuasion and the finer delicacies of periphrasis. But I was not master of the language I was using. I would not attempt his Aleko's justification in a merely pedestrian Greek.

"I had heard something," I said, purposely halting. I wanted to imply appreciation of his trust.

And then he began to pour out words, so that my mind was divided between finding sympathy for his intense confusion and paying attention to what he said. At the time I was only half aware how nearly his confidences touched me. And yet he was talking about Aleko, he was

telling me things that I had never known. They had been so deeply ashamed, he was saying, that they could not keep Aleko out of doubtful company. Vaguely I was given to understand that there were girls older than he whose influence was not good. It was the virtual incredibility of it all that shocked the father so much. Aleko was his own flesh and blood, so prayerfully, so impeccably brought up. He had been taught about chastity and disease. Everything had been done to interest and occupy him at home. They had never denied him pleasures in reason or discouraged him from making honourable friends. Why should God have seen fit to afflict them in this way ?

My attention, as I have said, was distracted by the necessity of ending a painful scene, and I asked no questions. I feel myself much to blame for this. To this day I do not know the exact nature of those transgressions of Aleko's which were hidden behind his father's turgidity of speech, nor do I know upon what evidence they rested. Had I been listening to an English father of a similar social standing, I should have surmised that Aleko had been spending his money in the dance-halls or something equally trivial. But I have always been led to believe that Mediterranean peoples are more indulgent in their moral judgments. Perhaps Aleko went to prostitutes. It is exasperating to reflect that

these uncertainties could have been resolved for me by a moment's presence of mind.

The answer I found myself making was of the type called *ad hominem*. A boy, I argued, who lived as Aleko did for the open air could not come to much harm. Everybody at school liked him. His record had been as blameless as was desirable for a person of initiative and high spirits. . . . Memory whispered that I was suppressing a number of disagreeable incidents, but I did not care. Let me speak to my brief and at all costs get it over.

"I expect a great deal of him," I concluded, with vague conviction.

I was not asked, as I well might have been, to account for the discrepancy between his behaviour at home and his alleged standard of conduct at school. But it was difficult to feel that I had emerged from the consultation with credit.

*

There is something monstrous in the ease with which we can defame a fellow-creature. Rejoining Aleko in the car, I had a positive sense of guilt, as though I had come near to betraying him. But he showed no signs of knowing what had transpired. That conceivably was his pride: I in his position should have known infallibly.

And I hated that he should have the smallest cause to doubt me or believe that I could ever be found in a confederacy against him.

We made haste to bathe: in waters which washed up grimed and shallow by contrast with the clear rock-pools of Greek islands. We lay and got dry under an extensive beach umbrella. I stretched myself in sand, drowsed with brine and the hot noon, and looked at Aleko. Not prostitutes, I was saying to myself, at least not that: here, at least, is a body which does not need to buy its love. How straight and lovely his legs were, "like two columns" Philip had once said with instinctive poetry, and wearing the bloom which comes from the eternal contact of the sun. Who are your lovers, lovely animal? Are they many and all successful? Are they greedy, sensual, possessive? God! I grudge it them . . . But since (let's console ourselves with Shakespeare) thou wast pricked out for women's pleasure . . .

It hurts, yes, perceptibly—a queer, probing, corkscrew pain—

Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure—

Mine be thy love! O sweetness of power! O triumph transcending jealousy! Love's use is a bauble—before, a joy proposed, behind, a dream. I and I alone can hold you.

"Do you know," said Aleko's voice breaking

across my rumination, "what we have got to do now?"

"Tell me, child: do you imagine Shakespeare could dive as well as me?"

"Who are you calling child? Who says you can dive well?"

"I can dive better than you, anyway."

"You can't swim crawl."

"I could if I were as fat as you. Do you think Shakespeare's boy-friend could swim crawl?"

"O, shut up about Shakespeare."

"The answer is no. He was an awful weed."

"I don't want to know the answer. You've got to get dressed now. I'm going to take you out to lunch."

"To lunch? Who says?"

"Mother."

"Just us two?"

"Yes."

"Very thoughtful of her."

"Get up then, and stop making sachlamarés."

I got up and was so far under the spell of his physical perfection that I watched him put his clothes on with the most intense and idiotic disappointment. Nor was our gesture to civilisation appreciated: myself in white silk and Aleko in a new school blazer, we were infinitely the best dressed of the restaurant's clientèle. It was one of those cheap seaside pavilion places with dirty

tablecloths and a scribbled menu, in which the steam of an improvised kitchen floated between the tables and coarse, hispid men conversed like mitrailleuses with girls in crumpled, overshort dresses. I was amused that Aleko did not seem conscious of its vulgarity. It scarcely mattered: the main purpose was served and we were alone.

"Is this the first time you've entertained me to a meal, Aleko?"

"Yes," said Aleko, smiling. "What are you going to have?"

"Uno, due, tre—aspetta, cretino—desidero mangare. You don't expect me to read anything in this lingua, do you?"

"I shall have macaroni, but you don't like macaroni."

"I do not."

"Never mind, I'll get you a soup which you'll like."

We filled up our glasses with the good brew of Messina.

"Your health," I said.

"Our friendship," emended Aleko.

I suppose everybody who reaches a certain degree of intimacy with another person feels the same, but it struck me as being extraordinary and even incomprehensible that Aleko should be leading a life completely independent of me, to which I had no means of access. His lovers—I

was no better than his father, it confounded and shocked me. But who—who? My curiosity was rising to fever-point and yet I could not ask him to satisfy it—it was not twenty-four hours since he had put an exactly similar question to me and I been too squeamish to answer. There was the rub. I could not dream of claiming one-sided confidences. The parental or pedagogical rôle was loathsome to me. But O, if I had known, if I had known . . .

"How old are you, Aleko?" One might, with tact, direct a conversation into certain channels.

"Seventeen."

"It said sixteen on your report."

"Well, I'll be seventeen in October."

"What day?"

"The twelfth."

I was thinking of myself at seventeen, for whom a wildly timid kiss on a party night had been a complete romantic adventure. I was thinking of caps and waistcoats and school suitings, and of the blanched, uncertain body they had concealed. Had it really taken me seven more years to acquire the poise and liberty of the boy in front of me? Was it by this standard that I was judging him precocious?

"I'm twenty-four, Aleko. Do you ever feel that I'm seven years older than you? I don't think I do."

"No, not often. I'm glad you're so young."

"Are you? Why? Wouldn't you like to be older yourself?"

"I would like to have left school. That's all. I think it's better to be young, swimming and playing games."

It is amazing how even personal conversation contrives to skirt the essentials.

"Perhaps," I said, "you're right." I nearly reproduced the remark of Socrates, that the mind's sight grows keener as the eye of the body fails, but on that Sicilian afternoon, with the sea still rough on my cheeks and lips, it seemed an oddly priggish thing to say. No philosophy could vitiate the moment, the youthful moment.

And meanwhile they brought Aleko the bill, which he paid ceremonially, laying out his pocket book on the table and slowly extracting a fifty-lire note. And after taking the change, he put in his hand again and drew out something else which I could not see and jerked it on to the cloth in front of me. I recognised my own handwriting—it was an old menu card. And then, for no reason at all except that the day was fine and I had been upset by what I had heard and he seemed to love me, my eyes filled with tears. I tipped my chair back quickly and stared behind me at the sea. I began to see ships with steam up in the harbour.

I said to him at last:

"If we're to be friends, Aleko, we must have our friendship different from other people's. We must make something with it, build something."

"Build what?" inquired Aleko, pragmatic.

"I don't know exactly," I said, "but it seems to me true that the world belongs to those who can enjoy it. Look at these people here, the way the heat melts them and makes their features run into one another—can you believe that any of them have got the fineness of soul to live and love and die well? Nobody, it seems to me, can live well without love or die well without having somebody he's ready to die for. But nothing else matters much. You, Aleko, what do you care if they chatter about your morality! You are the aristocrat, the imperialist. For you, what is wrong is what you don't like. And I and you . . ."

Silence.

"Poetry again," I said, sighing, "and damned didactic poetry at that! If I put it into Greek you wouldn't understand it!"

Silence.

"Shall we go?" said Aleko.

Indeed there was no excuse for staying longer. Everybody was leaving now and in one corner they were beginning to sweep the sand up. We walked back to rejoin the family and such is the poverty of resource in human nature that,

although probably neither of us wanted to do this, we neither of us even suggested doing anything else. I saw the last opportunity for converse vanishing, once more frittered away. It is only rarely that we feel the need of exchanging confidences with another person, with those, perhaps, whom we begin to love; and the world of habit leaves no room for it. And if room be made, there remains to be conquered that overmastering shyness whose other name is fear. Between Aleko and myself was the gulf of an alien culture. I knew only that its span was wide: I had to grope for the bridge in darkness. And yet I accused myself. I had been over-timid of making a false step. I had behaved like a patrol which extinguishes all lights in the face of an enemy. One does not deserve much of a friend whom one treats as a potential enemy.

We found the family in the main asleep. We settled ourselves in deck-chairs and wove a pattern of small remarks and long silences. The heat of immemorial summers was poured about me. The sand glittered and shone. I had, I reckoned, two more peaceful, lingering hours.

But suddenly Paolo appeared round the outer fencing, breathless with news.

The family woke. Everybody started to talk in Italian.

"Paolo says the boat leaves at four," I was told, "not at seven as we thought."

I turned up my wrist. It was like a reprieve.

"Then I've lost it," I said. "It's five to four already." I made to sit down again.

"You haven't lost it yet," said Aleko's father, taking me by the elbow, excitedly solicitous for me. "It's an Italian boat."

"But I haven't packed," I said decisively. "I haven't paid my hotel bill. I haven't any money either—I was going to change some."

He counted out eight hundred and fifty lire in fifties and handed them to me.

"Will that be enough?"

"But this is absurd," I protested, almost angry. "How can I pay you?"

"Pay in drachmae to the boys' guardian in Athens. It is the same thing. Now hurry. We shall feel that it's all our fault if you miss your boat."

I was at the mercy of his kindness.

"I don't know how to thank you," I said, "for everything. Please explain to Mrs. Petsalis how much I have enjoyed myself . . ."

Aleko and I began to run in the wake of Paolo, through the clogging sand. At once we were out of sight of the cabin.

"Aleko," I called, "stop running. I don't care a damn if the boat goes."

He stopped and laughed.

"Why not?"

"We should be able to climb Etna."

"Why don't you stay, then—three or four days?"

But I was too strangely confused in mind for that and allowed Paolo to drive me furiously through the streets to the Lloyd Triestino offices, where they told me that I still had an hour's grace and gave me a ticket for Piraeus. The end was officially confirmed. At the hotel Aleko insisted on doing the packing and negotiating for me. We said good-bye when we had explored every section of the steamer and self-consciousness urged that there was nothing else to do.

"It's quite a nice boat," said Aleko thoughtfully, "but it's better not to be travelling alone."

"I wish you were coming with me."

"Never mind, only two months before we're together." And we talked like this because human personality does not change.

"We shall write to each other, Aleko?"

"Of course."

"To-morrow?"

"If you like."

"Good-bye, then, and thank everybody for me, won't you?"

The narrow dock-approaches soon swallowed him up, and with him Paolo and the car. I felt the tremor of the working screw. Farther and farther away the northern slope of Etna

rushed up flame-edged into a casque of cloud. It was as though an epoch had ended.

And I did not write the promised letter. I was visited by a gusty, biting shame which assailed me as often as my mind went to pen and paper. It seemed to me that I had made an illimitable mistake, that what had originally driven me to search for Aleko was nothing more than a madness of the blood. Each scene in my memory wore, in reaction, a character of disillusionment, and the taste in my mouth was of something slightly common and soiled.

FOURTH LETTER FROM ALEKO

7 Agosto, 1932.

DEAR MARTIN,

When you left Catania I was still at the plage and looking with a pair of field-glasses I thought I saw you on the deck looking towards us.

I hope the pictures are all going to be "masterpieces," but my mother does not mind very much how they are, she wants to see them whether they are good or bad, and also she wants to have something to remember you by.

I went yesterday for a ride on my bicycle to Acireale, it's a place which we passed many times in the car, but I am sure you do not remember it. I wanted to go for another ride to-day but my father needed some help in the office and I stayed there to help him.

I spoke to my father about ENGLAND and he seemed to want me to go. Perhaps if during the year you write him some letters about E. he is going to let me go. But he says unfortunately the English like to buy their lemons from Spain and so there is no business for him in England.

How do you find school? Do you think it is better here (in Sicily) or there? If before going to England next year you pass by Sicily, we are going to show you many more things than you saw in those few days you stayed here.

All my family is waiting very much to see the photographs. SEND THEM.

Your

ALEKO

FIFTH LETTER FROM ALEKO

8 *September*, 1932.

DEAR MR. GRAHAME,

I do not understand very well why you do not write to me because it was your idea at first that we should write. I have waited a month so that you should not think me stupid like before, and each day I thought you would send a letter. It is difficult for me to know whether I have done something wrong or if you have just forgotten. Father says not to take any notice because you are busy.

If you think this letter is silly, you better tear it up and not think any more about us.

Your

ALEKO.

TELEGRAM TO ALEKO

ALEXANDROS PETSALIS
CATANIA

FORGIVE ME ALEKO AND WRITE AGAIN

Via Eastern
16.9.1932

FOURTH LETTER TO ALEKO

September 16th, 1932.

ALEKO DEAR,

What shall I say? I made a promise and broke it. I did not forget you but I had the notion that I ought to forget you. It seemed to me for a long time that it was not a good thing for us to become friends. And that is absurd.

Will you excuse me for feeling so madly? I get melancholy instead of sunstroke and when the fit's on me I can think anything. But I'm recovered now. All I want is to see you again and till then to have your letters. I sent the telegram with the hope of getting an extra letter.

When exactly are you coming back? What are we going to do with our next year? Is it going to be better than the last? Tell me these things and as many more as you can think of.

Yours ever,

MARTIN.

Here are the passable pictures—they would be better if I had had the light-filter.

SIXTH LETTER FROM ALEKO

16 *September*, 1932.

DEAR MARTIN,

I received your telegram but I cannot forgive you because I have nothing to forgive you for. It's a long time since I had any news of you.

Nothing has changed here. I am doing the same things as a few months ago.

We leave Catania the first of October and we are going to arrive, perhaps, the 5th of October. We cannot leave before because there is not a boat. What are you doing now ? Do you play tennis ? Do you swim ?

Have you told your wife you have been in Catania ?

Write to me soon, and now good-bye, half a month more and we are going to be together.

ALEKO.

SEVENTH LETTER FROM ALEKO

24.9.1932.

MARTIN DEAR,

I was very glad to receive your letter with the marvellous photographs.

I think that this is my last letter, because I leave Catania the first of October. I cannot answer all the questions you ask me because the third is difficult I think, I am going to be at school a few days first and then I will answer it. I am going to be back at school the 5th of October and I think that next year we are going to do the same things as we did last year. I have answered your three questions as best I could and I have nothing else to write to you.

Please give Mrs. Grahame my love.

Your

ALEKO.

THE date which Aleko had given for his arrival had assumed in my mind the fixity of an event in the calendar. Unconsciously, I had adjusted a whole programme to it. When, therefore, he turned up a day before his time, I was faced with a virtual emergency; and I have learnt to my cost that I have no tact for dealing with emergencies.

I had gone out after lunch with three boys to play tennis. It was one of those still, shimmering afternoons of the Greek October and I had promised Eve that as soon as the match finished I would come and call for her and take her down to swim. I remember that around three o'clock I had heard the boat hooting in the harbour but it had scarcely attracted my attention. Then, in the middle of the deciding set, my partner had suddenly said "Here's Aleko!" It took me completely unawares.

I happened to be serving. I saw out of the corner of my eye that he had the whole extent of the football field to cross, and knowing that if I turned round I should have to wave to him, I determined to finish the game before I appeared to notice him. That was adult dignity, to affect

indifference to excitement. He would have to wait to speak to me until three points were won. I threw up the ball again, intensely conscious of being watched, and put it down the centre-line unanswerably. I crossed over and with a thrill of surprise repeated the feat. I served a soft one and the game was over—much too soon. But I spun on my heel, triumphant, and stood waiting. It was still a long time before he was near enough to speak.

"Hullo!"

"Hullo! I thought you weren't coming till to-morrow."

"Well, here I am. Come and bathe."

"Can't you see I'm playing tennis?"

"Never mind that. It's too hot for tennis."

"Two more games, then," I said. The score was 4—1. I went to the net, exerted myself a little and saw to it that the games were no more than two.

"But now I've got to go up for my things," I told him, reckoning, crudely, that if Eve were not ready I could find a pretext for not waiting for her.

"No, you haven't, because I've brought you some slips."

I hesitated, apologetic, and confided my obligation.

"Call her from downstairs," said Aleko.

I called twice and did not make her hear.

"Never mind," he insisted with unconcealed impatience, "she will come by herself when she sees that the tennis has stopped."

And from sheer inability to say no to him or to miss that short walk down to the shore with him alone, I was persuaded. I ran back dripping up the stairs to her with a hypocritical excuse of forgetfulness ready on my lips. But she already had the truth. She was sitting in her bathing costume on her bed, deserted and silently crying.

*

Aleko had not omitted to raise a question which appeared to possess a considerable interest for him.

"Did you tell Mrs. Grahame you had been to Catania?"

"Yes, of course."

"Was she very angry?"

"No."

"What did she say?"

"As a matter of fact, she said—that she had guessed it already."

"Is that all?"

That was all. She had simply smiled reassuringly and rather wistfully, as though whatever of doubt or conflict had gone with the realisation, had been resolved quite satisfactorily without my interference.

*

Deliberately, it seemed, she was falling back upon an attitude of mute acquiescence, and I, as one presses a retreating adversary, began to take from her more and more of what I had long wanted for myself—my time—in order that I might give it to Aleko. Every day now, without exception, I played Aleko's games. If he were put down for football, I also (abating my scorn of an inferior code) played football. If it was tennis, singles or doubles, there was a court automatically reserved for us. We took turns to stand drinks at the tuck-shop. We would never have dreamed of going down without the other to bathe. Whenever it happened that neither of us had an afternoon lesson, Aleko would come up after games to my rooms and Eve would serve us tea, a delicious and informal tea in the course of which several plates of bread-and-butter would be consumed and a wholly unbelievable quantity of jam. I used to wonder a little and feel a peculiar gratitude to Eve on these occasions because of the graciousness and vivacity with which she entertained a guest who was not, after all, her own choice.

"I feel," she said once, "that you might be my two children."

"Are we so very infantile?" I asked between banter and compliment, taking her up.

"You," she retorted, "would be Aleko's younger brother."

"Indeed! And why?"

"Don't you see he's better grown than you? Look how much broader his shoulders are."

"O, if it's a question of weight, I give in," I said. "I accidentally ran into him on the field this afternoon and I was cannonaded a couple of yards behind the goal-line."

Aleko laughed with sheer pleasure at the memory and went on laughing.

"It was the only way to stop you scoring," he said.

"I thought," said Eve, "that the game was to kick the ball."

"The ball hit the post, I believe," I said, and modestly added: "It was a left-foot shot."

There ensued an acrimonious and semi-technical debate between Aleko and myself as to whether that particular shot had been a good one or not. As soon as Aleko had gone, Eve turned to me and said:

"We've got to leave this place, Martin; you're simply wasting your time. Your whole life is playing games, playing and then talking about them."

Her tone was interrogative and conciliatory as though to screen the truth of her thrust from irrelevant attack. Nevertheless I was bitter against her. My liberty was my own, to hoard or squander as I wished. I was not going to be reproved like a thoughtless child.

"What do you want me to talk about?" I said savagely—"Kant's antinomies?"

She sighed and spoke again, not less evenly:

"Do you want to be a schoolmaster all your life?"

God! that went home! (The servility of it—"We do not consider it in the best interests of the boys, Mr. Grahame, that they should discuss the doctrine of the Resurrection in your classes" . . . "But it would mean, dear, giving up the *pension.*") I saw that my hesitation had betrayed me and when at last I found my answer I also was cool.

"I shall play games as long as I like," I said. "It's my own funeral."

Surprisingly, she digressed into sadness:

"You never, never play tennis with me."

"I . . . I didn't know you wanted me to. But why don't you find somebody more of your own standard?"

"Aleko isn't *your* standard."

Once more I was left without an answer. It was the first time for many days that she adverted thus to Aleko and more nearly than I knew, the last. It occurred to me for a moment—it occurred to me almost to wish—that everything would go much more smoothly and conveniently if she too found some romantic diversion . . . silly, contemptible and rather nauseating thought! Suppose she set herself to take my Aleko. . . .

*

I became aware at this time that a strange kind of separateness existed between Eve and me, as between two lines which ran in parallel grooves, entirely close and entirely distinct. I touched her, but remotely. I praised her beauty, but with exactly that sense of vivid, æsthetic isolation with which one praises a splendour of art. I loved the quickness of her coming and going, the shaking loose of her hair; but it was no longer from the core of me, no longer a craving, a metastatic urgency. And she knew this, she must have known. She felt it, no doubt, like a power which was inexplicably slipping out of her grasp.

What does a woman do? She stands, perhaps, in front of the long mirror where the lamp can glint her hair and recalls the men who would have wooed her. She crosses her arms and whips her dress off: her breasts stand up carved and small, and she remembers that men have thrown gold away in order to cup such fruit as these. She steps naked out of the ring of her underthings on the floor. She takes in her breath, she locks her hands behind her head; and a stealthy draught, like a lover's fingers, explores the tense armpit and brushes over breast and soft waist to the cool adjacency of hip and thigh. She closes her eyes, shaken with desire. The past is sloughed off with her clothes like a snakeskin; is erased and overwritten.

I only imagine. I would not claim an insight into other people's experiences while I am so often at a loss in the interpretation of my own. I only know that the transition from love to not-love, however brought about, by slow attrition or the instant's conversion, is infallibly accompanied by a darkness and distress of spirit beside which the circumstances of its outward expression are the merest patter of detail. In some way, it seems clear, Eve ceased to love me; in some form she endured the consequences. The decisive battles had been fought already in another and secret arena when we sat and hated each other across the table on the Sunday afternoon when the end came.

I was in the wrong, of course, but so trivially. My crime had even been, in a manner of speaking, involuntary. "Five minutes," I had said to her, and I had been forty. It was an entirely casual promise. If Aleko had not been involved, nothing would have been said.

But Aleko had met me in the reading-room and asked me to play chess. I said yes, partly, it is true, because it was difficult for me to refuse any request he made, but also because I thought I could win in ten minutes. Unfortunately, I left a knight *en prise* and spent the next ten minutes in trying to lose. It was no use: I had to win myself. I had actually given the mate and was smiling up at Aleko. The pieces

were still erect upon the board because it seemed absurd for me to rush off as if I had to catch a train.

And there was Eve in the doorway.

"When you've finished, there's a note upstairs for you from the Head." The voice was shockingly cold, like a sneer.

"We *have* finished," I said, and got up. I could see that she did not believe me.

That made me wild. I would have apologised at once, I would have made any reasonable apology. But to be seen as a trapped liar, to be considered surprised like a common adulterer —I dropped into a chair opposite her and willed her to think her worst. Grotesque, intolerable situation! I opened my note and pitched it fiercely into the basket. She need not imagine I was going to do any grovelling in the hope of righting myself.

She started knitting on the other side of the table. I said in thought: I never meant to break my word, Eve. You know that one can't leave a game if one's losing it, don't you, and I did my very best to get it over before. I was thinking all the time that I had promised to be with you. You believe this, don't you, if I tell you that it is so . . . But neither did I openly say these things, nor did she openly reproach me with them. We both knew that the issues went deeper. . . .

My thoughts turned at bay before these deeper issues and began blustering. I will love whom I like. I will keep company with whom I like. You with your nagging and complaints, you merely make me hate you. If you're miserable with me, for God's sake go away.

"I'm going away," she said in startling coincidence.

"You've said that before."

"At once, to-morrow." This was a vehement interjection, as though to stir me to a sense of the impending loss.

"I don't want you here," I replied with cool, deliberate cruelty.

We were hostile and silent again. You are ugly when you are angry, I said to myself, and I am glad you are going. Your enunciation is not clear and you seem to talk through your nose a little. Those lines round your mouth will lengthen and grow hard in ten years' time. I shall be thankful I got rid of you when I see you looking like a golliwog. . . .

The dinner-bell rang but we both went on sitting at that table. An insane elation surged up in me. I felt that I would wear her out, sitting like that, that I could sit for hours and impose my own will on her by my greater endurance. But she simply got up in the end and said that she was going down to dinner, and I followed her.

I followed her back as well, walking slightly behind her not unlike a lackey in disgrace. I told myself that if only I was stronger I should be able to ignore her. It seemed that I was afraid of the responsibility of this separation, afraid, perhaps, of the separation itself. But at the top of the stairs she went off into the bedroom to pack and left me to re-enter the sitting-room alone. I closed the door behind me and paced for a long time up and down the carpet, disordered in thought and searching for emotions which would give me the impulse to act.

This moment is wrecking your life, I imagined someone saying to me, your future is falling to pieces around you. But they had told me the same about marriage, that there was no escape or salvation from a wrong judgment. What! Repeating formulæ with a woman in a registry office! Even the going to bed with her! So far from seeming a doom ineluctable and grand, it had felt like the lightest, most fantastic experimentation. The wreck of my life! No, the argument went wide somehow.

But a sterner consideration supervened which brought up before me Eve in the adjoining room, packing swiftly and compactly for no purpose except to get away. The floor would be littered and forlorn, like her thoughts. The night air would blow in to make her shiver and the night

outside the window gape to show how empty and vast and friendless it was. She would be folding silks and stuffing tiny shoes into corners—silks and shoes I had kissed—and all for nothing, nothing, except that I had made desolation more acceptable to her than my company. And I would still have an organised life. It was she who was betrayed, forsaken, homeless. Surely she would be sick with misery, surely I could save her and wanted to save her and loved her enough to save her. Those warm arms stiffening over latches! Those lovely, tender eyes set in despair!

A wave of agonising compassion swept me. "I love you and I can't let you go," I cried in mute rehearsal. Words! easily and justly despised! She would want more than that. She would want the conviction of a love unfeigned and vital enough to exclude all other desires. She was not a child to be coaxed back into shelter. She was a stranger-woman to be wooed again by the elemental human need.

I considered that capitulation. I considered the possibility of acting it against my basic feelings. I would have to tell Aleko, when he came to fetch me for tennis:

"I'm afraid I've promised to take Mrs. Grahame for a picnic."

He would be oddly startled, seeing it was the first time.

"Never mind, we shall be together in the Eleven to-morrow."

"I'm sorry, but I'm playing squash with Mrs. Grahame to-morrow."

"In games time?"

"Yes, in games time."

"We could put it off till the next day, then."

"No, Aleko, don't you understand what I am saying? I shall never play with you again."

And suppose I found the heart to do this, how, with my joy torn up by the roots, could I make satisfactory love to Eve? It was beyond the power of man.

And yet I loved her. I wanted to transform her misery into melted tears. Underneath the spell which had been laid upon me I felt I loved her. And there was at least one thing I could truly say. "I'll do what you asked me, I'll leave the place. Give me (November to June) six months and I will take you away." I would go now and offer her that. I went out, knocked at and opened the door of the bedroom.

"Eve!"

No answer. Small head bent assiduously over an open trunk. I was to feel I intruded.

"Eve, I wanted to say something."

"When I want you to say anything, I will let you know."

I was broken off, provoked. And yet, remarking the room half full of empty boxes as though the ordeal of a long packing had barely begun:

"Can't I help you?" I said desperately.

"No, thank you." The voice was braced and hard all through. There was no slightest trace of the helplessness or appeal before which I was ready to go down like a straw-man, making the uttermost concession. My last hope of speaking had gone now. She would say "Do you think I'd wait six months for my turn to have you!" And it would have come coldly, an insult, a whip across my pride.

"But, Eve, you can't pack all these things now. Pack what you need and go to bed. I'll have the rest sent on."

"I shall finish this if I stay up all night."

I began to boil at my impotence to move her.

"You can't," I shouted, "you won't, I forbid you."

She went on packing in entire contempt. She left my outburst unanswered until it began to echo in my memory, querulous, bombastic, absurd. I felt myself uncontrollable with fury. I would force her to obey me. I would rape her on the bed, lock her in the room. That little squatting body—I could break it over my knee. But in reality I did nothing. I knew that on my violence her contempt would grow until

it scorched me tangibly like a furnace flame. I knew, glaring at her, that it was impossible to break her spirit.

I snatched up my own blankets and cursed her:

"You can damned well go to hell any way you please."

I pushed out into the corridor and back to the sitting-room. I threw the blanket-heap on to the divan, trembling and frantic with failure and repeating in my head "Now I've done it, now I've done it," like a schoolboy. What I had done I had not yet fully understood, but my immediate panic impulse was to consider the consequences to myself. It was a good thing Eve had had the habit of paying prolonged visits to Athens. It would ease the first awkwardness of explanation.

"O, she got bored, as usual. It's no life for a clever woman."

"But what did she want with so much *luggage*?"

Yes, certainly, there was the luggage. Perhaps a slightly franker story would be better in the end. I had been outspoken enough in the past to carry it off.

"The fact is, we quarrelled rather suddenly. Decided we didn't love each other and all that sort of thing."

"Ah! Mr. Grahame! don't believe it. Young

love is always like that, a patchwork of little disagreements."

And I would look youthfully and ingenuously up at them as they chewed the cud of their own superior wisdom. My life would proceed unaltered. Only there would be more room for Aleko, for a freer, less ambiguous comradeship. Need I miss a girl's voice over breakfast? Should I find it so hard to sleep alone?

And Eve . . . There was the crime: it was for her that my pulses were hammering so darkly. To be working, heart-empty, to the point of exhaustion, to have to wrench open tired eyes before the dawn and embark on a pitching, stinking steamer, in order to journey—who could say where?—into vacancy: this was torture, and I responsible. The memory would return to haunt me. . . .

Bah! I was nothing to her, she had as good as told me so. She was not leaving anything she cared for; she was merely beginning an adventure. This agony of departure was a ruse, to subject *me* to torture, to have *me* eaten by regrets. I grew excited again at the necessity of controlling my excitement. I also would be cool and careless. I would shut my mind to her. I would prove that these things did not happen against my will.

Having thus discovered a mental basis on which I could allow myself to go to sleep, I tucked in

the blankets and switched the light off. But in the intimate darkness remorse struck in like gunfire and probed the thin defences of my hardness of heart. We had quarrelled so often and been reconciled. There had been once in London when I had run down the stairs in white anger, swearing I would never enter the house again, and then she had called to me from a top window and held out one of a pair of furry boudoir slippers I had just bought her. Her face at the window had been small, lovely, her voice very breakingly soft, and the waving of the slipper so poignantly ridiculous. Surely she too would remember these things, remember and come to my door soon, come and disrupt and flood away this barrier. . . .

But she did not come.

And if my dreams were vague with phantoms of her, surrendering, pleading, I did not wake to hear the boat go.

It might have been a thunder-cloud which had hung a long time, burst and dissolved into sunshine.

I surprised myself by my callousness. Obviously (I pointed out to myself) you never really loved her. You have no sense of loss. Your chief reaction is one of positive relief. You merely see yourself free of obligations. You have got what you wanted.

"A pity," pronounced Aleko with an air of suitable gravity, having been put into possession of the half of the truth.

"What makes you say that? I don't think it's a pity."

"She used to do everything for you, make your breakfast and get your bath ready."

"It seems," I said, smiling, "that you are something of an Oriental about marriage."

"I'm never going to get married myself."

"Why not?"

"I don't like it."

"If you're going to live with a woman, it's much the same whether you get married or not," I said, but he did not venture upon any answer to this.

I had got, it was true, what I had wanted: Aleko to call me out into the fresh morning sunlight, to come up and make and share a meal with me, without further thought of desertions and intrusions and conflicting loyalties. And yet I felt a peril in my circumstances, like a climber whose path has just missed being crumbled in a landslide. People already had plenty to talk about in Eve's going: it would never do for them to suspect the real reason. I would have to be careful how Aleko's relations with me developed.

I set my mind to this, methodically, thinking that the duration of my happiness depended on my finding a solution. What Eve had known of me, after all, she had known with the sensitised instincts of the lover. The rest of the world had no clue to a man's emotions except in his behaviour: my emotions were my own and secret. Even Aleko, who was most concerned, what could he know about them? I had written him letters, I had been to visit him—what did he infer from this? That we had, perhaps, common interests that tended to throw us together. Interests? Yes, that was the word. Something broad and self-seeking and commercial, like the mind of a normal man.

I contented myself with the resolve that at least he should have no privileges from me which were not, in principle, accessible to the others.

I never let him be "absent" or "late" for anything, or stay up in my room at night. "You see enough of me," I told him, "already." In public, I took opportunities to speak of him judicially, without enthusiasm: "He has energy, yes, but not a single intellectual impulse." In class, if the occasion rose: "I'm not going to mark your work, Petsalis, it's obvious that you haven't even opened the book"—weird, pompous gesticulations of authority! I did not say to myself, I am doing my duty: I said, I am playing a game, I am masking my own vulnerability, I am hoodwinking the prejudices of society.

*

And then, suddenly, I seemed to realise that in any case there was no long life for my structure of ethical compromise. The discovery was slight but momentous. Already in the easy familiarity of Aleko's comings and goings I had noticed with a certain disquietude that for long moments now I could be indifferent to his presence. Then, one afternoon when he was lying back in one of my arm-chairs and talking rather vapidly about cinemas, I saw that it was quite possible to wish that he were not even in the room.

I had an instant of peculiar, hollow dread. It was like recognising in myself the first symptoms

of a disease. It was like having it broken to me that in such and such a time I was to lose my sight. I had known so well that love was a fugitive thing, but that *mine* should go, that it should happen to *me*. . . . That the canker of dissolution should appear before I had so much as looked steadily at the full bloom. . . .

I cast about me in a kind of panic. How much had I sacrificed to this illusion? What had my sheer gambler's frenzy made me throw away? Suppose it were something enormous! Suppose, perhaps, that Eve had killed herself in order that I might be left alone, as I had wanted, with "love"—so much smoke, so much blown dust in the roadway!

The mood passed, as moods do, leaving only the scar. As if in self-reassurance I watched how I passed Aleko's classroom with the thought "That is his classroom," or moved inevitably to a window if I heard his voice outside. Sometimes, shy of asking where he was, I would go through classroom, dayroom, playing-fields, dormitory, looking for him and pretending that my purpose was anything but that, in order that there should be an appearance of accident in our meeting and in our deciding upon something to do. This was not the behaviour of disillusionment I told myself again and again.

*

And more than ever I wanted Aleko's secret life—it would have been a blinding shame to know how far he kept me from it. When our talk fell from themes like racquet-strings and the atmosphere melted towards intimacy, he visibly stiffened as if he had become suddenly cold. He would suggest something, anything, playing backgammon or going downstairs for the gramophone. I learnt that if I wanted to have him to myself, I must talk lightly and do things, be all action and no thought.

It was a silent, corroding curiosity. As long as he was talking to me, I was content, perhaps, to know that he was thinking of what he was saying and of nothing else. But if I passed him in deep conversation with another person, I burned to know the topic. If I said good night to him in the dormitory, I asked myself what he dreamed of before he went to sleep. It became a sort of obsession with me. I don't know whether ignorance or my conjectures hurt the more.

Aleko was only to be surprised into self-revelation. I asked him once if he believed in God, and put the question out of a clear sky in a tone of voice which I might have used to inquire if he believed in volleying.

"Yes, I believe in God," he told me.

"Many gods or one?"

"One, of course."

"I suppose that's reasonable," I said. "The

Christians believe in a God who's One and Three at the same time, which seems to me rather silly. Do you believe your God is good and looks after you ? "

" Yes."

" That must be a comfort."

" Yes, generally it is—a great comfort."

" But do you believe you can talk to your God and say prayers to him ? "

" Yes."

" You never say prayers, Aleko."

" How do you know ? "

" I've seen you going to bed."

" Well, I say them to myself when I'm in bed."

" Your God seems very like a man, Aleko, doing things for people and listening to what they say."

" Well, what of it ? "

" Xenophanes thought that God might just as well be like a hippopotamus."

Aleko seemed to find the theory more picturesque than philosophically significant. The subject was not pursued.

The nearest we got to talking about love was an occasion when I took up one of his towels to dry my feet with.

" Hi ! what are you doing ? I've got to wipe my face on that."

" What's the matter ? My feet are a sight cleaner than your face."

" I don't care. Use your shirt on them."

I was highly indignant.

"If they're clean enough for a woman to kiss they're clean enough for your face-towel."

Aleko went into loud, scornful laughter.

"Who'd kiss your feet? I wouldn't kiss anybody's feet in the world."

"Not even a mistress's?" I retorted, equally scornful.

Aleko stopped laughing rather suddenly as though he scented an ambush.

"I might kiss," he replied with caution, "every other part of her body, but two inches above her ankles I'd—stop."

"Bah! I always thought Italians were good lovers."

He wilted perceptibly under the attack.

"Any Sicilian girl I know would laugh at me if I started kissing her feet."

"How do you know? Have you tried it?"

This entirely silenced him. He said after a while, with an air of deep reflection:

"That's very funny. It's the first time I ever heard of kissing people's feet."

Naïf to a degree, I thought; and again the conversation ended.

There were times when I was positively angry over his disinclination to talk. One Sunday he had spent the whole day with me, and there was an hour left before dinner. He wanted me to listen to a new dance record they had brought:

I suggested a walk. To stand on the cliffs in the cool darkness, to drink in breadth and quiet, to attempt some faltering trifle of self-examination and purge a little our scheme of values—it presented itself to me as a physical need. But he would have none of it. There was no time: it was night.

Nevertheless we went downstairs together.

"Come on," I said at the porch.

"No, you must come into the dayroom."

"O, go to the devil," I said with the bitter Greek phrase, weary to death of banality. I have pretended so much for you, my heart said, I have been interested in nothing but goals and gingerbread, I have put myself in your place, invented things to give you pleasure and protected you from the boredom of an elder's moral outlook. Now, at the last, you will do nothing for me. You will make no effort of imagination to have me happy. . . . It may be, of course, that you are quite devoid of imagination, like this wall.

*

Here were bells, classes, games, detentions as usual. The long autumn calms remained unbroken. I had made plans to stay at the school with Aleko during Christmas.

That it should all break up on the instant like an extraordinary dream!

That seduction and conspiracy should come

into a world which I thought held nothing more violent than common-room gossip!

Perhaps I exaggerate. I had no prevision of so personal a catastrophe. I feel myself continually passive to events, even to those for which I should be considered responsible. It is as though they belonged to an alien order of things. Imaginatively, I cannot grasp them. That the environment of habit should suffer change and become a battleground of sudden emergent passions is no less of a prodigy to me than the sun's turning to blood. Eve's going had been a prodigy of the sort. It was unthinkable that there should be another.

Much later I recalled a single incident which could have warned me. One night when there had been a disturbance in one of the dormitories, I asked the prefect of the dormitory if there had been anyone absent. He replied: "Only Petsalis, who was in your room." The mistake embarrassed me and I ignored it. Aleko had not been near my room, but it simply did not occur to me at the time that he might have said he had.

I was plunged unsuspecting into the midst of things. It was really the old feud between village and school, and within the school the hostility of Lambadarios and his Greek staff against the English regime, and it was a little ridiculous that I should take sides with myself and think myself clever and important enough

to carry it off. I was merely elbowed out of the way. And yet I could not have done anything else. I had only one possible interest in the outcome and that was Aleko's safety.

I had the first news from an English colleague whom I had no reason to like. He buttonholed me in the garden and leered in the manner of one who is about to divert himself with genetics. It was then only six days from the end of term.

"Your friend Petsalis has got us into a pretty mess," he said.

Then I knew. It had the impact of a condemnation. My knees went like water.

"What's the matter?"

"What! haven't you heard?"

I loathed him for enjoying imparting the information and yet I smiled inanely because I wanted it.

"No, what's he done?"

"Good Lord, man, he's been getting half the village virgins with child. Lambadarios raving against the laxity of the English. You'll probably be required to give your House a course of neo-Malthusianism. Twice a week, after fire drill."

My temper was at the edge of control.

"What the hell do you mean—'half the village virgins'?"

"One, to be precise, but the kid's parents are putting in an enormous claim. About five hundred pounds, I believe."

"My God! whom did you get all this from?"

"Petropoulos. But it's all over the school by now."

I wanted to stop my ears up. It was too monstrous to be listened to any longer. I rushed up the stairs, three at a time, to the Head's flat, thinking "I could have prevented this if I had known in time," and vaguely convinced even then that the solution lay in my hands. Only it was pathetically essential that my intervention should come before another moment had been lost. I was cold with fear lest the Head should be out or occupied. But he was alone.

I took the proffered chair and seemed to blurt out my question. But I heard my voice come level, with the merest hint of a caught breath at the close.

"Why haven't I been told, sir, about this business of Petsalis?"

"I was only told ten minutes ago myself."

I switched off, seeing that my sensitivity had misled me. The Head had a way of drawing the sting of criticism.

"It's unbelievable of—Petsalis."

He smiled in response, rather wanly, as though, after all, the milk had been irretrievably spilt.

"I always thought he was a horrid little pervert," he said.

"Most schoolboys are that," I replied, with

a sort of despair that he should have been so discerning. "But who is the girl?"

"The youngest of old Gavas' litter. She's not more than fifteen."

I winced. A pastry-maker's daughter.

"And is she really pregnant?"

"It seems so."

"Do they say how long?"

"Two months."

Out of my first headlong helplessness I began to conceive myself as defending counsel, probing, parrying, brilliantly retrieving. I would rise, I was sure, to the occasion. Whilst a friend was in peril I owed it to my ideals.

"Doesn't it seem to you," I said, talking rather quickly, "that the affair's simply thick with absurdities? Why did no one know two months ago? If it rests on the girl's story, what sort of corroboration has she? Obviously none that won't be the worse for two months' wear. Was it a night—who's to identify one night out of sixty? Besides, if she'll lie with one person, she'll lie with half a dozen. You know what they do in affiliation cases. We'll have her virtue pulled to shreds with ten minutes' organised investigation."

He heard me out and then shattered me with a word.

"I'm afraid you won't get far along that line, Grahame. You see, he's confessed."

"Not Petsalis!"

"Yes. Not to me, of course," he added bitterly, "to what's-his-name, my *vis-à-vis*, Lambadarios."

Confessed! I could have laughed out loud at my simplicity. He had confessed, and nobody but me found it strange. Friendship indeed! It was a pretty miserable little surface-scratching bastard of a friendship to show for half a year's belly-aching. I was laughing cynically and internally while my speech came in a sort of silly confusion:

"But the school—won't pay—the five hundred pounds?"

"Five hundred pounds? What five hundred pounds?"

"The indemnity."

"Good heavens! it's not five hundred pounds. They only want thirty thousand drachms, poor fools."

I laughed at myself in reality now—rather weakly.

"Two months of my salary," I said. "I could pay it myself."

"I wish to God it ended with the money," he went on moodily. "Consider: we lose Aleko at once and probably Philip, and it's not as if the school were full. Then I don't know how I'm going to persuade the various parties that it's in their interest to keep the thing out of the papers. Somebody's sure to see some nationalistic

capital to be made out of it. I don't even know what view the Governors are likely to take. Quite frankly, it would have been better for me if I'd had a death or two from typhoid. You simply say 'I called in the best doctor' and wash your hands of the business. But as soon as it's a moral question, everybody treats you as though you positively instigated the crime. Look at that little catamite we sacked last winter. Do you suppose I've ever heard the last of that? These Greeks have no shame."

I saw that my own aim, single and imperative, was to prevent Aleko being sacked like that. I saw something else too, while the Head was speaking, which was that Aleko's expulsion was the merest item in the broad situation; and it came to me in a picture that while the protagonists were fighting for honour and self-interest, I might have the kill out from under their very noses. A little craft, a little adroitness, a little playing of the one against the other. . . . A half-plan rose to my mind.

"It would discredit Lambadarios to your advantage," I said, "if Aleko could be brought to withdraw his confession."

"Do you suggest," said the Head sharply, "that we should tamper with the evidence?"

That was exactly what I had suggested.

"No, no," I amended hurriedly, relinquishing a conspirator for a tool, "but if by chance this

confession should have been trumped up by the Greeks . . ."

"Gavas would go straight to the Governors with his tale, I suppose, if I didn't give him satisfaction."

"We would go first. We would represent it as a pure fabrication by which the town hoped to injure the school."

"And if he took it to court ? "

"He would be paid, if necessary, for signing away his claims."

"And we be blackmailed every six months by the same sort of ruffian ! No, it's too fantastic. I don't see how you can talk like this until you've got the facts."

I had caught a vision of myself chartering aeroplanes, organising, interviewing, persuading, even paying, and turning in the end to Aleko and saying "You see how much I think of you, you see what I have the power to do for you, you see the Englishman's idea of friendship." Fantastic ! yes, that was just. My preposterous hypotheses were making a fool of me. But I knew where my single hope lay.

"You haven't seen Aleko yet, sir ? "

"No, I sent for him, but I imagine he's still being cross-examined by Lambadarios."

"And if he does deny the confession ? "

"We shall have to look into the matter. One can't damn a kid on hearsay."

He went on to say how much he liked the boy and how rarely a verdict of expulsion fell upon the right person. I thought that any moment now might bring Aleko to the door. I was burning to get away.

*

I was going to wait at the foot of Lambadarios' staircase till Aleko came down, but the matron told me, looking at me curiously, that he had left a long time ago and had gone, she thought, to the dormitory. She had given him the key. She supposed that it was all right while everybody else was in afternoon school.

I went running up to the dormitory and found him sitting on his bed with an open handbag beside him. It was difficult in the gloom to distinguish what it contained.

"What are you doing, Aleko?" I cried, seeing things flowing away from me much faster than I could understand.

"They're sending me down to the hotel to-night. My guardian's coming to-morrow to take me away." No comment, no trace of contrition or tears, such as my sympathies were taut for.

I felt a miasma of isolation all round us. The wind outside was blowing up the dust on the tennis-courts where we had hit at those numberless

white bouncing balls. Already they were part of another world.

Let it all go, said Despair, it has passed beyond you. Let it go, let it go.

"Hadn't you better see the Head first?" I said, cool under rebuff. "Come up to my room."

I hated the utter deadness in him which made my words sound like one more schoolmaster's order, the prelude to one more inquisitive and condemnatory interview. I hated the rôle of privilege which he forced upon me. He came upstairs with me and simply leaned back on the couch, saying nothing.

I challenged him with my own silence, I pleaded. Don't you see that you *owed* me your trust? I was your friend, I made your interests mine: don't you see that I had a right to know things and give my sympathy? It's like insulting me. It's like saying you've no use for me. Can't you tell me now that it's all a mistake? Can't you put this much right between us?

No: the whole initiative was with me.

"Aleko," I said, stricken.

"Yes," he inquired, half waking, it might be, to something in my voice.

"Why, why didn't you tell me about it?"

"Tell about what?"

"About—this?"

He said, after a pause:

"I knew you wouldn't understand. When you kept saying you were my friend, you wouldn't have anything to do with me."

I was incredulous, aghast.

"What do you mean, Aleko?"

"You know. It's not your fault though. All Englishmen are cold-blooded."

I did not speculate on the origin of this final generalisation: I was too staggered by the main attack. So that was where my honour had been assigned! Not to purity, not to duty, not to a sense of my position, not to any other motive which I might, even though disclaiming, have understood, but to a certain anæmia, a racial deficiency of blood! I would have found it comic if I had not been so leaden-hearted. I stared at the boy who sat back frowning on my couch with his socks down over his ankles and I reflected that however often I had watched him take that pose, I knew no more of him than I had known at first. He was as much an enigma to me as I was to him.

I was a prude to him, a half-and-halfer, a sort of milk-and-water nincompoop. It was a little bitter to realise that I could be these things to people I had loved and been eager to sacrifice for. That Aleko, when the storm broke, had had nobody worth turning to. God! I was to blame!

"Aleko," I said, made miserable, "let's forget

all this for a while and think. You don't want to leave the school."

"I don't care if I do."

Let it go, despair clamoured, you are agonising for nothing. He does not care. Let it go.

But I could not. I was fighting alone, for myself alone, to save some part of my crumbling world intact. I could still assert my influence over Aleko, for my own purposes if not for his. I could *make* him want what I wanted. I could save him in spite of himself.

"Don't talk nonsense, Aleko. Tell me from the beginning and we will see."

He told me willingly enough, while I endeavoured to forget the raking emotions and fix my mind on what I knew of legal methods of criticism. When had he been out to meet this girl? Always at night? Did that mean many times? No, two or three was no good, he must remember exactly how many. Say four times. Had no one in his dormitory known where he was? Thought he was with me (you little devil!)—never mind, so much the better. Had no one seen him out of bounds? Was he sure of that? Had no one even hinted at knowing about it before to-day? What! it was yesterday! Good God! But to come to the most important point—how much had he told Lambadarios? Exactly how much? Nothing but Yes

in answer to a question? In front of Lambadarios alone? In front of Lambadarios and the enraged father alone? But this was incredible.

I got quite excited.

"You fool, Aleko, there's not a particle of evidence against you except your own. You must simply take it back. Say you didn't understand what was being asked you. Say you know nothing whatever about it and leave the proof to them. We'll get you off in the end—for certain we'll get you off."

Puffed, dangerous words. . . .

But he came over to my enthusiasm, as I had known he would. Together we discussed eventualities. I enlarged upon my scheme to show how easy it was. It was merely a question of impudence, I told him. There was nothing for him to remember: he had only to persist in his denial. No, of course I wouldn't contradict his alibi. Yes, he should go and see the Head now. Yes, certainly he could say he had seen me.

"Perhaps you'd better not come straight back to me though," I added. "Come to-morrow morning as soon as you're free."

The possibility of its being the last time I should speak to him would never have occurred to me.

*

I went to bed feeling a sick revulsion.

It was so much like physical nausea that I doubted if I knew the whole cause of it. I had mixed myself up in a dirty business. I had talked loudly and madly for my own ends, so that everyone must have noticed it. I had made myself a party to lies and forswearing, and all without precautions, rushed into it by circumstance like a weak-minded little office clerk to whom a criminal temptation has come. I must have betrayed myself a hundred times. Unconsciously, perhaps, I was sick with dread of exposure, some form of exposure too humiliating to foreknow.

I bit into my pillow, facing the thought, and understood that the worst was still not plumbed. How ridgy the sheets were getting. If only I could sleep before pictures came, or keep my mind on sheep jumping, waves rolling, the ridges in the sheets. . . . O, I dared not, positively dared not. It would be at me sooner or later from the dark. That bitch with Aleko. . . .Hot at fifteen for lovely thews and a moulded body. . . . Luring, under dirt and powder, with her gross animal-smell. . . . Another thought, at any cost! Yet it could be borne, it seemed, with the nails pressed into one's cheek.

Even that was untrue—Christ! even that was untrue! It was scourging, ripping, flaying myself with knives, but I knew in my heart that he was the doer. Those vivid limbs tight with lust. In

fever, oblivious of me. And how clean his beauty had looked, how he stripped like a god, how nearly mine he had been! Mine and so foul! Mine to drive me over and over in the sheets to tear, blot out the image of him!

Let me do it with women myself, or I shall go mad. Let me drown myself in my own lust, loose the whole horde of Spintrian imaginings in the search for a pleasure that would deluge and possess me. . . .

Pleasure—there it was that touched the final nerve-quick. I writhed from it into the darkness. That he should stand in his carven youth and give his love to me and go hiding from me, excluding me, in this sty of pleasure, this gasping, contorting pleasure, this thumping of the blood, this raging self-defilement of beauty which fetched the sick loathing up from my vitals! O, to sob it out of me! I turned into the pillow again and groaned aloud, as though an audible expression would draw off something of the pain. Pleasure, pleasure, and this pain! I struggled against it as one does against disease or a bad dream. I thought of turning the light on or walking about outside, but I knew that it would take hold of me again immediately. It must be conquered or exhaust itself.

I noticed miserably how the sweat was trickling, as though it were coming out with aspirin. . . .

*

I woke very late in the morning with no feeling of having rested. All the night's psychic commotion had cleared away and left only the dull sense of something distasteful to be carried through. It had made a defeatist of me. I had ceased to believe that the operation of cause and effect could be arrested by my random personal wishes.

It cost me an effort even to send for Aleko. I would have liked to stand aside, passive, and be brought his news, without responsibility for success or failure. But in any case he was not to be found. He was in the hands of the enemy, no doubt, and I trembled to think how his lie and mine was bearing up under the strain of attack. I saw with horror that I was chiefly afraid of being more implicated myself. I had no stomach for the vulgarity of it.

When a notice came round during my English lessons requesting the presence of the staff at a special meeting in the staff common-room at twelve-thirty, I merely told myself fatalistically that matters were coming to a head sooner than I had anticipated. Probably Aleko was to be expelled. Very well: I should affect indifference. I should speak as little as possible. My syllables should be icily articulate and framed to restore my dignity. Only the automatic excitement of suspense disturbed me.

I went early to the rendezvous and remember how I stood at the seaward window so that people should not talk to me and marvelled that I felt no pain. The December sunshine was too brisk a light. The reflection of green and ochre in the water was sharp and broken and evoked no memories. Much later, perhaps, when the air grew heavy and resinous and I stood like this, but alone, to watch the moon rise, big through the summer dust, the past would drive back at me. But it was an intellectual prospect, poetic and remote.

I shrink at recalling the events of that meeting, they touched me so shrewdly. The Greeks brought in an attorney fellow who was to watch the interests of the girl's family. He was a squat, common man with a dirty collar: I perceived, sizing him up, that I would have lost any case rather than win it with his assistance. But nobody appeared to resent his interfering.

Aleko came in with Lambadarios and stung me by not returning my smile. He merely looked frightened. In some unpleasant way fear seemed to push his features back. It struck me like a starting nightmare that a frightened face goes badly with a broad, finely built body. My imagination was raw and hypersensitive. You don't care what happens to him, an obscure voice was saying inside me, you will soon wake up.

Very typically the Head arrived when Lambadarios had begun speaking and took an armchair near me in one of the corners. The speech had opened on the responsibilities of the school towards the commonwealth, and passed to a certain grave confession which a pupil in his charge had made and later (he hoped spontaneously) withdrawn. His Greek was a literary and formal diction which speedily relinquished its hold upon my attention. I thought how strange it was when finance and democracy and religion were on their trial that such solemnity could be wasted on one more conjunction of youthful flesh. Did this old fool not know how many women would gladly have borne a child on this condition? I did, and looking at Aleko was only sickly jealous of the lust in it.

And now without deference or apology the nasty little attorney was asking me questions. Did I as Housemaster, for example, provide for the proper supervision of the dormitories at night?

"There is a prefect in every dormitory," I replied pretty civilly, "and the prefect on duty reports to me every night after lights-out."

"What is a prefect?"

I explained what a prefect was.

"Do you mean that these duties are actually entrusted to *boys*? Is it not a boy's interest to deceive his master?"

"That is not my experience," I said. I might have added that I was not a Greek.

"It is an unheard-of thing."

There was no point in losing my temper. I guessed, with an inward glee, that the Head was at least twice as furious as myself.

"It is the English system," I remarked drily.

"And a very bad system in my opinion," retorted this slick-wit who doubtless owed to the arts of deceit his own rise from some Smyrniot slum. There was a murmur of applause from the Greeks.

I began to tingle to the double stimulus of exasperation and debate. Then I heard Aleko begin answering. He mumbled and looked here and there across the room, never at me. I became savagely apprehensive for him. God! he had nothing to gain by being servile. I scrutinised his face in half-profile and it showed suddenly to be quite lacking in fire, like the face of a waiter. I winced at it. I refused to believe that I had so dreadfully lost the vision of his beauty. Suppose he undid that weedy tie and ruffled his hair and laughed again. Suppose he challenged this gross investigatory board to take its clothes off and talk about chastity in the full consciousness of its unsightly and deformed physique. Suppose he stood straight and said one bold thing to justify the glorious impulsions of youth.

Alas!

"You arranged that night to meet outside the wall on the town side of the playing-fields."

"No."

"You took the road towards Kryopotami."

"No."

"You left the road where the path goes up behind the theatre."

"No."

"You went . . ."

It was no better than third-degree where the victim was so helpless. I had an urgent desire to plant my fist in the man's face. I would like to have seen Aleko do it—how smack he would go down! But it is pitiful to have body without brains and beauty without spirit in it.

The Head passed me a scribbled note: "What's the use—most obviously guilty." I crumpled it in my hand and interrupted forthwith.

"Is it really necessary to have all this repetition? If he answers no to one of your questions, he answers no to them all. He has told you already that he was in my room and I support that statement. We were working late for several nights at that time, trying to finish the first number of a form magazine."

The fellow paid not the slightest attention to my outburst. His eyes never moved from Aleko.

"You still say that you did none of these things?"

"No, none."

He scrabbled about in his bulging portfolio and produced a pair of rubber tennis shoes.

"But you left your shoes behind!"

That was a bombshell. I thought frantically: why have we heard nothing about these before? My mind flew off at a tangent to that popular saying that murderers always leave a clue to their crime behind them. At length I began more constructively to cast about for a weapon of defence. I knew there must be one, a simple one.

At all events there was a silence of seconds. Then Aleko said:

"That's a lie. I went barefoot."

Poof. I never found out what made Aleko step so open-eyed into this clumsy Muscovite trap. But now, certainly, it was all over, except for me. The unspeakable inquisitor turned to me with a sneer.

"I thought you said he was in your room."

"I evidently made a mistake," I replied with all the scorn I could command.

But I blushed, as they say, to the roots of my hair. I felt the flame running, spreading. There was no subterfuge by which I could hide it. But I hugged myself round with the invincible conviction of my superiority to all of them in the room. I told myself that whatever they thought of me would scorch and shrivel before my furious contempt of them. . . .

I scarcely listened to the few words the Head said in protest. What had happened had happened anyway. It was over, all of it. . . .

I supposed in a confused way that I must quickly find Aleko and piece things together somehow with him. But while I was fingering an encyclopædia, waiting for the room to clear, the Head came up to me and began to talk of the awkwardness of the general situation. My pride was too low to perceive his drift.

"Perhaps it would be wiser," he ended apologetically, "if you offered the Governors your resignation. It won't be accepted."

"I shall offer my resignation and I shall insist on its being accepted," I replied to cap him, and murmured with a sad attempt at facetiousness: "What is there sweet or lovely in the mountains now that Daphnis has gone?"

"What's that you said?"

"I was only quoting Meleager," I said moodily. The Old Man had had a classical education.

He smiled a broad, exasperating smile and added an observation which I dared not ask him to interpret:

"In a case of formal expulsion you could always have saved your man. Greek law requires a unanimous vote on the part of the whole staff."

I made my escape, pretending laughter. But I was ashamed again: of my silly, ill-considered interference, at being caught shifting and lying

like a child, of being in any way connected with any part of the affair. It was a huge relief to be shaking the dust of the school from my feet. If I could only pack fast enough to avoid meeting anyone again, if I could only fix my attention on that so as not even to think of people until I had left them behind me, I could breathe a larger air and be thankful.

Aleko ? I knew now : I despised him. Bitterly and finally. I forgot everything he had ever been to me, seeing that cowed, spiritless face of the court-room. I would be ashamed to have to recognise him again. He had made the past a row of pricked bubbles, and disgust reminded me only how the hair behind his ears had suddenly looked coarse-cropped like a common soldier.

SURGIT AMARI ALIQUID

In a last turning-out of my drawers I came across one of Aleko's English exercise books. Idly curious, I opened it. The school crest decorated the front inside cover: also the sketch of an athlete of unusual muscular development and the names of the second school football team deployed in front of a goal-post. The first entry was a dictation from Ruskin: thereafter the book had served for the pencil drafts of essays—"Venizélos," "I waste my time," "A Visit to Heaven," "My Idea of Education," "The Influence of America on Greece." They were scrupulously edited most of them, scratched out, palimpsested, abridged and even sometimes abandoned when half done. My eye fell upon something in the form of a letter, abandoned like this but easily legible beneath a cancellation of long, oblique pencil-strokes. I read:

"Dear Mr. Grahame,

"It is almost a month since you left Catania. But it seems to me only a few hours. The boat, your cabin, you waving your handkerchief as a good-bye to me and to Sicily are always the pictures that come to my mind when I think.

"Do you remember the morning when you took photographs in my house? And after two hours and a half you took only one? When terrace, first floor, second floor, garden were all explored to find the right light, the dark shadow for a good photograph? Do you remember our picnic to Taormina?

"Perhaps these things (crossed out).

"Three days you stayed in Sicily and we (crossed out).

"You were sad going away because you were leaving Sicily, the beautiful land, I was sad" ("sad" had been substituted for "crying"; I reflected that I had never known Aleko cry and wondered if it was shame or a queer artistic sincerity which had inspired the emendation) "because a person I love was going away.

"I am waiting for the time when I shall be in Pityessa again."

Break and silence. The book had not been filled but I turned by chance to the end of it. There was a list written small in a top corner of the last page:

"Hesta Zipper
Elsa Minetter
Tina Cosentino
Fosca Comes
Lina Comes
Lidia Terranova."

And just below, scribbled too many times to count: "Lidia, Lidia, Lidia, Lidia, Lidia, Lidia, Lid, Lid, Lid, Lid . . ."

I sat with this absurd book of scraps on my knee, letting the evening gather around me until my eyes were stinging with unshed tears. I was thinking, paradoxically, of Eve. Here her hand touched, and here her silks hung, and here . . . I went to the window at last and saw how quiet the sea had fallen. The eastern islands were still visible—I could imagine a boat stealing round that far point with her lights lit, bringing my love back. Creeping, twinkling, across that expanse of water harbourwards, with a fortune of sudden joy for me. I put the thought away because it was so miserably hopeless. I would undress quickly and go down for the last time to swim.

The ground was cold underfoot and out on the bathing platform the damp planks seemed to suck the warmth downward from my body. Not a soul was anywhere in sight. The sea was black and silver, jet-black under the cliff-edges and the palest luminous silver at the horizon where the sun had set, and all ineffably still. And its beauty was like something which I had actually held in my hand and let slip out again. There would have been no tragedy if I had always seen it as a stranger.

Nobody would disturb me in this place. I

could stand like this all night and nobody would know or notice. How wide the sky was, how ironically insentient the sob of water against the piles. A thousand thousand people were not less lonely than I, but they did not hear Eve's voice calling.

"Martin, silly baby, are you angry still? Look at me, Martin, and see if I'm pretty."

I dived. I wanted to have the clean shock of cold go through me.

EPILOGUE

I WAS in Athens through the March revolution and the subsequent amazing affair of the Cephisia Road. There were times when it was hard to believe that I had not been there always; I knew its personages and its press, its trams and shops and cinemas, the sour olive-smell and white sunlight of its streets. A single figure, a boy, Aryan or Iberian, returned to perplex my vision of a later Greece. I had seen a great deal but I was still an alien. It was not so long since these blue Attic hills had been poets' names to me. In England, of course, there were no temples, no broken lattice of temple-columns to show against the sky.

And by June it was getting hot. Already I had both fans working in my room at the Grande Bretagne: it was time to go. I cabled to Norton in London to ask him to find a flat for me, and one morning early in July I landed at Croydon and was in England again. It was like the old homecomings from school, warm enough and yet a little awkward because the scheme of values had changed and the struggle and the glory had been left like a dream

behind me. The gruff noise of common English was everywhere. I had lost something of my stature and something of my Imperial pride.

A sudden sense of time wasted drove me round to certain newspaper offices that same afternoon, and it was about six before I got to Norton's studio. I found him in the remembered chaos: broken chairs and a ragged wainscotting of framed, averted canvases. But it was good to be talking to him again, and in England. The first shyness would wear off.

"Have you seen Eve?" I asked at length, not because I was eager for the question, not because I wanted the answer to it, but because I feared that it might lie like a forbidden thought between us and become more painful with suppression.

"Yes, she's still in London."

"Do you see her to speak to?"

"Yes, I suppose so. I happened to introduce her to the man she mostly goes about with."

He mentioned a name which I did not recognise. It occurred to me that he had news to break and was wondering what to spare me. I could not endure that.

I asked something which did not come any easier for having been often in my mind:

"Is she his mistress?"

"Does that matter?" He smiled so that I saw his sympathy and his invitation to a broad, impersonal view. True or false, did it matter?

I still had friends who were concerned that I should not torture myself with uncertainty.

"What's he like?" I inquired only.

"A bit of a bounder perhaps."

"Eve hasn't the sensuality to be in love with a bounder for long."

But if I was to be saved from self-torture, I was to be saved also from self-conceit.

"How do you know?" he asked me.

"I don't know," I replied quickly and humbly. The instinctive conviction of my own rightness passed utterly away. I saw myself briefly scanned in the midst of thousands, a creature of wasteful inner commotions, egoistic without cause. I was in the mood for some great recantation. I felt a need of human love arising within me like a power.

"Norton."

"Yes?"

"Do you know where she lives?"

"Yes, she's got a place in Bedford Square."

"Will you come with me to see her?"

"You don't want me to come."

"Yes, I do. I want to go just casually. I don't want to suggest that I've got any claim upon her."

He said no at first. His idea was that a woman wanted either mastering or complete surrender. But I said that I was too tired for histrionics: I wasn't even sure that I should desire her still.

I only had the logician's craving for adjustment. Then he said that he would come, on condition that if she were in and willing to dine with me he should be allowed to make his excuses.

Once in the taxi, my heart began to beat with the certainty that for all my protestations I was going to desire her. But I rehearsed a studied calm, a formality of demeanour. I owed it to her to make the first advances but they should be tentative and retractile. "Are you happy?" I should ask, and affect satisfaction with the answer. Before long, before very long, I should know.

"She is out, sir."

It might have been "She is dead," so swift was my despair.

*

Norton had left me, after dinner, at the flat. "Two bedrooms, two sitting-rooms, kitchen, bathroom and convenience, delivered according to instructions"—I could still hear him hooting with delight. But a strange place mocks you as you call it your own. It is clean and homeless. It is bare in the midst of sumptuousness. I had almost cried, like a child, not to be left alone.

"To-morrow night we'll go out somewhere and you shall tell me about Greece." It was exactly the answer he might have given to a

child. Greece. Those island-shapes, their vigour, their incandescent day—how rich, how incommunicable! Dear body of youth, how soon they had dimmed behind me!

I had been leaning against the mantelpiece for some time, turning the clock round and possessed by an obstinate inaction, when I heard the outer door bell ring. It was late for the most enterprising of tradesmen. I supposed, though I scarcely dared to hope, that Norton had for some reason returned. I began to go to the door myself, but the concierge had already let him in and it was—one moment for recognition and another for belief—Aleko. I was stunned by coincidence.

"Since when have you been in England?"

"O, about a week ago. Father thought there might be some chance of breaking into the English market." He added detail as I questioned him.

He stood perhaps an inch taller than I, grown up and commercialised already.

"But how on earth did you find me?"

"I went to the *Morning Post*."

"That was unusually sagacious of you. Where are you staying? Not with friends?"

"It's a hotel my father had heard of. Holland Park way."

Two bedrooms, two sitting-rooms . . . It would have been the simplest thing in the world

to ask him to go shares with me. But I saw that I did not want to know very much of a young Greek-Italian in the fruit import business who spoke English a trifle thickly and would be apt to bring the daughters of Covent Garden into my household. Nobody looking at him now would suspect that his body was a living bronze and that he swam his own Southern seas with a breathless power and beauty.

I thought: I have lived long enough, having known one thing, that love hath an end.

"Will you come to lunch to-morrow?" I said.

"Yes, of course." He paused and made a grimace. "Do you remember in Catania when you said we ought to build something with our friendship? We made a pretty mess of it, didn't we?" He used a familiar Greek idiom for this last and I admired the way he implicated me.

"I have written a book," I replied ironically.

"Have you? A good one?"

"Bad, I expect," I said, "but that's for the critics to say."

And we talked of the Coliseum and the Underground, and when he had gone I wondered if I had not dreamed him. But no, I had watched the clock go from a quarter-to to half-past eleven and he had left gloves on his chair. I was merely sleepy—I had had those propellers

all morning and a hot afternoon in the City. . . . There was one more thing to be done before going to bed.

I clicked open my hand-bag and got out writing-paper.

July 5th, 1933.
12 *midnight.*

DEAR EVE,

My fourth sheet. My eyes won't stay open and I make the most absurd spelling mistakes.

I only got back to London to-day. I came about seven to see you but you were out. I had tried hard to hope to find you very happy. I can't write anything about myself because it sounds silly and I spell it wrong. But can I see you ?

I have forgotten my address but I will ask the concierge for it in the morning.

MARTIN.