Excerpt from

Blue Voyage

Conrad Aiken

⟨[Chapter III

Hay-Lawrence frowned his monocle into his left eye socket, stretching the left corner of his refined cruel mouth. A point of green handkerchief protruded from the checked breast pocket. The offensive plushy shoes—brown suede?—were neatly crossed under the table. Blue cuff edges showed, starched and sharp, at the sleeves, as he held out his brown lean hands.

"Which?" he said.

"Right," said Demarest, touching the right with light forefinger, refined and arch.

"Right is white," said Hay-Lawrence, replacing the white pawn and then the black. He turned the chessboard. Pawn to king four—Pawn to king four—Knight to king's bishop three—Knight to queen's bishop three. Bishop to knight five—Pawn to queen's rook three. Bishop to rook four . . .

"Ruy Lopez," murmured Hay-Lawrence haughtily.

"Ruy Lopez."

The Major, self-conscious, smiling, blushing, stepped over the sill with the Welsh Rarebit, one hand under her arm, his tweed cap and book in the other. The gray flat sea washed in with the opening door, was shut out hissing.

"*There's* a corner," he said, consciously a man of the world, conscious because he was from Murryville, Ohio.

"Where?" The Welsh Rarebit wiped her mouth. She peered cupidinously into the smoke.

"There." He lifted his book and cap. "Hello! The intelligentsia are exercising their brains."

"You flatter us," said Demarest. "Do you play?"

"Not often. I used to play a good deal in Constantinople—I knew an old Turk general who played a most awfully good game. He'd have been too good for me—if he hadn't constantly made howlers!" He twinkled, apologetic and vain.

"What is it?" said Peggy Davis, smiling with moist affection at Demarest and then with fleeting slyness at Hay-Lawrence. "Halma?"

"The Royal Game of Chess, Mrs. Davis! Shame on you. He he!" The Major giggled, wriggling.

"Royal crumbs!" croaked Peggy. "Let's sit down." They moved to the next corner, stiff-kneeing past the table edge, the Major putting his book down, then his cap on the book, then his pince-nez on his cap. Leaning his neat striped arms on the table he turned and inclined his flushed academic brow toward the Welsh Rarebit, pinkly and intimately. He began speaking in low tones. Malvolio smirked at them through the smoke, corkscrew in hand.

"God," swore Hay-Lawrence, "that woman gives me the pip . . . Did you ever see such a face in your life?"

Knight to bishop three he curved with lean fist.

"Is this the face that scuttled a thousand ships? Opened the sea cocks. It's that undershot wet lower lip that gets me," said Demarest, castling. "Can you imagine kissing it? Holy Smackerel! It glistens!"

"Good God! Don't suggest it: *cloaca maxima.* Accidental death by drowning would be the verdict at the inquest."

"No . . . suicide while of unsound mind."

Hay-Lawrence, smiling retrospectively, with slow-consuming satisfaction, lifted the king's bishop. To king two. A careful player, orthodox and gingerly. Rook to king square, Demarest moved delicately, conscious of Hay-Lawrence's sharp refinement and expensive dress. He must be, in England, well connected. Latent arrogance, and rudeness overlaid by good manners. Sloane Square—or a Sloane Square Mews? . . . Cheyne Walk? . . . Perhaps he had met Cynthia. There was something a little flashy about him, however. And the sort of refinement that invites coarseness in the beholder.

"She reminds me," Demarest refinedly grinned with one side of his mouth, "of the little song about the spittoon."

Out came the monocle.

"The spittoon? No! What is it?" The pawn in his paw went to queen's knight four. Back, bishop. Draw in your miter! To knight three.

"Say not spittoon . . . Nor cuspidor . . . Spit not too soon . . . Nor yet too far . . . Spit on the floor . . . Not on the wall . . . Or better yet . . . Spit not at all! . . ."

"Ha!" cried Hay-Lawrence. "Jolly good! Ha! Ha! Jolly good, that." He grinned the monocle back into his left eye. "Nor cuspidor!"

"It's very nice sung, but I can't sing . . . A doleful hymn tune."

The half-opened windows opposite, rising, scooped a rapid green evening sky; then slowly, forwardly, swooped again, scooping a nacreous cloud touched with flamingo. The evening would be cold and clear. Stars indistinguishable from mast lights. Seal up the shipboy's eyes. Imperious surge. One of the poker players began humming the tune of "My Little Gray Home in the West," then all began singing, furtively, fruitily sentimental. "Ante, boys," said the glass-eyed gambler evenly in the midst of it. The words dissolved, lowering, into an ululating hum, richly harmonized. *Ho-ome in the We-est.* Faubion. She came out of the West,

flamingo-winged, with eyes far apart, somber and absorbent. "Hello, you!" she cried, provocatively brushing past him with saucily jerked shoulders. The opera cape, flamingo-lined, streamed after her, billowing. "*Faubion!*" sang all the evening stars together. "Oh, Faubion!" they sang, strumming their psalteries of gold and chrysolite. Faubion, coming out of the West, unperturbed, darkly walked eastward on the dark waters, Napoleonic, sardonic, ironic, Byronic. And what of Cynthia, sleeping in the east, deep sleep of the undefiled? "*Cynthia!*" trilled the morning stars with diamond voices . . . And Smith, little gray homunculus, came out of the sunset, paddling furiously in his coracle, dipping now to left and now to right, birdlike nodding his cuckoo head as he paddled in the infinite. "*Faubion!*" he caroled—"*Coo-hoo Faubion! O Faubion!*" The paddled foam burst into trident flames to right and left as he coracled from wave to wave of the abyss. Phosphorescent foam dripped chrysolite from the paddles, from his fingers, from his drooped mustache; phosphor glowed on his arched eyebrows, outlining fierily his seriocomic eyes. "*Coo-hoo Faubion!*" he sang in tiny tenor, while behind him the evening stars drew together, blue cloak to cloak, psaltery against psaltery, their mountain shoulders touching, their eyes earnest and fiery. "Deep Faubion!" they diapasoned. "*Faubion in the lowest!*" . . .

"Say not spittoon," murmured Hay-Lawrence, and pushed the queen's pawn to queen three with three tiny pushes of a clean finger nail. Again orthodox and safe. The queen's knight undefended—but mobile. Queen Faubion—the black queen; Queen Cynthia,—white as the moon; and King Caligula, corrupt and lecherous monarch, ripe Camembert of kings. "I would that all the Roman people had but one neck." Was that a castration complex? . . . Ah—that dream this afternoon during his nap. The asphyxiated baby in the railroad station. Horrible and strange; for as he worked over it (the Schafer method) pressing with merciful palms the small back to induce breathing, regarding the small blue neck and wondering at the parents who had so casually abandoned it on a railway platform, he suddenly noticed that the head was not a head but a—— A spasm of disgust . . . Sleepless Caligula, much troubled by dreams, dreamed nightly that a figure, —a form—a shape—vague and terrifying and representing the ocean—came to him speaking. This was why he had bidden his army to collect sea shells, as trophies of his victory over the sea. Pawn to queen bishop three was the move. His horse, Incitatus, he had intended to make consul. What form to represent the sea? Seaweed-bearded, arms of green water and fingers of foam; coral-branching; eyes wide, hollow, glaucous, where phosphor bubbled slow-winking, blue and lemon-yellow, vitreous, moon-mocking. And the voice? The dithering crack of two boulders smitten together under the sea? The short cruel resonance of submarine bells? The skirling lollop of a wave running vortical into a dripping cavern, weed-hung, wagging anguishedly like a tongue against the horny barnacled palate, and then out again, inarticulately noisy? "*Oo-wash-oo-wallop-are-you-awake-King Buskin?*" . . . "Attendants! What ho! Attendants—lights!" . . . Sweating, staring, Caligula started up. Two frightened attendants, with torches, ran in, kneeling. "Is Pyrallis the prostitute there? Sleeping? Wake her and bring her in! Wake also Valerius." . . . "My

lord?" said Pyrallis . . . "Ah, Pyrallis, such a nightmare I have had!—you would not believe it. That wave again, with eyes, but no face. What can it signify?" . . . "Wine for supper, my lord." . . . "Ah, Pyrallis—a throat so lovely—to cut when I like! Shall I cut it, to discover the secret of its loveliness? I have told Caesonia that I will vivisect her, so as to find out why I love her" . . . Pyrallis cringed, frightened, at the look in the goat's eyes. If she said, "Yes, vivisect her," might he not—cruel madman and pervert—vivisect herself? . . . "Let me soothe you, my lord," said Pyrallis . . . Black slaves hoisted a canopy of purple. And Valerius, running out to weep in the street—listen, good Romans and you shall hear of the midnight ride of poor Valere!—that mysterious Catullus Valerius rag.

"The climate?" said the Major, in a pause during which the poker players arranged and examined their cards. "Delightful. Hot in the middle of the day, but you retire for a nap . . . There! those are the stone stairs I told you about. Look at the size of them. Each step two feet high. It's a humorous custom there to take ladies to see them. You let the lady go first, and if you loiter a step or two below—*he he!* That's Mrs. Grant, wife of one of the officials. A jolly good sport. *She* didn't give a damn—and didn't wear any petticoat either! . . . I stayed behind, admiring the view . . ." He laughed at the Welsh Rarebit with scarlet forehead; his face, flushed with invitation, moving jerkily upward and downward. The Welsh Rarebit, holding the photograph in one hand, regarded the invitation snakily; with an air of stupid appraisal. Then she squeezed his wrist.

"Naughty man!" she crooned.

"Well, boys," sang the glass-eyed poker player. "I think I'll have a look at this. There's fifty, and I'll raise it ten. It's a great life if you don't weaken."

Hay-Lawrence brooded downward with cheeks sunk upon fists. Thought was moving in his brain. Like a train in a dark subway. A red spark coming nearer through the darkness, gliding round curves. Other thoughts too, going in other directions—he was listening to the voices in the room, listening to the half-excluded sound of sea, the thrum of the engines which vibrated his English body. What else? A brass telescope at Cowes; three pairs of white flannels; four pairs of white shoes; tea on the lawn with Lady Daphne Twinkleplume (slightly literary) followed by a week on his little shoot in Wales. At home, his neurotic wife, Gladys, sitting by the fire, looking out of the darkening window on which long bright gashes of rain began to glisten, looking into the gloom of a London dusk, then again sitting by the fire, shivering. Tea at five. Vivien had sailed from Cartagena. He had sailed from Rio. He had sailed (a postcard said) from Panama. He was sailing (a cable said) from New York. The maid was taking Ching (the Pekingese) for a walk round Sloane Square and perhaps as far as Harrods. She ought to have known it would rain. "Vivien, tell me, why is it you go away so much? Why are you always going away to sea? leaving me alone?" "Are we going to discuss that again?" "I can't stand it, Vivien —I can't stand it . . . and all my friends saying——" "Let them talk. Tell them it's doctor's orders. Always tell them that. It's doctor's orders that I should go to sea, and go to sea alone. Would you like me to go mad?"

Knight to queen's rook four, the black horse taken firmly by the ears.

"This is the part of the game where I always go wrong," said Hay-Lawrence.

Exchange the bishop for the knight? No. Concentrate on the center—then the queen's pawn forward. Bishop back, out of reach, to bishop two.

"The part where I invariably go wrong," murmured Hay-Lawrence lifting his queen's bishop's pawn to bishop four. Pawn attack on the queen's side—not too difficult to dispose of. Hay-Lawrence was human, after all—began shrinking to commensurable proportions. Refinement without taste, intelligence without originality. From either vantage point, one could probably intimidate him; for he was intelligent enough to know his weaknesses and weak enough to be snobbish, to want to make a good impression. Silberstein, for all his vulgarity, had ruffled him and put him at a disadvantage. "Why shouldn't *I*?" thought Demarest, secretly smiling. "*The Duke of Clarence, my partner.*" Pawn to queen four. Moses Caligula Silberstein. Solomon Caligula. Did Jael: with a nail: pierce the *viscera:* of Sisera? No, his head! He is dead . . . Caligula in Italian sunset under a purple canopy, on which flashed the eagle: Veronese, crouching in the dark foreground, saw the scene. The wide eye of Veronese saw the royal canopy, saw the black hand that drew the curtain, watched the distance brightening among the hills. The cold, precise, lavish hand of Veronese took possession of these things; but it lacked madness . . . Again: *King Caligula, setting forth; after a seven days' meditation; marched his army a parasang north; and in the evening took his station: on a green hilltop peaked and gleaming: in the last slant of Alban sun. Black slaves hoisted a canopy of purple—to hue the vision of the godlike one* . . . The movement too jaunty altogether—but no matter. Let it go—let it come—let it blossom and die. Why did it blossom, though, out of the massive face, dead white brow, and cruel eyes of Silberstein? . . . *There, as he slept, he had his vision:* but what was the vision? Elysian, fountain, mountain—threadbare rhymes, but let them serve. *There as he slept he had his vision: candles burned by the sacred fountain; sadly he walked, through a twilight Elysian, and came to the wall of the laureate mountain.* (Why laureate?) *Bathe your heart in the lustral water* (a voice, this was—a voice on the air, out of a grotto, out of a tree) *until like silver it burns and shines* (pleonastic), *and lo from the sky comes heaven's tall daughter—down from a star—by a stair of vines. Seven ripe peaches, from the walls of heaven*—not six, not eight, but seven. The Pleiades. Mystical seven. The seven moles on Juno's back. The seven stages in the life of man. The dance of the seven veils. Come sevcn—come eleven; everything at sixes and sevens. SEVEN. The word was extraordinarily beautiful, had a balance analogous to the balanced rhythm of the number itself—seven digits, of which the second was the s and the sixth the N. NEVES: Eno, owt, eerht, ruof, evif, xis, neves. A less emphatic series, but decidedly more interesting as sound, more varied. Queen to bishop two. Yes. He might have withdrawn the knight, however—to knight two. No—a pawn given up. The king's knight to queen two, then? That might have been better? . . .

"Oo, no—certn'y *not!*" cried the Welsh Rarebit with all-embracing archness, loudly and proudly.

"Why not?" The Major leaned forward over clasped fingers. His eyes, without the pince-nez, were beginning to look strained—but he liked his brown eyes to be seen. He had probably been told that their effect was fatal. They twinkled, small, dark and bright, shy yet challenging, attractive in spite of (perhaps partly because of) their boyish vanity.

Peggy lifted her black-and-white striped coat collar against the side of her face as if she were taking the veil. Over this she swerved green eyes at him, upward. Then lowered the long lashes and looked away. An expression of practiced fright—yet perhaps there was some faint survival of genuine feeling in it. The Major, still gazing at her, as she did not reply, gave the little crisp musical giggle (very appealing) with which he was accustomed to fill in awkward pauses; and cast a quick glance over the small room to see if he were being observed. When his eye met Demarest's, he looked sharply away, preened his mustache briskly with thumb and finger, then leaned, flagrantly confidential, toward the Welsh Rarebit and said something inaudible, gravely. Peggy ululated, lifting her throat. The crumpled handkerchief was pressed against her lamia mouth.

"She drinks blood, that trollop," said Demarest.

"Who? Oh . . . Can I look?"

"No. The Major has his eye on us . . . The Major's a fast worker, as the saying is."

As the saying is. He had added this phrase for fear Hay-Lawrence might suppose him to use slang unconsciously—a disgusting cowardice! "Yet I feel, somehow, that the Major will play safe, oh, very, very safe." Queen's knight to queen two. "With masks and buttons—a friendly bout, no injuries, and a sweet heartache, not too severe, at farewell."

"He's welcome," muttered Hay-Lawrence, not looking up; unexpectedly severe. Something unconquerable in him after all. He scowled at the chessboard. Knight to queen's bishop three—retreat, confound him—he must be beaten; beaten thoroughly, but with inexpressive modesty, not to say apathy.

"I wouldn't touch her with a tent pole," Hay-Lawrence added. Hay-Lawrence with a tent pole, walked sedately, haughtily. The Welsh Rarebit darted before him, twittering. Spare me, Clarence! . . . Damn silly . . . Pawn to queen five: *Now*—move your blasted knight again—move it, damn you! And hurry up.

"Damn it, why don't they open the bar?" Hay-Lawrence was angry. "Absurd to keep us waiting like this. Steward?" A commanding finger.

Malvolio, languidly smiling, took four steps; steadying himself *en route* against a chair back.

"Yes, sir."

"When does the bar open?"

"Seven o'clock. Not till seven on Sunday. Ten minutes yet, sir."

"What's yours, Demarest?"

"Mine? Oh—double Scotch."

"Bring up a double Scotch and a port flip, as soon as you open."

"Double Scotch and a port flip."

"Utterly absurd on a ship . . . Absurd enough on land." Scowling he lifted the knight, held it a moment in air, choosing a landing place, then

deposited it on the queen's knight's square. Home again. Black was beginning to be bottled up uncomfortably. Malvolio tapped at the bar window, which was opened an inch.

"A port flip, to come at seven."

"What's that to me? I can't do anything without the keys, can I?"

"The gentleman wants it as soon as you open . . ."

Seven again—the mystic number. S for seven and Silberstein—Silverstone. Good morning, Silverstone! . . . Now to break open that queen's side—a Caesarean operation—Caesarean tactics. Very simple. Pawn to queen's rook four—that was it—that would do it. Afterward the knight could get through. That is, if Hay-Lawrence, as he expected, moved the knight's pawn . . . Those fingers of his, so damnably refined, poised, clustered, above the pawn—like Cynthia's. Not really like Cynthia's; but they belonged, somehow, to the same constellation. Cynthia, pondering over the chessboard, frowning, poising her fingers thus—stately, reserved, leaning forward for a moment out of a world so remote from his own, stepping down for a moment from her heavenly treasure house, with a star on her finger, to move the king on the board and then reascend—yes, *heaven's tall daughter . . . Seven ripe peaches from the walls of heaven, she holds in her hands. Bright, in her hair, the Pleiades glow: the Fireflies seven, shine above her eyes and her forehead is fair . . . Angels follow her; gravely, slowly; with silver and vermilion and rainbow wings . . . One, more luminous—lost in his own light—sits on a cherry tree bough, and sings: Blest be the marriage betwixt earth and heaven!* Cynthia's fingers moved the knight's pawn to knight five. Ah! Cynthia—not so skillful as usual! You will be checkmated, Cynthia,—or else you'll resign . . . That first game they had had on the *Silurian*—when he had fetched the board from the smoking room. She had received it with delighted surprise—with what a lighting up of her face! "Why, where did you get this? Is it yours?" . . . And the book. He had been carrying the book under his arm when Billington stopped him and introduced him to her. "I've found a chess player for you!" he had cried fatuously. "Miss Battiloro, may I introduce Mr. Demarest? Mr. Demarest has been looking everywhere for a chess player . . ." Then Billington had disappeared . . . The astonishment, the incredulity, on finding himself thus introduced to *her*, whom he had been avoiding for three days! He had been excited, frightfully excited. What was it, about her, that had so agitated him from the outset, when he had seen her climb up the gangway, slowly, then turn about on the deck—flinging the brown scarf end over her shoulder—to wait for her companion? The obscure shock had gone through him at once, as he watched her from the deck above—gone through him like a tidal wave of the blood . . . She, then—he had said to himself—is the one I must escape! I must keep away from her . . . This had not been difficult; for the simple reason that she had, from the beginning, produced a peculiar change in him: She had made him shy, she had stripped him of his defenses, she had taken ten years from his age and made him again a callow and awkward youth of seventeen. The thought of talking with her simply terrified him. And then, from the blue, the introduction! . . . And regarding the title of the book, when he had put it down on the deck beside

her, she had said—"That's *lovely*, isn't it! Don't you like it?" . . . The effect of this commonplace remark had been overwhelming. Its nature, the nature of the magic, was dual; for first it was the slender beauty of her voice, which everywhere broke through and into him; and then it was the swift revelation, no less intoxicating, that she had a "mind."—The two perceptions came upon him together, came like the opening of the sky for a bewilderingly beautiful confusion of music. He was done for; and he knew it instantly . . . Pawn to rook five . . . Hay-Lawrence castled, not pausing to think. Now, then—knight to bishop four! *This* would make him think . . . Six bells from the brass clock on the fluted wall—*tan-tan; tan-tan; tan-tan.* The bar window opened with a bang, the bartender withdrawing a white linen arm. Malvolio stepped nimbly, ingratiatingly, with the tray.

"Double Scotch and a port flip," he smirked.

"Oporto fleep," grimaced Hay-Lawrence.

"To fornication," said Demarest.

"To crime," said Hay-Lawrence.

"No, sir," nasally boomed the glass-eyed poker player. "This is on me. Waiter! One minute. Now, gentlemen, give it a name and let it rest. You, what'll it be? Bass? Guinness? Double Scotch? . . . Well, then, three Basses, two double Scotches, and a Guinness . . . God, I'm as thirsty as a camel . . . If you'd 'a' come in, my boy, with that pair of tens, you'd have been sunk so deep they'd never have found you . . . that's the time I *wasn't* bluffing."

"There's much to be said for strong drink," murmured Demarest, filling his glass. "Aha! The Major is giving a little party . . ."

"Two Martinis," Malvolio was saying, while he regarded the Welsh Rarebit with a loitering eye. He clearly felt that he had more right to her than the Major had—he knew her level. This made the Welsh Rarebit uneasy. She was uncertain whether to be friendly or rude. Consequently she was both, alternately. Queen's knight to queen two . . . Hm . . . not so bad. Better threaten the queen's rook pawn? Queen to king two . . . For goodness' sake don't hold the door open like that! Someone outside was holding it open, and the night air, cold and full of sea sound, galloped round the smoky room. Silberstein stepped over the brass, cigar in hand, and lazily, leisurely, serenely, greenly, surveyed the lighted roomful of people. Oh! Silberstein. Sorry, Silberstein, didn't know . . . Annoyed with me, are you, for keeping the door open? Run home and tell your mother. Tell her a boy bigger than you hit you. Bury your blubbering whelp's face in her apron and bawl. I know you, you damned little coward and sneak and tattletale . . . Silberstein saw them and came toward them slowly, with unchanging expression. Something flippant must be prepared for him. Something smubtle . . .

"Well, Dook, is he trimming you? I'll bet you two drinks New England will beat you."

"Don't call me *Dook!*"

"Oh, all right, all right, Clarence—keep your shirt on . . . Ha! This was a Ruy Lopez . . . And Black, as they say in the books, has a seriously compromised position."

"He's clever," murmured Demarest. "He knows we're playing chess."

"Chest," corrected Silberstein. "In the army they call it chest."

"What army?" Hay-Lawrence scowled.

"The Grand Army of the Republic."

"I'm surprised they ever heard of it," said Hay-Lawrence.

"That's all you know, is it . . ." Silberstein leaned backward against the settee back, half standing, half sitting. He expanded his chest, lazily, narrowing his eyes. "My boy, the best checker players in the world are in the American army. They know all the numbers."

"Checkers! What the devil is checkers?"

"Never heard of checkers? No?"

"The same as drafts," simpered Malvolio; "they often ask me for checkers . . . You wanted something, sir?"

"Yes, will you repeat, gentlemen?"

"Not I, thanks," said Hay-Lawrence.

"Two double Scotches, then . . . You don't mind if I watch, do you? Of course not. Everybody likes an audience."

Hay-Lawrence pondered, brown right forefinger lying on ruddy right cheek. With the other hand he revolved his *oporto fleep*. He was annoyed. Liberties were being taken with him by one who was not a gentleman. A frosty silence. A pity to have the game spoiled, nevertheless. If one could only keep separate the things one liked! Bawdy conversation with Silberstein—chess or literary conversation with Hay-Lawrence. Philately with the Major. With Smith—what with Smith? Poor old Smith. I wonder who's kissing him now? Where is our wandering Smith tonight? Pawing her dresses in his stateroom: like the fawn. M-m-m-heliotrope!

"Go away, man! How can I think with you sitting there, a mass of expert knowledge?"

"Go away? Not by a damn sight. I came here to drink."

Rook to knight square. So: Hay-Lawrence would fight for command of this file. Bishop to queen three. Attack the rook's pawn. Can he save it?

"How!" said Demarest.

"*Gesundheit*," said Silberstein. "While he's thinking how to save his little goy—Christians, that's what they call them on the East Side, where they used to play you for a nickel a game—I rise to remark that there's a clairvoyant on this ship . . . A full-fledged clairvoyant. I dug him out from under a palm tree in the second-class dining saloon, where he was deep in the *Occult Weekly* or the *Mystic Monthly*, or some such thing—horoscopes on every page and ectoplasms running all over the place. Clairvoyant *and* clairaudient,—he's a wizard! You've got to take your hat off to him. A most peculiar specimen. And full of bright little predictions. 'You,' he said to me, after one look at my hand, and a glance at my left eye—'are hoping to sell chewing gum in England.' How did he guess it?"

"Too easy," said Demarest. "Probably your bedroom steward."

"You may be right, you may be right; the usual method—find out in advance. And easy enough on a ship. He also observed, sadly, that there would be a death on this ship. Not so cheerful, that. Who's elected? A chance for a pool. The dead man wins."

"Well—does he say how he'll die?"

"Murder." Silberstein was placid, but stared a little.

"Murder? On this ship? He's off his head." Hay-Lawrence sipped his flip. A signet ring on the fourth finger

"This grows interesting," said Demarest. "Also of personal concern."

"It does . . . He felt something wrong with the ship when he got in—something wrong with the ship's aura."

"I noticed that myself. Especially in that corridor beside the kitchen!"

"Then last night he had a nightmare. He woke up thinking someone was in his room, turned on the light—no one. Looked out in the hall—not a soul. Everybody asleep. Then he remembered his dream. An old man with a hole in his head, walking toward him, stretching out his hands—in his pajamas, he was—as if asking for something.'

"An old man? That lets *me* out," said Demarest.

"And me," Hay-Lawrence sighed. Rook to king square . . . Bishop to queen two, Demarest moved smiling. All as anticipated.

"An interesting question. He says he's sure to recognize the victim—hasn't seen him yet. When he *does* see him, ought he to tell him? If so, what?"

"He's cuckoo," said Demarest. "No harm if he *did*."

"Would *you* like to be told?"

Silberstein stared with lazy penetration, his eyes cruel, at Demarest. A shiver went up Demarest's backbone and coldly, slowly, flowered phosphorescent in his skull. Singular! No, he wouldn't. Not by a damn sight. Another shiver, more fleeting, followed the first. He felt it also down the front of his arms. Death. Murdered at sea. Demarest dead, with a hole in his head. A murder at sea—why was the idea so peculiarly exciting and mysterious? *Blood—blood—blood*—throbbed the ship's engines. A pale steward creeping along the corridor. Two bells. The steward threw something white over the side. His white linen jacket—bloodstained. An inspection next day—"Tompkins, where's your jacket?" . . . "Burned, sir." "Burned? How was it burned?" "Well you see, sir, I was smoking, and . . ." The knife discovered; a cook's knife from the kitchen. Usually a belaying pin. Or one of those red axes hanging in the corridors *For Use in Case of Fire*.

"Gives me the creeps," said Demarest. "What else did Jeremiah say?"

"Jeremiah, as a matter of fact, is a fatalist—that's funny, isn't it? Says he never interferes, even when he knows, because it's sure to happen anyway, and the knowledge merely adds to the victim's misery. Nice, isn't it? . . . It occurred to me that it might be me. Why not? I'm not young. Maybe somebody has discovered that I've got a trunkful of chewing gum under my bed. Maybe it's Jeremiah himself who'll be the murderer."

"Nothing more probable," said Hay-Lawrence. "If you don't shut up and let me think, I'll murder you myself."

"Don't be snotty, Clarence. Remember the freedom of the seas."

He took the pawn. Demarest retaliated. Bishop to bishop square moved Hay-Lawrence—to free the rook.—Was Silberstein making up all this yarn of the clairvoyant? "*Well? It convinces you? It sounds fairly circumstantial?*" Yes—it was circumstantial.

"Who is this bird?" he said, lifting the king's rook to the knight square.

"Clark, Seward Trewlove Clark, from California. Unitarian minister,

clairvoyant and clairaudient. Smokes a kind of herb tobacco which looks like confetti and smells like hell. Turns in his toes when he walks, and is only four feet high."

"You've made a careful study of him. Does he wear B.V.D.'s? Boston garters?"

"A hair shirt, probably . . . Are you castin' asparagus on my story? Are you—as they say—questioning my veracity, Mr. Demarest? Have a cigar."

"Not in the least . . . Thanks; I'll smoke it after dinner . . ."

"Oh, he's full of it. Astrology, mediums, trances, crystals, table rappings, and the cold and slimy ectoplasm. Who knows? It may be an ecoplastic murder . . . Hello! Is that our friend the Major? Getting his hand in already, is he? Fie."

"Easy money," murmured Hay-Lawrence.

Silberstein, turtle-faced, impassive, watched the Major with reptile eyes.

"Check!" said Hay-Lawrence, taking the rook.

"Check, says he." Demarest recaptured the queen's rook. How much of the game was Silberstein taking in? A good deal probably. He had seen that Hay-Lawrence was uncomfortably placed, and that his vanity was suffering. This "check" too—no doubt Silberstein saw it to be partly histrionic. Hay-Lawrence stared, flushed, at the pieces, fists on cheeks. Then, frowning, he moved the bishop to knight two. The conception of defeat. *Blood—blood—blood*—throbbed the engines, impersonating the furies. How delightful, this discovery of Caligula's about the clairvoyant! Just the sort of thing he *would* unearth. One could see him coldly and implacably questioning the little fool—taking off his very B.V.D.'s. "You believe in these things, do you, Mr. Clark?" "Yes." "Well, I don't: but I shall be interested to hear any evidence you have to offer. Speak up—don't be frightened—I'm listening!" . . . "We must go forward with caution, reverence and hope," replied the clairvoyant . . . Now, then, knight to knight six—and the crisis arises. My horse for a kingdom. Hay-Lawrence stared, immobile, an expression of stupor, or perhaps terror, in the fixed unseeing eyes: loss of psychic distance. One could almost hear the blood hammering at his temples—gush, clang, throb, thrum, pound, pulse, boom. *Blood—blood—blood*—sang the furies. Hay-Lawrence is doomed. Hay-Lawrence is being done to death. Demarest is murdering him, murdering him in little on a chessboard. There lies Hay-Lawrence, disguised as fourteen pieces (still living) and two pieces (dead) dispersed on a checkered board, fighting for his life. There Demarest, disguised as fourteen pieces, articulated like the adder, coils, hisses and straightly strikes. Death in miniature. Death in a cobweb. Was there a tear in Vivien's left eye? No—the reflection of a light in the rondure of the monocle. A tear falling in Vivien's heart, like the reflection of a moving light, tiny, down a lacquered edge—the cold secret tear of a nobleman, falling remotely and soundlessly. Miss Gadsby, of Andover. "Why do people come to me in their trouble? It is strange. They come—they come. There was the case of Henry Majoribanks, only last month. He telegraphed from Chicago—or was it St. Louis?—to say that he was coming. When he came he walked straight into the drawing room, where I was sitting, knelt before me without a word, and buried his face in

my lap. I put my hands on his head. 'What is it, Henry?' I said. He wept —for five minutes he wept, shaken by sobs. Then, without a word, he rose and went away—went back to Chicago, or St. Louis . . . Why? . . . What is it in me that is so unconsciously beneficient, so comforting, so healing? I am only an ordinary woman. Why should Henry—whom I have never known very intimately—come all the way from Little Rock—to weep in my lap? Tears from the depths of some divine despair! . . . Yet I am grateful for this gift which God has given me, even though I cannot wholly understand it . . . They come to me for solace . . ." Knight to knight square, moved Hay-Lawrence, the murdered man.

"You're sunk," sighed Silberstein. "See you later, gentlemen. I now struggle into a stiff shirt."

"Good riddance," said Hay-Lawrence. "He's an interesting chap but he *can* be a damned nuisance."

"He has a strange effect on me," said Demarest, moving the bishop to knight five. "What is it, in such a man, that disturbs one's balance so extraordinarily?"

"Thick-skinnedness."

"Partly, perhaps. But something more. Is it his massive confidence, rock-like integrity? I lose, in his presence, my own integrity entirely. I feel as if I have no personality at all. Or rather, I feel that my own personality is only a complement of his—and I catch myself actually trying to demonstrate this to him—trying to be as like him as possible. Such occurrences make one wonder whether one has any more personality than a chameleon . . . I have, afterward, a weary and disgusted sensation—as of having wagged too much an ingratiating tail."

Hay-Lawrence gleamed. He placed the king's bishop at king two.

"By Jove, that's perfectly true. I know people who affect me like that . . . My father always did . . . So does my doctor."

"Well, boys, later on," sang the glass-eyed poker player. He pocketed two packs of cards. They trooped out, whistling and singing. Cold air from the sea door. Bishop takes knight? No—next time. Queen to knight two.

"It doesn't seem to make much difference," Hay-Lawrence resignedly murmured. "Suppose I advance the rook's pawn." Pawn to rook three. Now —bishop takes knight! Hay-Lawrence dies slowly. A caterpillar attacked by ants. Then bishop takes bishop. A piece will be gained? Knight back to bishop four—the bishop twice attacked. Ten to one he advances the rook to king two—he does. Queen to knight six: the *coup de grâce* . . .

"Oh—well! I'll hide the bishop in the rook's corner . . . No—*that's* no good . . . Suppose I exchange queens?"

"Queen takes queen and rook takes queen," said Demarest, suiting the action to the word.

"Absolutely nothing I can do—I surrender."

"I'm afraid you've lost a piece—whatever you do . . ."

"Yes. Thanks very much. We'll have another some time . . . Has the bugle blown?"

"I think so."

Why "think so"? He knew it had. They descended the red stairs to the dining saloon. The orchestra was beginning the *Blue Danube*: and the

music rose to meet them, mixed with a confused sound of voices and dishes. The palm trees trembled, swayed slowly trembling, in the bright light from pearly ceiling lights. Pink curtains were drawn over all the portholes save one, which yawned black, night-engulfing. A hundred faces feeding as one. Stewards running soft-footed on the stinking carpets, dishes clattering, dishes chirruping, trays clanging—all interwoven, pouring, with the *Blue Danube*. The pale pianist, with frayed and spotted sleeves, smiled wearily at the score, *tum-tum*: the girl-faced flute player hooked his lip, uncous lip, over the flute, and eyed Demarest mournfully, *tootle-too*. *Blaue Donau*. Should he tell Hay-Lawrence Wagner's remark? . . . "My God, what a melody! . . . But—*Jesus Christ!* what orchestration . . ." No, too noisy, not the right moment for it. Save it up. *Da*, die, dee, *dum*:—die—*dum*: die *dee* . . . Anita. He always, when a kid, at dances, danced the *Blue Danube* with Anita. Her odd, delicious laugh, which ended in an inbreathing bubble, like the bubbling of a starling! Darling starling. Darling, hoydenish, long-legged Anita. *Down from a star by a stairway of vines*. That Sunday in the rain by the pond. "But *William*, you don't seem to *think* anything about *marriage!* Do you?" Then the streetcar in the rain, the rain-soaked curtain blowing against their backs; flap, flap. Rejected. Was he heartbroken? Surprised at being able to eat a good dinner at Memorial Hall. "Where are my waffles, Sam Childers?" "On de fire, suh—waffles on de fire."

"Good evening, Mr. Barnes—Good evening, Miss Dacey—Good evening, Mrs. Faubion—Good evening, father."

"All right for *you*, Mr. Demarest!" Mrs. Faubion, mournful and reproachful, mock angry.

"For me? What have *I* done?"

He dived, laughing into the somber eyes, which darkened maliciously to receive him . . . Swimming. I swim, you swim, he or she swims. We swim, you swim—the rich sardonic mouth tearing bread.

"Oh, I know what you've done. And *you* know *too*."

"Cross my heart and hope I die . . . Not guilty. I appeal."

She cut her meat savagely. Roast beef *au jus*, underdone, in watery gules. Green and celluloid cabbage. Barnes was drinking black stout. Jingle, went Daisy's bangle.

"The little girl's in a bad temper, tonight," said Smith, lowering his voice. "I wouldn't let her have the dress she wanted . . ." Then louder—"Who's your dressmaker, Madam?"

"*You* be *careful!*"

"Careful! Reckless is my middle name."

"Water, Miss Dacey?"

"Oo thank you, Mr. Barnes." Titter, titter.

"Walking right by me like that!"

"Never!"

"You did! On the deck this afternoon. And I was alone."

"You don't ask me to believe *that*, do you? Alone!"

"Where was Australia?" said Smith. "How come?"

"I'm not talking to *you*, Mr. Smith. I'm talking to your *son*."

"Oh! . . . God."

"Sixpenny fine, Mr. Smith. Swearing at meals." Mr. Barnes serenely peeped over the tilted stout.

Da dee die *dum*—die *dum:* die *dee.*—Anita looked over the silver-spangled white fan, long-leggedly, gracefully gliding, the green irises of her eyes irregularly flecked, gold-flecked, the pupils dark and—witty. "I thought you were *afraid* of dances! . . . I believe it's all a pretense!" . . . That lesson in the dining room. "You don't hold me *tightly* enough—that's the trouble!" And the peal of laughter, bubbling, inbreathing. Her *Empire* gown—high-waisted, white, like the Empress what's-her-name, standing at the top of the stairs—stairs of alabaster. Sorosis; Sesostris. "But she's *nervous*—very highly strung," Anita's mother had said. "Ever since her operation" . . . Well, what of it? Why did she eye him (knitting) so meaningfully? Ah—! she had meant to warn him off. Die *dum*—die *dee* . . . *Da* dee die *dum*—Faubion was looking at him rather hard—but as if she were not quite focusing her attention—no, she was beginning to smile, but obviously the sort of smile which is an answer to a smile—it must be for someone behind him. He turned his head—it was Australia, the Romantic Young Man, who was now in the act of passing the water bottle. A well-dressed, vapid young man with a high collar and a high color; he was a little too self-conscious, elaborately polite, a shade too much of the traveling salesman's genuflectory manner. "Swipey—I don't like this cat—he's too swipey." O God that word—how fond of it Aunt Maud had been, and how terribly her choice of it lighted that part of her vulgarity which he had always hated. There must be the same stratum buried somewhere in himself, of course—or his disgust would not have been so intemperate. Where had he got it? No—he was damned if he had it! It must have been a natural dislike—that element in Aunt Maud's sensibility (or lack of it) had done him a violence from the beginning. What could so have poisoned her? Her mind, her character, her outlook blackly poisoned:—a savage coprophily, a necessity for dwelling on the foulness of things. Well—he did this himself! but not surely in the same unclean way. Aunt Maud's perceptions were somehow septic. A septic sceptic. Himself, an aseptic sceptic. Tut tut . . . This was probably completely wrong. More likely it was simply Aunt Maud's lack of sensibility—a failure to perceive things clearly, to make fine distinctions? A bitter and unbridled woman.

"Penny for your thoughts," said Faubion.

"The fleshpots of Egypt," said Demarest swiftly. Why? Faubion = fleshpot.

"What! . . ."

Smith shook sadly his close-cropped gray head.

"Eating *this* dinner, he thinks of fleshpots! . . . No. Give me a Creole chicken dinner. Okra soup."

"Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, where we sat by the fleshpots . . . For we, alas, the Fleshpots love . . . Man cannot live by bread alone."

"Shame!" cried Fleshpot. A flaming shame.

"It's all the Bible I know."

"Did you go to church this morning?" A finger uplifted, schoolteacherly.

"Certainly not. I played bridge."

"Bridge! Oo aren't we swell," Daisy derisively caroled.

"He's got too much brains," said Smith. "He plays chess, too . . . But I beat him at drafts just the same, didn't I?"

"You did."

"Got to hand it to the old man! . . . Chess is an old lady's game. I don't like chess. Let the old ladies play it. But I'll beat you at checkers any time. Yes, sir, I'm all right at checkers."

"And what do *you* play, Mr. Barnes?" Daisy Dacey wriggled, jingled, slanted her long white face, and wide blue eyes, leaning against the tablecloth with phthisic breast. Mr. Barnes, tolerant, slow-smiling, with slow-burning eyes of amusement, looked down at the proffered head. Herod and Salome.

"Golf," he said.

Daisy was disconcerted. Golf! What the devil was golf? She smiled a weak smile, too elastic, and looked sadly forgetful—Ophelia straying by the stream. Let me Ophelia pulse! There's rosemary—that's for remembrance. Wan, and oh so wistful. Weak, and oh so helpless. But no pansies—ah no: for never a thought had she. Straying with little white feet among the lilies. Oh, pity me, a shopworn Ophelia! Come and find me where I wander at twilight, sadly singing, or perchance weeping, among the cowslips! Put your strong arm around me, and hold me, hold me! Don't let me remember—O God, don't let me remember! . . . When I was thirteen. It was dreadful! . . . and I trusted him . . . Have you read the Rosary? . . . Where the cowslips, there slip I.

". . . a clairvoyant," Faubion was soberly saying.

"You don't say," said Smith. "Where?"

"Under the middle window, at the end of the table." Window equals porthole.

A little mournful sallow face, dark-eyed and shy. A hurt and frightened little victim, eating stiffly.

"Yes," said Demarest. "Silberstein was telling me about him."

"What did he say? Is he a real one?"

"Don't ask me! He told Silberstein that he's going to England to sell chewing gum—which was correct. He's also a clairaudient."

"Clairaudient! What's that?" Her dark eyes are wide and serious. Melodiously fluting.

"He hears things—at a distance. Voices. Probably hears what we're saying about him."

"Don't be silly! . . . I think they're all fakes." She looked witheringly toward the meek little clairvoyant.

"You can't fool *her*," said Smith. "She's from Missouri."

"He predicts," said Demarest, "a murder, on this ship."

Daisy Dacey gave a little screech, pressing her hands together. A crumb of gorgonzola shot from her mouth into Mr. Barnes's tumbler. She slapped a hand against her mouth, too late.

"Oh!" she cried, blushing. "Mr. Barnes! I'm so sorry!"

"Quite natural, I'm sure," said Mr. Barnes. "Worse things might have happened, under the circumstances! A little upsetting to hear a murder predicted, what? . . ." He lowered his left lid at Demarest. Poor Pol.

"An old man came to him in a dream—an old man, pardon me—wearing pajamas; he had a hole in his head. He stretched out his hands to the clairvoyant, as if beseeching . . . The clairvoyant jumped out of his bunk—and probably bumped his head—thinking there was someone in the room. He turned on the light, and of course there was no one. But he says he'll recognize the man when he sees him . . . Father!"

"*Don't* call me father! . . . What."

". . . . Nothing . . . A goose walked over my grave. I think it must be *me* . . ."

Why conceal it? He had suddenly thought—and thought vividly, with absurd apprehension—that it was *Smith!* Ridiculous, both to entertain the thought and to suppress it . . . Nevertheless, he had seen Smith, with shattered forehead, blundering into the dark stateroom. Plenty other old men on the boat. Poor old Smith. What if it *were* true? There was nothing in such predictions, of course—if it proved true, it was simply a coincidence.

"I dream things myself," he said. "I once dreamed three times in succession that a certain ship—the *Polynesian*—had sunk. I was shortly going to sail on her. The dream was confused, and it seemed to me in each case that she sank somehow in the dock—collided with it, or something . . A few days after the third dream I was walking in London, and saw a headline (one of those posters the newsboys wear, like aprons) saying: *Atlantic Liner Sunk. I knew,* absolutely *knew,* it was my ship; and it was."

"You're making it up," said Faubion.

"You *never* take my word, Mrs. Faubion! Why?"

She relented, smiling; but smiled coolly.

"When you dream about *me,* I'll believe you," she said, rising.

"I'll have something for you at breakfast!"

She turned her dark head away. The cold shoulder. Humming, she walked slowly, with abstracted thought, lifting her cape to her round neck. A coarse lace blouse, slightly cheap, well filled, through which one saw bits of blue ribbon. Ah Faubion! Ah, Fleshpot! How attractive, how vulgar, how downright, and yet how mysterious you are! "O *Faubion,*" sang the evening stars . . . "*deep, deep Faubion!*"

"Coming for a walk?" said Smith. "Beautiful air tonight—beautiful."

"I'll join you in fifteen minutes. In the smoking room?"

"All right. I'll wait for you" . . . Smith departed sedately, brown eyes among the palm trees.

. . . A curious remark, that of Faubion's—"When you dream about *me*——" Extraordinary, her instinctive directness; this observation of hers, and his reply (of which she had dictated the key) left their relationship changed and deepened. To sleep, perchance to dream—one dreamed only of those for whom one had profound feelings? "When I walk, I *walk* with Willy——" He had never dreamed of Anita—not once. But on several occasions he had dreamed, erotically, of women for whom he had never consciously felt any desire; and had found them, when next encountered, magically changed; they belonged thereafter to the race of salamanders, opalescent and fiery. But Faubion had now, in a sense, saved him the trouble of dreaming—the suggestion of the dream was sufficient. It was a

tremendous step toward intimacy—intimacy of that sort . . . But a step (alas!) which perhaps meant, for her, little or nothing. She would say the same thing to everybody—to any male who was reasonably attractive? Was she, perhaps (as the Welsh Rarebit had suggested), under the "protection" of Barnes, and being handed about from one member of the crew to another? Such things, of course, were common enough. A special technique was always employed in such cases. The girl avoided the officers in the daytime—consorted only with the passengers; but after the lights were out—the dark ship sleeping, sleep walking on the dark sea—then it was her footstep which one heard, furtive and soft and quick, passing one's door, or treading nocturnally over one's head. Was Faubion leading this kind of double life? Time enough to find out. Meanwhile—

Tin-tin: tin-tin: tin-tin: tin-tin: eight o'clock. The flute player folded his tripod, the pianist closed the yellow-toothed piano. The *Blue Danube,* miles behind, sank into the Atlantic, was caught by mewing gulls.

"Good night, Mr. Demarest . . . Are you comfortable in your stateroom?"

"Quite, thanks."

"That's good . . . Good night."

"Good night . . ."

"G'night, sir," said the table steward, flicking crumbs.

. . . Smith's alley: but Smith was not there, and neither of the girls . . . The long red carpet abruptly declined before him. The wind had freshened. The sea was getting rougher. 142-156. Home. A light in the room beyond his own—the Irish girl moved about, there, with door half opened. *Snap,* went a suitcase lock. A tumbler clinked. The bed curtains were harshly slid along, brass rings on brass rod—Zring . . . An electric bell buzzed remotely, twice: a voice, remote, called "Mrs. Atherton! . . . *Mrs. Atherton!* . . . One sixty-eight . . ." "Coming!" cried Mrs. Atherton . . . Mrs. Atherton could be heard pelting down the corridor, a whirlwind, and laughing, then a male voice, laughing, and Mrs. Atherton gave a squeal, and "Don't!" she cried. "Get out of my way!" she cried, then both laughs sliding down the scale, diminuendo . . . A madhouse. I am in a madhouse, thought Demarest . . . Figures given for the year 1920 show a considerable increase in the number of cases admitted to institutions in the United Kingdom. Of these 56 per cent were female, 44 per cent male . . . It is noted with interest that few insane people die of cancer . . . General paralysis of the insane . . . Certified as insane . . . All is insanity . . . Who so among you that is without insanity, let him think the first think . . . Shall we read, tonight? A nuisance carrying a book . . . The amusements provided for the insane show a gratifying variety . . . Croquet, phonographs, picture puzzles in great numbers . . . We are happy to report that the Society for the Encouragement of Vocal Therapy has co-operated with us now for six months with . . . Music and hot baths . . . Therapeutic value of jazz . . . Even staid old country preachers are engaging tango teachers . . . You can't get away from it—can't get away from it—you can't get away from it at all . . . If one could only establish a direct mode of communion with another being, instead of undergoing this pitiful struggle of conversation? Extraordinary, the way conversation,

even the most intimate (not at present *apropos*) concealed or *refracted* the two personalities engaged. Impossible to present, all at once, in a phrase, a sentence, a careful paragraph—even in a book, copious and disheveled—all that one meant or all that one was. To speak is to simplify, to simplify is to change, to change is to falsify. And not only this—there were also the special demons who inhabit language; and again, the demons who make a perpetual comedy, or tragedy, of all human intercourse, the comedies and tragedies of the misunderstood. These were the same thing—or aspects of the same thing? The experience of an individual is coextensive with the world and therefore infinite?—he is, in epitome, the history of the world, a history still being lived. But this "language"—by which one such epitome seeks to make himself understood or felt by another (felt, rather than understood!)—this meager affair of signs and sounds, this tiny boxful of shabby, worn trinkets, few in number, dim in color and crude of shape—how much, of one's infinitude, could one express by an earnest stringing together of these? Little or nothing. And these demons of language—they invited one, how tiresomely often, to disregard the reference of the trinkets, and to play a *game* with them, to toss and catch them, to match their colors and shapes, to demonstrate one's *skill:* turning human intercourse into a game of anagrams. Ah, the disgusting way in which one is always trying to "make an impression!" and the even stranger way in which casual groups of people actually co-operate to make a *collective* impression, a mutual deception of smartness, gaiety, good humor, good breeding, vulgarity, or wit! Their dinner table, for example—all of them unnatural. Bridge with Silberstein and the others—unnatural. Chess with Hay-Lawrence—unnatural . . . Smith? Ah—this seemed closer to the real . . . Faubion? Relations with her, too, would be real or nothing. And what a profoundly interesting experience! A marriage with earth . . . With reversed meanings:—*Blest be the marriage betwixt earth and heaven! Now, in the round blue noon of space* (round blue noon was delicious) *the mortal son, and the daughter immortal* (immoral!) *make of the world their resting place* . . . Not so bad: the colors a little aniline, perhaps, as in a flower piece by Hiroshige Third . . . Curious that Silberstein—Caligula (who seemed so almost identically one person!) should have started this train of feeling and precipitated a poem involving (so transparently!) Cynthia and himself. But, of course, the Caligula strain in himself was familiar enough—from the age of ten (that vacant lot, with ruined cellar walls, grass-grown, secret) all through the horrible furtive years of adolescence. Little Caligula ran on the sidewalk, pulling after him a toy fire engine, from which poured the thick smoke of burning excelsior. Little Caligula invited Gladys Dyson to come to the vacant lot. Little Caligula was kissed unexpectedly in the tailor's shop by the Italian tailor's black-eyed daughter. Walking through a slum alley, little Caligula heard voices, peeped in through the wet green shutters, saw a Negro and Negress embracing, heard the Negress moan. He had wanted to remain and watch, but hadn't dared. The vocabulary of little Caligula—the profane vocabulary—increased rapidly. The cook made startling contributions to it, screeching with laughter as she did so. Then there was that Swedish sailor, caught in the same doorway during a shower, who on seeing the two dogs had cried "*Jesus!*" Why Jesus? What connec-

tion? Little Caligula looked from dogs to Axel, from Axel to dogs, and sought a clue. Jesus, then, was not merely a god who had suffered crucifixion, but could be mentioned, laughingly, on such occasions as this? . . . There were also the singular totems carved out of wood by the "gang" to which he had once or twice been admitted. And there, too, strange words had been pronounced, which had rendered him more than ever a little Caligula—a Caligula with strange festered recesses in his mind, with wounds in his body. Love (he had been taught) was sensuality, sensuality was evil, evil was prohibited but delicious: the catechism of the vacant lot. But how, then, had beauty come in? How had it so managed to complicate itself with evil and sensuality and the danks and darks of sex?—It had come in with the trumpet vine. It had come in with the seven-year locust and the chinaberry tree. It had come in with the stenciled shadows, on a tropic moonlight night—shadows, on the walls and floors, which suddenly galloped. It had come in with the song of the Negress who walked in the sun with the basket swaying on her head and sang "Ay-y-y-y prawns—ay-y-y-y-y prawns . . ." No—the tissue was too complex;—it was impossible to say where beauty had come from, or even to predicate that there had ever been a beginning; to be born, to become conscious, was to be, and at the same time to face, pain and beauty . . . "All this, Faubion, is what I am trying to say to you when I make a vulgar joke and laugh at you! . . . It is Caligula, who nevertheless has the rainbow wings of a seraph; Caligula, corrupt and yet devout, who beseeches you to be kind to him. And yet it is not entirely Caligula—it is something less than Caligula, and also something more; it is a life small and innocent, inconceivably naïve and at every instant new, a life infantine and guileless; but unhappily this ethereal waif harbors in his heaven-born mind a little black seed, the gift of Tellus. This little black seed is the yearning to be Caligula. I MUST be Caligula. And is it not you who provide me with the opportunity to achieve my destiny—you and your sisters? It is in your presence that the black seed begins to grow. Eunice warmed it, smiling upon it. Helen Shafter wept upon it, watering its terrible roots. Mary gave her body to be devoured by the terrible roots. Anita, fleeing, tempted it to grow like a vine . . . And here are you, Faubion—vigorous synthesis of all these; the familiar theme repeated, but repeated more emphatically than ever . . ." O God, if he could only escape! But did he really desire to? . . . The Irish girl in the next room again moved the bed curtains, brass rings on brass rod—ZRING. The light, which had shone through the reticulated grill at the top of the wall, above the upper berth, suddenly went out. She was going forth—he could meet her. It was time to meet Smith. And the five minutes of solitude, of morose reflection, had been (as he had foreseen) just what was needed to restore him to himself. His periodic need of escape. To re-establish his boundaries —to re-establish his awareness of his own periphery. Now he could go forth calmly—to face the Irish girl calmly, to face Smith calmly, to face the sea with joy.

To have collided with the Irish girl would have been simple and agreeable; but in the very act of willing it he also inhibited the length of his stride over the brass sill.

"Oh!" she said, smiling.

"I'm so sorry!" said Demarest, drawing back. He regarded her with friendly inquisition.

Lowering her soft flushed face, she passed him, close against the white wooden paneling, the smile gently dying. Innocent gray eyes: not without humor and boldness. My wild Oirish Rose. When I look into your eyes—Then I think of Irish skies . . . Anita's favorite song—he used to sing it in the shower bath. Sure as you're born, top of the morn . . . ! "*Come—come—come—*" said her slippers on the red carpet, as she turned away to the right. "*No—too—shy,—*" his own feet whispered, stammering and inarticulate, as he turned away to the left.

The cloud of smoke in the smoking room was dense and turbulent. The poker game had been resumed, bottles and glasses assisting. The glass-eyed gambler sang loudly: "*Some* girls live in the country:—and *some* girls live in town:—but MY girl can't keep her reputation up, 'cause she *can't* keep her petticoat down:—By! God! she! is!—a lulu:—yes, b'God, a lulu:—a lulu is that little girrrrrrl of mine . . ." All the players broke loudly into the chorus, "By! God! she! IS—a lulu," to the grave delight of Malvolio.

"There you are," said Smith. "Come on. I've got an idea."

"What?"

"Wait, I'll tell you outside." The brown eyes were solemnly mischievous. "Somebody might hear us."

The night had become cloudly, and a cold wind came in damp gusts from the northwest. A drop or two of rain—or was it spray? No—it was rain. The deck was nearly deserted. Patches of white light fell over the polished planks and tarred seams. A feeling of storm. At the forward end of the covered deck, beyond the first-class barrier, two sailors were moving to and fro under a ceiling light, stretching a canvas screen.

"Well," said Demarest, "what's this brainwave?"

"Why shouldn't we sneak up to the first-class deck—the upper one—and have a good walk? Eh? I don't know about *you*, but I'd like some exercise . . . Down here you can't get started before you have to turn around."

"No sooner said than done."

"The question is—how do we go? Straight up the companionway? with the light shining on it? Sort of public . . . The only other way is to go through the barrier, and then up a companion way further forward . . . It has the advantage of being darker."

"With so few people aboard, I don't believe they'll give a damn anyway. Let's go straight up . . . They can't do any more than kick us out. We'll do a dignified retreat, with profuse apologies . . . When I was on the *Empress of Ireland*, in the steerage, I used to go up and drink beef tea with the first-class passengers every morning: and tea every afternoon."

"It's easy if the ship's crowded."

"Come on! there's nobody looking."

Smith climbed the iron stairs warily and softly, and swung the iron gate at the top. It squeaked and clanked.

"Nobody in sight," he said, *sotto voce*: "not a soul . . . This is something like! A crime not to allow us up here—yes, sir, it's a crime. Absolutely wasted."

The long white deck, exquisitely sloping and curved, stretched away

through alternating light and shadow. High as a cliff. Yes! This was something like. One felt at once like a first-class passenger, and subtly changed one's bearing. If they met Purington—well, so much the better. They would be under his protection. Purington meeting Smith—ha, ha! One could see his discomfort—one look at Smith's tweed hat (absurdly big for him) would be enough, and all of Purington's heavy snobbishness would begin creakily operating. It would be rather a joke. They turned the forward corner, walking through a crescendo of wind. Sparks blew from Smith's cigar. *Ooo—wash—oo—wallop*, went the waves against the unseen bow; the ship lifted slightly, he careened against Smith's arm,—and then drew back in the deep shadow at the corner to let three women pass. Confound. It wouldn't be so comfortable, this being inspected twice on each circuit of the deck.

"Yes, sir—this is something like. This is what you come to sea for . . . Now, if we only had those little girls—but no. No. They'd give the show away. Nothing first-class about them! Ha, ha!"

"I suppose you'd let me walk with Faubion?"

"Not much, I wouldn't! She's the little girl for me . . . I dropped a hint to her tonight. Sort of risky, I guess, but I got the feeling that I couldn't help it . . . Hm."

"What . . . For the love of mud don't ruin yourself, Father!"

Smith meditated, his cigar in his mouth, his cheeks pursed a little, right forefinger curved round cigar. He stared along the long deck.

"Oh, it wasn't very much—nothing at all, . . . It was when she came to get a dress before dinner—I said, 'You know that song, don't you?' 'No, what song?' says she. 'What's the use of all these things without the girl inside?' I said. 'You naughty old thing!' she said—that's what she said. 'You naughty old thing!" . . . She looked sort of mad, but then she always does, half the time, anyway, so you can't tell . . . What do you think?"

"That's harmless enough—but I'd go slow if I were you."

"Damn it, life's too short—*my* life is! Time I had a little fun."

"Do we walk right round at the back, where the second-class can see us?"

"Sure, they won't recognize us—too dark."

Turning the corner, they again met the three women. Tall women, easily striding, keeping step. Demarest averted his eyes again, shy and conscious. "No," one of them was saying—"I don't think——" A cultured voice, and English. The rest of her sentence was blown overboard. Getting back to England and Cynthia. Would he ever see Cynthia again? Would he dare to go and see her? She had never answered his two letters—not a word, not a sign. She had never acknowledged the book. She had thus rebuked him, of course—he had not asked permission to write; and to do so, and particularly to send the book, had been after so slight (!) an acquaintance a callow presumption. A warm wave of shame and misery came over him. That had been exactly characteristic of the state of mind she had induced in him—clumsy adolescence, shyness, awkwardness, misplaced audacities, occasional funks (as when he had allowed her to pay his fare on the bus!) and a mixture of abruptness and preciousness in talk . . . As for the two letters—again that wave of shame and misery came hotly over him. The letters

had been in his very worst vein—the sort of disingenuous, hinting thing, self-conscious and literary, which he always achieved (how revolting) when the occasion was emotionally important. Was it impossible to fall in love without loss of balance? No loss of balance with Eunice or with Mary—but both were of humble birth. Helen Shafter? Well, perhaps, a trace. Yes. But no more than that. That first night in the house by the bay. Helen's aunt's house, when Helen's aunt had been called away, and they had been left alone—had there been, then, a loss of balance such as he had experienced with Cynthia?

"You never can tell, in these cases," he said. "Never . . . Once I was spending the weekend with a respectable middle-aged lady and her niece. I'd known them all my life. There was no thought of anything between me and the niece—well, nothing to speak of: a mild intermittent interest, perhaps a little more physical than intellectual. The aunt got a telegram and went away for two nights, leaving us alone. Well, it was extraordinary the way a kind of tension grew between us! We couldn't talk naturally, we began to look at each other, our voices seemed to change in key—we finally said good night to each other in a panic. That was the first night. The second night was worse. We were seized with a terror lest the conversation should come to an end—we talked frantically, incessantly, and as impersonally as we could. Absolutely nothing personal was said: and yet the personal tension was every second becoming more unbearable. I was aware, of course, that she agitated me—but I couldn't make out whether *she* was agitated; and I was determined to avoid a false step, which for various reasons would have been fatal. What really happened was that we were both in that state, but neither wanted to take the responsibility of declaring it: the ghost of respectability, perhaps, but also the fear of rebuff and of making fools of ourselves. So we just sat and talked, and it got later and later, and first one lamp went out, and then the other, and then the fire began to die and the room to get cold. Should I put coal on the fire? It would seem to suggest too coarsely that I took it for granted we were going to continue sitting there in the dark, talking inanely, at one-thirty in the morning. So I didn't. We sat, finally, for ten minutes in silence, at the end of which she suddenly said, 'Oh! I feel as if the top of my head would blow off!' . . . That seemed, in a way, clear enough! and yet, could I be sure? I thought for a minute, and then I said, 'Why?' to which, after a long and desperate pause, she replied, 'You ought to know, I think.' So it was she, really, who took the final step . . . As soon as she had said that, we rose from our chairs as if hypnotized, and moved together . . . Unfortunately in the dark, I got one foot into the coal scuttle, and our first embrace looked more like a wrestling match—we staggered and fell."

"You fell," said Smith.

"We fell."

"I wish things like that would happen to me. Yes, siree. But they don't. And never did."

"It's luck simply. A friend of mine in a train, once——"

They again faced the three tall women, drawing modestly aside to let them pass. They had the light at their backs, and their faces were in darkness. The outermost girl was wearing a knitted jersey—remarkably like—

he turned to look, his heart beating in his throat.—But the gloom had swallowed them up. Impossible! Impossible! Impossible!

"—was practically proposed to by a young woman who sat beside him . . . Total stranger . . . She gave him, as the saying is, the glad knee. He was getting off at Philadelphia—she was going to—I forget where—Atlanta. She implored him to come along with her—absolutely implored him. Offered to pay his fare and all his expenses for a week's trip . . ."

He felt out of breath—excitement. Dyspnea. His voice had shaken absurdly (and a little high) on the second "absolutely." He cleared his throat. He must time the approach, so as to meet them under a light.

"Good God," said Smith. "And did he?"

"No. He was on his way to visit his fiancée . . . Poor devil!"

"Oh, don't spoil the story! My God . . . He just let her go like that? What sort of woman was she?"

"Beautiful, he said—about twenty-six. A buyer for one of the big stores —Gimbels or Wanamaker's."

Smith groaned. He took half a dozen quick puffs at his short cigar, holding it between thumb and finger, then flung it over the railing. The red spark described a swift parabola in the dark, and Demarest imagined —in the midst of all that thresh and welter—its infinitesimal hiss. Suppose they shouldn't come round again? . . .

"To think," said Smith, "of losing a chance like that! . . . Oh, *boy*!"

"She gave him her name and address—and he lost it."

"I don't believe it."

"Yes—and all he remembered about her name was that it was Mabel Tupper something . . ."

"He ought to be shot at sunrise," said Smith. "Yes, sir, he ought to be shot down like a dog. And she made love to him, did she?"

Smith turned an eager round eye under the tweed rim. An eye like a well.

"*Did* she! He said he was embarrassed to death—and afraid somebody he knew might see him. She simply wrapped herself round him—stem to stern. He put his overcoat across his lap so that the confusion of legs wouldn't be too obvious."

There they came, around the corner. He paused, feeling his pockets.

"Damn," he said. "I forgot my pipe . . . No matter." He continued feeling his pockets.

The jersey—yes. Tall, too. Being on the outside, her face was in shadow. No. Too slender, too girlish. Something queer!

"Don't tell me any more stories like that," said Smith. "Makes me too sad."

She came swiftly, gracefully—touched a palm on the rail, turning her face down toward the black water. Light fell on her lifting face—it was she. She looked, for some reason, slighter and younger—his recollection of her had not been exact . . . She had not seen him yet—they came nearer. Her mother—the one in the middle. She looked at him, but unrecognizing—no—yes . . . Suddenly her eyes took fire and she smiled, stopping. He moved toward her, slowly, putting out his hand, his awkward hand. The

two other women, turning their heads, walked on. Smith drifted gloomily toward the companionway.

"How simply extraordinary!" said Demarest. He was aware that the speech was resonant with too much feeling, too many references.

"Isn't it? . . . I've been in America again!" The exquisite light voice was breaking through him: oddly childish, subtly simple.

They drifted slowly, and leaned against the railing, under a light; as they had leaned the year before; as it seemed natural for them to lean.

"In New York?" said Demarest.

"Yes . . . And Philadelphia!"

"For long?"

"Three months . . . I'm glad to go back."

She had been in New York and Philadelphia—without letting him know! Good God. At any time during the last three months he might have—— She hadn't let him know.

"I'm going to be married!" she then gaily added. She laughed delightedly, girlishly, leaning backward on the rail with lifted elbows—the striped and diamonded jersey of richly mingled Hindu colors.

"*Really!*" he cried. "How *delightful!* . . . May I ask——"

"And have *you* made up your mind," she interrupted, "where to live?"

"It's been made up *for* me, for the moment . . . I'm having—possibly—a show in London. So I shall stay a year or two—perhaps settle." He frowned, confused. Things were confused, distressing, ecstatic.

"Oh! . . . My mother always says it's a mistake for Americans to expatriate themselves."

"Yes . . . I remember she said so to *me*, last year . . . I'm not so sure! . . . It's an awful problem! Simply awful. If, when one's young enough, one develops a taste for Europe—I'm afraid it's incurable."

"I think I'd stay in New York if I were you—you have there such a priceless sense of freedom——"

She turned, somber, and looked down at the black and white of water. She had used that phrase in a letter.

"I hate it," Demarest said with surprising bitterness.

"Do you?"

Cynthia smiled at him amusedly. He must, somehow, mention that he was not in the first cabin—that he was a sneaking interloper; just what he had always been *afraid* of seeming! It was a perfect nemesis; caught red-handed. How surprisingly tall she was: how transparently young and beautiful. He remembered Wetherall's remark, "too innocent." Also Wetherall's comment on the ugly way her skirt hung, creased, at the back: that brown tweed skirt, with a small rip in the hem at one side. Blue woolen stockings. The rip stretching against her knee as she sat opposite him—sitting on the deck itself—playing chess, one hand supporting her (the long arched fingers crossing a tarred seam), the other touching her cheek. Sea gulls. And now, everything so complicated and difficult—her mother with her (who had disliked him)—and someone else.

"Yes, I really like London much better."

"It is lovely, isn't it! I can hardly *wait* for London in the winter!"

As usual, when they talked, he had the sense of their partaking of a

secret communion, exquisite and profound: a communion in which their idle talk, fragmentary and superficial, and even their physical identities, had the remoteness and smallness of the trivial and accidental. It seemed merely to be necessary that they should be together: that they should stand together for a moment, saying nothing, looking at the same falling wave or the same white sea gull; or talk a little, lightly; or loiter a little, with lazy bodies. This had been true from the beginning—it was still true. And yet—was it? There was this other man. The communion could hardly, therefore, be as perfect as he supposed. And indeed, had it *ever* been? Was it conceivable that already, when he had met her a year ago, she had been in love? Was it possible that her luminousness, her lightness of heart and body, her delightful, delighted swiftness in meeting him, had been simply the euphoria consequent upon that:—and might it not have been precisely her love (for this other man) that he had fallen in love with? . . . On the other hand, there had been something—well, just lightly destructive, the loosing of a gay arrow, explanatory but not apologetic, in the quick laughing announcement *"I'm going to be married!"* This seemed to refer to a marked consciousness of former communion: to refer to it and to end it. As if she said, "I liked you—but how much better I like *him!*"

"It is astounding that we should meet again like this!"

It was a mistake—but Cynthia met it lightly.

"Isn't it? It makes one feel——" She hesitated, and gave a little laugh in which there was no tension, but rather an assumption of security and distance, the perfection and inviolability of her personal view, which she need not, if she did not wish, bother to communicate to him.

"How small the world is?" laughed Demarest.

"Oh, that! if you like . . . I was thinking rather, that it made one feel like Buddhists, or some such thing—meeting, reincarnated, every thousand years or so; and always in the same way; and always inconsequentially; and always with tremendous surprise."

She smiled at him delightfully, again rocking back with Hindu-bright elbows, on the railing, which burned vivid and real against the darkness of the sea. The familiar shape of her arms, the familiar gesture and attitude, the colors, the youthful frankness, all these, together, suddenly released in him a torrent of remembered feelings.

"Pilgrims," he said—falling in with her image, in which she had so candidly delighted—"who meet once in every cycle for the exchange of a remark on the weather? If they *have* anything so mundane as weather in their purgatories and paradises!"

"*And* infernos."

"Yes!"

The two women approached, slowing their steps a little.

"Mother—you remember Mr. Demarest?"

"How do you do."

"How do you do."

To the pale girl, who stood under the light, waiting cynically, he was not introduced. Flight, prearranged, was in the air.

"I'll let you rejoin your friend," said Cynthia, moving off slowly. Smith! His friend Smith!

She smiled: Demarest smiled and nodded: and the three women walked swiftly away. Good God—Good God—said the blood beating in his brain. He moved blindly toward the companionway. He must rejoin his friend—by all means. Yes. And he must take his friend down to the other deck—he suddenly felt that he didn't want to face them again, particularly with old Smith by his side; Smith and his comic-opera tweed hat. Nothing first class about Smith! Ha ha. Nor about himself either. He hadn't had time, worse luck, for the necessary light touch on that point. How awful. She would look for him in the passenger list, and not find him, and laugh. How much it would explain to her! "Mother—how very funny. Mr. Demarest must be in the second cabin!" "Funny? It doesn't especially surprise me—I always felt there was something——" Et cetera. Then that pale girl, cynical—she would laugh, too. They would all laugh merrily together, with heads thrown back. What the Spanish call *carcajada*—loud laughter, boisterous and derisive. Sexual laughter, the ringing scorn of the female for the defeated or cowardly male, the skulker . . . He rounded the corner, but there was no Smith. Instead, at the far end, he saw the three women coming toward him. Cynthia appeared to be talking, the others turning their heads toward her. He must escape. Irresolute, he began pretending (absurd) that he was looking for a lost friend. What—he isn't here? Then I'd better turn. He turned, went briskly around the comer again, then rattled down the companionway.

In the smoking room, as he paid for his glass of port, Smith reappeared.

"Well, who's your swell friend?" he said, composing himself in the corner.

"Ah, that's the great chimera I was telling you about."

"What! The one you were going to see? How come?"

"The chimera—more so than ever," murmured Demarest. "Have a game?"

"Sure, I don't mind."