

A CRIME CLUB SELECTION 

*Edward Atiyah*

*the  
cruel  
fire*



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## A CRIME CLUB SELECTION

In the small Lebanese village of Barkita, Faris Deeb is a man of property. Miserliness has brought him wealth, but also the hatred of his wife and children.

One day business takes him to Beirut, where he becomes impassioned of an Egyptian belly dancer. His clumsy advances repulsed, Deeb returns to Barkita in anger and frustration; finding a beautiful American movie star swimming by moonlight in his orchard pool, he attacks and murders her.

Bit by bit, he tries to hide his trail, as slowly his family and the villagers begin to suspect his terrible secret.

Scene: Lebanon

THE  
CRUEL FIRE

*Edward Atiyah*

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FOR

NAJLA

*All of the characters in this book  
are fictitious, and any resemblance  
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is purely coincidental.*

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# THE CRUEL FIRE

# 1

Life was beginning to stir in the little, remote Lebanese village of Barkita as the summer morning came over the hills in bright sunny strides, leaping from roof-top to roof-top, stretching longer and longer past the pinewood, across the terraced vineyards, plunging here and there into the shadows of the valley. The day labourers were already on their way, whether by the main road or by mountain paths, to the various orchards or building sites on which they worked, each carrying his midday meal under his arm—olives and onions rolled up in a round, flat, thin loaf of bread. But the more well-to-do of the villagers—the small peasant proprietors and shopkeepers—had only just got up and were drinking their early cups of Turkish coffee and smoking their first cigarette or hubble-bubble of the day. Many of them sat in the open, in a small garden or on a terrace just outside their front door, over which a vine spread its branches, now thick with leaves and heavy with pendant bunches of grapes.

One of these comparatively prosperous and leisured villagers was Faris Deeb, who sat on his terrace sipping his coffee with a loud, hissing noise. He was a heavily built man of about forty-five, and his face was hard and unamiable, with a few days' growth of hair on it, for he shaved only twice a week. He was the local corn dealer and owned a vineyard on the hillside behind his house and an apple orchard in the valley, by the river. The vineyard he had acquired from his father, who now sat a few paces away from him, sipping his own coffee; but the orchard he had bought with the profits of his hard dealings in corn and the savings of his avarice over the years. He had a shop in the village where he transacted his corn business and sold a few other things besides; but he did not have to hurry to it in the morning because his elder son and assistant, Mitry, was now sent ahead to open it, while Faris Deeb drank his coffee and smoked his *argileh*. . . . Where was that damned *argileh*? He would finish his coffee if it did not come soon, and he liked to draw the first few puffs while the aroma of the coffee was still in his mouth.

"Rosa!" he called to his wife, who was preparing him the *argileh* in the kitchen. "Rosa! What the hell are you doing, taking such a long time to prepare me my smoke?"

"It's coming, it's coming," answered the unseen Rosa with an impatience as cold as her husband's was heated. "I'm not a machine."

"I'll say that," growled Faris Deeb. "A lazy cow, that's what you are. A

cow that doesn't even give milk, now that your children are grown up!"

"A cow, am I?" said Rosa with aloof, unpassioned venom, issuing from the kitchen, carrying the *argileh* between her two hands. Then she addressed herself to her father-in-law. "Listen to your son's sweet morning speech, Abu Faris. This is my reward for making him his coffee and bringing him his *argileh*; for looking after his house and bringing up his children to be better than anybody else's children in the village, though the Lord knows he never gave me enough money to dress them decently, so loath was he always to open his purse wide enough for a copper to slip through!" She was a few years younger than her husband, and not an uncomely woman, with red cheeks, full lips and full but not over-abundant bosom.

"Put down the *argileh* here, and enough tongue-wagging in the early morning," said her husband. "You always had enough money for food and clothes and everything necessary. I don't deny my family that, but by God, I'm not giving money away to be spent on your trashy fineries. Anyhow, what do you think I am, a gold mine?"

Abu Faris sipped his coffee in silence, not wishing to be drawn into this acrimonious exchange between his son and his daughter-in-law. Such exchanges were a common occurrence in the household, not only between Faris and Rosa, who often finished by getting a beating from her husband, but also between Faris and the children. Mitry was too big and strong to be beaten now—too big and strong for Faris even to beat Rosa in his presence; but when Antoine and Genevieve answered their father back, he beat them too as he beat their mother. There had been that terrible scene when Faris discovered that Genevieve was walking out with the young man Ramiz—a nice young man too, who would make a suitable husband for her—and given her such a thrashing that her cheeks were too red and swollen for her to go to her work the next day. The old man's sympathies were with his daughter-in-law and the children, who were good to him and who were the victims of his son's vicious temper and tyranny; but he himself was cowed by the tyrant, though he did try to protest when Faris beat Rosa or the children. Until the row reached the stage of physical violence, however, Abu Faris preferred to keep out of it. He bitterly regretted his folly in making over the vineyard to Faris. If he had kept that in his name he would have retained some hold over his son, but now he had none. Yes, he had been a fool. . . .

Faris Deeb uncoiled the red *argileh* tube and, putting the black mouthpiece between his lips, drew at it as though taking deep breaths under a medical examination. The embers poised on the mound of wet tobacco glowed, and the glass stem of the *argileh* began to cloud with smoke.

Rosa contemplated her husband with ill-concealed, arrogant distaste, her

arms akimbo, the fists resting on her hips in a challenging posture. Her secret guilt made her hate him all the more. In her hate of him she found her absolution—her hate and her provocation of him into words and actions of increasing viciousness. When she succeeded in making him behave with the utmost brutality of which he was capable, the adulteress felt purged of her sin, exulted in it as her final revenge and triumph. She had also another triumph. She had learned how to deny him the enjoyment of her body even when he took her. Gone were the days when she resisted him or showed reluctance. That had only whetted his desire and given him greater pleasure. Now, she let him take her when he wanted as though she were a lump of dough that neither responded nor resisted, and she knew that her indifference filled him with a mad frustration.

“Thank God,” she said, “the children don’t depend on you any more for their food and clothes. They’re all grown up and earning, and you need them more than they need you.”

“I have never needed anybody, nor ever will,” he said, smarting with his unsatisfied need of her as a woman.

“Then why don’t you let Genevieve get married? Why don’t you let Mitry go to join his cousin in Brazil?”

He took the mouthpiece out of his mouth and glared at his wife. “Has that girl been asking you to intercede with me again? I’ve told her ‘no,’ and ‘no’ it is. Get that into your head. And if I ever catch her walking with that namby-pamby boy again, I’ll give her a bigger thrashing than the last one. I’m not going to let her marry a penniless fellow and produce a family that will become a burden on me. She’ll have to marry a man of property.”

“Ramiz is not a penniless fellow. He’s earning.”

“Earning from what? A job by the week which he might lose any time. Has he got a house? Has he got a shop, a vineyard, a prosperous father?”

“No one with property will marry her unless she has property of her own. Would you give her a dowry? Why, you don’t even allow her to save from her wages so that she could amass a little dowry of her own. You make her work and pay you half her earnings. You’d lose that if she married. That’s why you won’t let her marry.”

“It’s a lie! What she gives me of her wages doesn’t pay for her keep.”

Abu Faris intervened here with a quiet aside to Rosa. “Enough, enough, my daughter,” he said, trying to prevent the altercation from reaching those excesses which so distressed him. He could not understand it, but it did seem to him that Rosa often went on deliberately provoking Faris until he used violence on her. He had known children behave like that, as though nothing

would satisfy them until they were beaten, who knew the beating would come if they went on provoking their elders long enough, and yet would not desist. Rosa was like that. She was being like that now. Paying no regard to her father-in-law's warning, she went on:

"You make a handsome little profit out of it, together with what you get from Mitry and Antoine. Antoine gets only ten pounds a month, and you make him give you five."

"Ten is only his salary, you fool; but a waiter at a smart hotel gets twice as much as that in tips. I know nothing about his tips."

"How that must hurt you!" said Rosa.

"You know how much he gets," said her husband, narrowing his eyes, beneath the bushy eyebrows, into hard slits, "don't you? He tells you."

"All right, he tells me; but I'm not going to tell you," she said, letting her arms fall and walking back into the kitchen nonchalantly.

Faris Deeb dropped his *argileh* tube, got up and followed her.

His father said: "Come back, Faris; leave her alone. How does she know how much the boy gets in tips?"

"She knows," snarled Faris Deeb, "and I'm not going to have anything kept from me in this house. I'll beat her secret out of her."

In the kitchen, Rosa had picked up the coffee pot and turned the tap on to wash it.

"How much?" said her husband, coming up to her. "I'm asking you for the last time. How much?"

"I don't know," said Rosa coldly.

"You're lying. You said you knew."

"I wanted to annoy you. I hate you."

"Your hatred doesn't hurt me."

"Nor your children's? They all hate you. You're a blight on their lives. They wish you dead, every one of them."

"I don't care if they hate me or love me as long as they fear me."

"But they don't all fear you now. Mitry doesn't. You daren't beat him any more." She gave him a little derisive sneer, knowing that he was about to strike her, and experiencing that queer thrill that came before the first blow. She enjoyed goading him because it made her feel superior to him intellectually. The rage that he felt when he beat her hurt him much more than his blows hurt her, for she was no weakling and could stand up to a good deal of punishment.

"Why should I beat him," he said, "when he obeys me? He's a sensible

young man now.”

“A strong young man, you mean, who is capable of paying back a bully like you who beats only women or children. Or are you afraid to beat even a woman now?”

He raised his hand and struck her in the face; and her conscience, as well as her intellect, was satisfied, for she was expecting a visit from her lover that morning.

## 2

Half an hour later Faris Deeb walked into his shop in the village. It always pleased him to see his sacks of sample grain standing solidly on the floor of the shop, open and bulging with their contents, filling the shop with the faint, dusty smell of wheat. The blow he had given his wife and the smoke he had inhaled from his *argileh* had somewhat soothed his temper—that, and the prospect of one or two profitable deals he expected to transact that morning. Everybody in the village knew that he was the hardest, most astute dealer in the district, that nobody ever got the better of him in a bargain. They feared him in the village, as they feared him in his house. Everybody feared him except Rosa. He had an uncomfortable feeling that she mocked him. She had looked so insolent, standing before him, her hands resting on her hips, telling him that she knew how much Antoine got in tips but that she would not tell him. Well, she had got what she deserved. Much good it did her to be insolent when he could thrash her. And he would thrash her and thrash her until she told him how much the boy got in tips. Or perhaps he could find out from Mitry by cunning instead of force. For he prided himself on his cunning as much as on his ability to inspire fear.

Mitry was in the shop putting a few papers in order, when his father walked in. He was bigger than his father and more powerfully built but with a gentle, rather subdued expression in the youthful face.

“Anyone been yet?” asked Faris Deeb.

“Abu Shukri came a few moments ago. He said he would come later.”

“Did you tell him there were other buyers for the apple crop?”

“I told him. I said they were willing to pay a higher price than what he was offering.”

“Good. You’re a smart fellow like your father,” said Faris Deeb, deciding that a little flattery would serve his purpose. “I shall make of you the cleverest dealer in this district, and one day you will be a rich man.” From the window of the shop, across the narrow valley, could be seen the Baruk Spring Hotel, where Antoine worked. Faris Deeb nodded his head in its direction. “Your brother is clever too.”

“There’s no cleverer fellow than Antoine in these parts,” said Mitry.

“I reckon they’re very pleased with him at the hotel because he knows

English, and they have many English and American visitors now. Couldn't do without a waiter who spoke some English."

"No, they couldn't."

"They're doing good business at that hotel; it's always full nowadays. And the Americans pay well. They chuck their dollars about as though they were piastres."

"Ay, they do. Wherever they go, the prices go up."

"Your brother must be making a lot in tips. I shouldn't be surprised if his tips came to more than his wages—maybe fifteen pounds a month, or twenty." Faris Deeb spoke in a tone of disinterested speculation. His cunning prompted him to name a figure or two. People liked to correct you if you were wrong and they knew the right answer.

"How would I know?" said Mitry, who knew. Antoine had told him but made him swear not to tell his father.

Faris Deeb peered at his son obliquely, doubting whether he was telling the truth. He knew that his family were united in a conspiracy of defence and secrecy against him. For all the power he had over them, in his innermost heart he often felt helpless and insecure against this conspiracy, felt that in their unity they had a power which he lacked, which enraged him, which could even frighten him. In his little kingdom Faris Deeb knew the loneliness in which all tyrants must live. "They wish you dead, every one of them," Rosa had shouted at him in the kitchen. She wished him dead too. But wishes had never killed a man.

His ruse with Mitry having failed, he decided to change the subject. He would force the secret out of Rosa before long or, better still, he would make Antoine pay another three pounds for his keep whatever the amount of the tips he received.

"Where's last month's corn account?" he asked Mitry. "Did you get it from the broker?"

"Yes. Here it is," said Mitry, taking some papers out of his pocket. As he did so, an envelope, bearing a Brazilian stamp, fell on the floor.

"What's that?" said Faris Deeb.

"A letter," said Mitry, picking it up in some confusion.

"Your cousin in Rio?"

"Yes."

"When did you receive it?"

"Yesterday."

“Let me see it.”

Mitry handed his father the letter. He was going to have spoken to him about it in any case. Perhaps it was just as well that it happened so. Now, he would not have to spend hours working up his courage to the necessary pitch for opening the subject.

Faris Deeb read the letter, then threw it scornfully on the desk.

“Father, I want to go to Brazil,” said Mitry.

“Go,” said Faris Deeb curtly, then, as Mitry remained silent, he went on: “Have you got the fare?”

“No. You know I haven’t.”

“How can you go then?”

“If you will lend me the money, I will pay it back to you when I have worked there for some time.”

“You want me to sell the orchard and the vineyard to pay your fare to Brazil?”

“You don’t have to sell the orchard or the vineyard. You’ve got enough money. . . .”

“All the money I have I need; and I need you here in the business.”

“But there’s no future for me here. You’re standing in my way. I want to go.”

“See that door there? It’s wide open, isn’t it? You can just walk out now and head for Brazil. No one will stop you.”

“With not a pound in my pocket?”

“If you haven’t got the money for the fare, you’ll have to save it from your earnings. I pay you a good wage, don’t I?”

“At the rate you pay me, and after I’ve paid you back for my keep every month, it will take me ten years to save the fare.”

“Then shut up and get on with your work here, and don’t let me hear any more about this nonsense of your wanting to go to Brazil. Let’s have a look at this account.”

Mitry handed his father the account, and remained silent for a moment while Faris Deeb perused the figures. He was torn between fear of his father and the urge to escape from him into a free life, a life free from fear and hatred, and beckoning with bright opportunities. When this question of going to Brazil had first been raised, he had been held back by a chivalrous feeling towards the rest of the family, thinking it would be cowardly of him to go away and leave his mother and the younger children at his father’s mercy,

without even the little protection which his presence afforded them. But his mother had encouraged him to go. She had told him she could look after herself, that Genevieve would sooner or later get married, that Antoine was growing up and would, like him, be soon big and strong enough for his father to be afraid to beat him. So now only two things stood between him and the new life his cousin offered him in South America: the fare and his father's opposition. The accidental dropping of the letter had reopened the subject and he did not want it to be closed until he had pursued it to the end; for once it was closed he might be afraid to raise it again for a long time.

"If my cousin will advance me the fare," he said at last, "will you let me go?"

"What's that you said?"

"Only that I might ask my cousin if he would be willing to pay for my ticket by way of a loan which I could repay him when I went out there and started working with him."

"You're not going there. Do you understand?"

"But you said I could go if I had the fare."

"If you had it in your own money, not if you borrowed it like a beggar. Supposing you don't make good in Brazil and can't pay it back to your cousin? Supposing you died before you paid it back? I'd have to repay it then, wouldn't I? Don't you dare ask your cousin for it. I'm not standing you security for two hundred pounds."

"I'm not asking you to stand me security for anything."

"Ay, but you're my son, aren't you? If your cousin lends you the money, it's because I'm your father, and he knows I've got property. Well, I'm not having my property mortgaged to send you out to Brazil, when I've got work for you to do here—plenty of work. You will stay in the business with me. . . . Now take this account back to the broker and tell him this figure of fifty-three here is wrong. It should be forty-three. And don't you dare speak to me of Brazil again."

Mitry took the account and walked out of the shop. Although he no longer feared his father physically, he was still dominated by his will, still too much the cowed son of a tyrannical father to be able to rebel. Physically, his father could not prevent him from going to Brazil if his cousin would advance him the fare, could not prevent him from writing to his cousin to ask for the fare. But the mysterious power of the spirit which a tyrant exercises over his victims, even when the sanction of physical violence is not applied and has indeed fallen permanently into abeyance, held Mitry in its grip. He could not go to Brazil. He dared not write to his cousin to ask for the money. His father's

command laid an unchallengeable interdict on his will. He walked along the street of the small village like a prisoner walking in the prison courtyard, though around him there were no walls, but open slopes and valleys stretching to the sky—the sky through which ‘planes flew to Brazil from Beirut every day. He was miserable with frustration and burning with hate. One small, sweet thought was his only immediate consolation: his father had not succeeded in tricking him into revealing how much Antoine made in tips.

It was still only nine o’clock and at the Baruk Spring Hotel Antoine, in white coat and black trousers, was attending on the patrons who had not finished their breakfast yet. His favourite among them was a young American woman who had come from Beirut a few days before to spend a fortnight’s holiday at Barkita. She was pretty and friendly—very democratic, thought Antoine, talking and jesting with him without a trace of snobbery, not as some patrons treat a waiter.

She was now sitting at a table by herself on the terrace overlooking the valley, and Antoine was bringing her a basket of fruit, having filled it with the most luscious of the pears and peaches that had arrived at the hotel that morning. He had kept them specially for her because she was late in coming in to breakfast, having gone for a long walk on first getting up.

“Good morning, Antoine,” she said, with a sunny smile. “What a lovely fruit basket you have brought me! I’m hungry after my walk. Thank you.”

In spite of her friendliness he was too shy to tell her that he had carefully handpicked them for her behind the back of the cook, who liked to keep the best for himself. He only said, smiling back with the youthful devotion she had inspired in him, “I hope you like them, Miss Bright. They are very good today.”

“I sure am going to like them,” she said, picking the largest peach. “Everything and everybody here is delightful—the village, the hotel, the people and the fruit!”

“Where you walk this morning?” he asked in his broken English. All the other patrons had finished their breakfast and left the terrace, so he could permit himself to have a little conversation with her while she ate her peach.

“I went down the valley and followed the river,” she said. “There is a lovely clear pool down there, with big grey rocks on one side and an orchard on the other.”

“What is ‘orchard?’ ” he asked.

“Fruit plantation—apple trees.”

“Ah, yes, yes. Trees belong to my father—his orchard.”

“Fancy that! Well, I didn’t steal any of your apples, Antoine; I swear I didn’t, though I was sorely tempted.”

“They are not my apples; they are my father’s.”

“Well, isn’t that the same thing?”

“No. You not know my father,” he said, shaking his head.

“Isn’t he nice to you?”

“No. My father not nice to anybody.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, Antoine.”

“When I am little older, I go away from home. I go to Beirut and work in hotel there.”

“Just to escape from your father?”

“Yes, and I get more money in Beirut.”

“But your village is much nicer than Beirut. You have these beautiful mountains, and the valley and the river; and that pool—my, isn’t the water in it wonderful? So clean and sparkling between the rocks. Doesn’t anyone swim in it?”

“Some children bathe sometimes.”

“Nobody else? Doesn’t anyone go to it from the hotel?”

“No.”

“Well, don’t tell them about it. I want to keep it all to myself! It would be wonderful to swim in it by moonlight. I love swimming by moonlight.”

“Oh,” said Antoine, simulating a shiver, “at night it is very cold, very, very cold!”

“I like the water when it’s very cold, very, very cold,” she said, repeating Antoine’s words, but with zest instead of a shiver. “But now, I want some very hot, very, very hot coffee, please, Antoine. You know how I like it.”

“I bring it to you boiling,” said Antoine, hurrying back to the kitchen.

### 3

Faris Deeb spent the morning arguing with the corn broker and transacting the sale of his apple crop. The bargaining was hard and lengthy, and he conducted it with his usual toughness and cunning, obtaining a price which both satisfied his cupidity and flattered his vanity as an artist in these matters. In the afternoon he took a seat in a car going to the town of Tripoli, where he wanted to look over some property that had been recommended to him as a good investment.

The estate agent who hoped to sell him the property was lavish in his hospitality. He insisted that Faris Deeb should stay for the evening, and took him to dine at the city's most popular cabaret, hoping that good food, plenty of liquor and the sight of pretty, scantily-clad dancing girls would induce in his client a mood favourable to purchasing. Faris Deeb, whose partiality to liquor was held in check when he had to pay for it himself, drank several glasses of arak while he and the estate agent ate and watched the dancing girls perform. This was the first time that he had seen a cabaret spectacle; and the hot, pounding blood in his arteries pounded with new excitements at the sight of young, semi-naked female bodies swaying and jerking provokingly at only a few paces from him.

Noticing his entranced gaze, the estate agent said:

“This is the famous Egyptian belly dance. Ever seen it before?”

“No,” said Faris Deeb with assumed indifference, but following the motions of one particular belly with hypnotized eyes.

“Well, you must come to Tripoli more often, and we will show you more of these pleasing sights. If you buy that piece of land, you will probably want to build on it—everybody is building now with rents soaring as they are—and that will give you more occasions to visit the city. You could divide your life then between Barkita and Tripoli. Waiter, two more please.”

“Maybe,” said Faris Deeb, his eyes fixed on the navel in the middle of the shivering belly. The belly itself, white as milk, was completely naked, but below it the dancer wore a triangular loin screen of beads and tinsel, and the same sparkling fabric covered the mounds of her breasts. Faris Deeb found this local veiling an impediment to his full enjoyment. He tried to penetrate it with his imagination, but as he was doing so he suddenly felt very uncomfortable, thinking that everybody around the dancing floor was watching him and

divining his thoughts. Well, what the hell! He could wager all the men there were having the same thoughts, the same desires. He wrenched his eyes off the dancer for a moment to survey the audience, and was reassured. He was not different from other men; and though a villager, he had heard enough about town life to know what went on at these places. Perhaps, if he bought that property he might, as the estate agent had suggested, become something of a townsman himself. His eyes returned confidently to the object of their desire.

“This girl here,” said the agent, noticing Faris Deeb’s special interest in the person concerned, “comes from Cairo. She’s a very good dancer, and a lovely piece to look at, think you not?”

“Ay, she dances well,” said Faris Deeb, sipping his drink and pretending to share his companion’s ostensible appreciation of the art of dancing.

“The management pays her ten pounds a night for her dancing apart from the commission she gets on the drinks the patrons order when she’s sitting with them. . . . And this is not to mention the money she makes on her own account in other ways. What say you, Khawaja Faris, shall we invite her to our table after this number?” The estate agent gave his client a smile which the serpent might have given Eve when they were discussing the apple.

“What for?” asked Faris Deeb, uncertain whether the agent was making him a serious proposition or merely pulling his leg.

“We could invite two of them to make a little party, and then take them for a drive in my car after the performance. Only, then we should have to order something more expensive than arak. They will want whisky at least, if not champagne. But you don’t have to worry about that. It will be all on me. Have you ever tried champagne?”

“No,” said Faris Deeb, maintaining a stolid outward calm but dizzy with excitement and panic at the things he might try that night, if the estate agent was serious, if the thing was possible. Rosa was the only woman he had ever made love to, the only woman he had ever seen undressed, and his senses had long since become blunted with the sight and the touch of her, so that when he took her now, it was like taking a bite of dry bread because you were hungry; and now after years of dry bread he saw a feast before him, and his appetites gnawed at him with a sweet and fierce craving. Yet, he dared not say “yes,” for fear that the estate agent was laughing at him, for fear that he would not know how to set about these matters because he was a villager unused to the ways of the town. And there was a greater fear still. Though the estate agent had offered to pay for everything, this might be only an empty gesture. When it came to paying the big bills for the whisky and the champagne, when it came to settling with the girls themselves, he must offer to pay his share, and the

agent's generosity might waver. Faris Deeb had one hundred pounds in his pocket. He had brought this large sum in case he decided to buy the property and had to pay a deposit on it. As he gazed at the swaying figure of the dancer, his hand went automatically to his breast pocket where the money was. He clasped his wallet firmly through his coat, protectively, his avarice struggling with his lust.

The agent, for his part, had not been serious in his invitation. He had merely wanted to increase his influence with his bucolic client by showing him what doors of pleasure he could open for him, without actually opening them. Through those doors he had no wish to enter with Faris Deeb, being himself a sophisticated townsman and regarding his client with a certain derision as an unpolished countryman. Deciding therefore that the moment had come for him to extricate himself nimbly, he said:

“I see that you have no desire for such frivolities to-night.”

“Such pleasures are for a young bachelor like you, Khawaja Jamil,” said Faris Deeb, assuming a respectable married man's aloofness, but sick with disappointment at the withdrawal of the prospect which the estate agent had dangled before his eyes for a moment. Now that the money in his pocket was safe, and the dancer's body no longer accessible, it gleamed and swayed before him with a more teasing appeal than before.

“Come, come, Khawaja Faris,” said the estate agent, “you're only a few years older than me, and this is the modern age we're living in. You think only bachelors permit themselves these distractions? What's the harm in it? But if you're not in the mood to-night, some other time perhaps.” Having extricated himself from all immediate commitments, Khawaja Jamil could afford to become expansive and seductive again. He enjoyed toying with the whetted but not-to-be-fulfilled desires of this limited, primitive village merchant.

Faris Deeb had never been more in the mood. In fact, he had never been in it at all till that night. In the village, he had from time to time lusted in his heart after this or that woman in a passing way, never as a practical proposition, never with fulfilment as a possible, attainable goal. He did not know how to court women, how to make the first move. In his courtship with Rosa twenty-five years before, it was she who had made the first move, and since then the experience had not been repeated. But here it was different. Here the women were there specially for it. All you had to do was to pay, and he could pay if he wanted to. His hand clasped his wallet again. How much, he wondered? Three pounds? Five pounds? The dancer, wriggling her belly, swaying her hips, clicking the fingers of her two hands held together above her head, and jerking her bust with convulsive little movements that shook her breasts provokingly under their veil of beads, came forward towards their table, giving Khawaja

Jamil a smile as she did so.

“You seem to find favour in her eyes,” said Faris Deeb.

“Oh, she smiles at all the patrons,” said the estate agent, casually.

The dancer stood before them for a few moments, only six feet away, and the lust in Faris Deeb, vanquishing his avarice as nothing had vanquished it before, made a mental bid of ten pounds. With a violent thumping in his heart and a growing weakness in his knees, he said to his companion:

“If you have a mind to invite her, don’t let my presence stand in the way. I shall have to be leaving for the village shortly anyhow.” Desperately he hoped that Khawaja Jamil would take the hint, invite the girl and one of her companions, press him to delay his return to the village. The bidding in his mind went up to fifteen pounds as his eyes gazed now at the dancer’s navel, now at the tips of her trembling breasts. Surely, fifteen pounds should cover everything—the whisky, the champagne and all that was to follow. On these hopes and daring calculations, Khawaja Jamil slammed the door by saying:

“I didn’t want it for myself, Khawaja Faris; I’m here every night. It was to provide you with a little entertainment—but as you must be going back to Barkita soon there will be no time. Let us hope there will be other occasions. I will accompany you to the car stand. What time were you thinking of leaving?”

Faris Deeb’s thwarted desire turned into a murderous hate for his companion. He pulled at his watch-chain and took out of his waistcoat pocket the old, nickel watch, his father had given him on his twenty-first birthday. “I think I will be going now,” he said curtly. “It’s eleven o’clock.”

“Well, let me know as soon as you’ve made up your mind about that little property. If you decide to buy—and, by my honour, you will not find a better bargain going in Tripoli for a long time—we will have a big celebration. We will come here again, and there will be no nonsense about your having to go back to Barkita so early in the evening. The fun here begins only after midnight. You’ll have to stay till morning. But let me whisper a secret in your ear: this pretty piece from Cairo you’ve taken such a fancy to is only staying another week, so don’t let matters slide for too long.”

## 4

The car from Tripoli, in which Faris Deeb took a seat for Barkita, deposited him on the main road in the valley a few minutes before midnight. From there to his house on the hillside was a short walk of some fifteen or twenty minutes by a footpath which passed close to his apple orchard, whose crop he had sold that morning, while it was still on the trees, and was to deliver the following Sunday. The light of a large moon flooded the valley, but the only noises to be heard in it, as Faris Deeb started to walk, were those of the receding car that had brought him from Tripoli and was now on its way to the next village, and of the river, lapping its banks or tumbling over a rock here and there. The pool, which the river formed in a pocket among the rocks, gleamed with silver reflections in the distance.

Faris Deeb was still thinking of the Egyptian dancer. The shapes and motions of her body filled his drunken brain, and his own body ached with the hunger they had provoked. In imagination he sought the fulfilments which had eluded him in reality, constructed the scene which had never taken place. Would it really take place if he bought the property within the coming week? His avarice made further fantastic concessions. He would pay twenty pounds, twenty-five pounds. But was the estate agent serious? Without him he could do nothing, even with twenty-five pounds. He did not know how to set about these things. He couldn't go to the cabaret by himself, take a table, invite a girl, didn't know how to start, what to say. His dependence on the estate agent for the pleasure he wanted tormented him. And, rough villager though he was, a strange sense of shame made it impossible for him to go to the agent and say, "Look here, I want that girl. I'll pay twenty-five pounds for her. I'll buy that property if you fix it up for me." Why couldn't he? They were both property, weren't they? Both for sale?

His thoughts were suddenly arrested by something he saw. A figure moved on the river bank just behind his orchard, shadowy and, as it seemed to him, stealthy. He stood still and peered through the trees. The figure appeared and disappeared, with slow and careful motion, as though picking its way on the rocks that surrounded the pool, some hundred yards from where he stood. His suspicious nature instantly prompted the thought that somebody was coming to steal his apples, fill a sack with them and sell them the next day in the market. By God, he would teach the rascal and the whole village a lesson! He would catch the thief red-handed and give him the thrashing of his life before

dragging him to the police post!

With this intention he went into the orchard and began to advance slowly and noiselessly in the direction of the moving figure. For a few moments he lost it behind a clump of trees, but he was getting very close to it now and he took careful steps so as not to frighten the marauder away before he could catch him in the act of committing his crime. When a few moments later the figure reappeared, now only ten yards away or so, Faris Deeb was dumbfounded. It was the figure of a woman, standing among a group of rocks above the pool, with her back to him, taking off her clothes. He stood utterly still behind a tree, so that she could not see him even if she turned round, and gazed at her. He was certain, without seeing her face, that she was not a local woman. No woman of the village would be mad enough to come bathing in this pool at midnight by herself. It must be an English or American woman from the hotel. These Westerners were eccentric enough for anything.

Although the woman obviously thought that she was completely unobserved, Faris Deeb at first imagined that she had a bathing costume on underneath her dress, and that all he was going to see when she had finished stripping was a sight similar to some he had seen once or twice on the beaches of Tripoli when he had visited the town in summer, but rendered more exciting by night and the solitude of the place. He and this woman were alone in the valley, and she did not know that he was watching her as she removed her surface clothing. He waited to see her in her bathing costume. But when the clothes came off—some pulled over her head, some unfastened behind her back, some sliding down her legs—there was no bathing costume. She stood for a moment naked in the moonlight, then bent forward and dived into the pool.

Shameless woman! thought Faris Deeb with provoked lust masquerading as offended modesty. What does she think this place is—a brothel? I have a good mind to give her a thrashing when she comes out; she deserves it even more than an apple thief would have done. By God, I'll take her clothes away before she comes out! That would make her look a fool of a bitch, having to go back to the hotel naked!

While these expressions of hypocritical indignation were whirling round the surface of his mind, Faris Deeb's eyes gazed immovably at the bathing figure, and his body clamoured with a dark and imperious urge. When the bather swam towards the farther end of the pool, he crept forward and stood behind the trunk of a nearer tree, only a few yards from where the woman's clothes were. Then the bather swam back towards him. At first she was doing a gentle breast stroke, and he could only see her head above the water, but the face was distinct enough to show him that she was both young and pretty. The

water around her rippled with broken gleams of moonlight. The head came nearer and nearer. Then it stopped, and Faris Deeb's heart beat with a giddy excitement at what he saw next. The bather spread her arms out, dipped her head into the water and let her body rise to the surface in a straight, motionless line, the legs held close together, the feet thrusting gently in and out of the water. She remained thus for a few seconds, then she turned over and floated on her back, her breasts and the swell of her belly just above the edge of the water.

A hundred thousand Egyptian belly dancers could not have provided such a spectacle for the eyes of Faris Deeb. Although he had little poetry in his soul, the beauty of this secret, natural vision in its setting of moonlit water among the rocks and trees had a magic which overwhelmed him. The desires which had first stirred in him in the public, artificial atmosphere of the cabaret sharpened to an unbearably exquisite yearning. And—the thought flamed up suddenly in his brain, sweet and terrifying with its seductive power—here, the object of his desire was immediately accessible. He would not have to pay twenty-five pounds. He would not have to wait on the estate agent's favour. What his eyes saw, his hands could stretch out and seize. He had heard that these English and American women were only too willing. Perhaps, she was lying there hoping that some man would see her. Perhaps that was why she had done this thing.

At these thoughts a terrible agitation shook him. A great desire urged him on, but a great fear held him back; and in this state of tormenting conflict he remained for a few minutes motionless behind the tree. Afraid of the vision, and of the temptations it was whipping up in him, he shut his eyes. Then, desire overcoming fear by the weight of a straw, he opened them again and took a step forward. And just then, the bather came out of the water. Faris Deeb's courage faltered again. He gazed, helplessly and furiously, at the bather as she dried herself with a small towel. The minutes were slipping quickly. Soon she would be dressed, she would be gone. Yet, he could not move. Sick with rage at her provocation, at his cowardice, he took comfort again in moral indignation. "Shameless woman!" he muttered to himself. "Harlot! I shall report this to the municipality; they must not allow it to happen again. This is my orchard. I won't have naked women swimming next to it. By God, I won't!"

In a moment the woman had put on her few clothes and departed, walking back to the hotel. Faris Deeb watched her go, then, raging with frustration and self-contempt, he left the orchard and headed again for home—and Rosa.

# 5

Faris Deeb opened his eyes the next morning as though awaking from a dream that had taken him to a remote and magical land. For a few seconds, as he drifted back into consciousness, he really thought he had dreamt the strange experience that had befallen him on his way home the night before. Its reality, its indubitable reality came back to him only slowly, bringing sweet and increasing amazement. He tried to recapture the vision, to stand behind the tree, to gaze upon the pool and what he had seen in it. But he could not concentrate in the harsh morning light and amidst the morning bustle of activity in the house. His father's *argileh* was already gurgling on the terrace. Mitry was getting ready to go to the shop. Rosa was giving Antoine and Genevieve their breakfast before they set off for their respective jobs. The voices and noises, the comings and goings jarred on his nerves. He was angry and irritable. The vision would not stay in his mind. It broke and splintered teasingly, and the splinters pricked and goaded him. When he had got into his bed at half past midnight, he was resigned to accepting Rosa as a consolation for the vanished excitements of the cabaret and the pool, but the old cow had been asleep and he had not been able to wake her.

"Rosa!" he called, as he finished dressing, "bring me a cup of coffee quickly. I want to go down to the orchard."

"What do you want to go down to the orchard for?" said Rosa, speaking to herself and the children in the next room, where she was giving them their meal. "Haven't you sold the crop?"

He heard her but did not answer. He could not even be bothered to inform Antoine of his decision to charge him eight pounds a month for his keep. A desire to keep himself to himself, to remain alone with his thoughts dictated an avoidance of all intercourse with his family. And with himself he was in a state of rage. Bitter tauntings assailed him from the secret places of his mind, hopeless yearnings after a lost opportunity. Why had he been such a fool and coward, refrained from touching after seeing, walked away feebly from the orchard, meditating revenge by complaining to the municipality? Complaining!

He came out on the terrace as Rosa was arriving from the kitchen with his coffee.

"Don't you want your *argileh*?" she asked, not from any desire to minister

to his further pleasure, but merely as a matter of routine, and so as not to waste the tobacco if he was not going to wait for it.

“No,” he said. “Why? Have you soaked the tobacco? I did not ask you to. I said only coffee.”

“No, I have not soaked it.”

“Here,” said his father, “you can have a draw at mine to go with your coffee.” He offered his son the mouthpiece of the *argileh* tube.

“I will smoke a cigarette,” said Faris Deeb, taking out of his pocket a packet of American cigarettes which the estate agent had bought him at the cabaret the night before. He lit one, drew at it deeply, and sipped his coffee.

“They’re expensive, these American cigarettes,” said his father, surprised that his son, who never bought any but local cigarettes, should have indulged in such an extravagance.

“I didn’t buy them myself; they’re a present.”

“Mitry tells me you sold the apple crop for a good price,” said Rosa.

“Not so good that you can buy yourself a silk dress,” said Faris Deeb. Looking at his wife, he was filled with a flaming hatred for all women. The Egyptian dancer had eluded him; the woman in the pool had eluded him; even his own woman, whom he dressed and fed, had eluded, was always eluding him now. Cow, lump of dough, even when she was awake! “I shall need all the money I have to buy that property in Tripoli,” he added, by way of a stern warning against any projects involving an increase in domestic expenditure.

“Will you be going to buy it, then?” asked Abu Faris. “Did you have a look at it yesterday?”

“Ay.”

“Did you look at it by moonlight?” asked Rosa. “You were very late coming home.”

The form of her question, and what he had seen by moonlight checked his impulse to chastise her sarcasm with a violent retort. Strangely, he found himself on the defensive, and merely said: “I had to spend the evening discussing it with the estate agent.” This slight, temporary abdication of his power galled him, so he added with cold anger: “Anyhow, how do you know at what time I came home. When I arrived you were sleeping like a cow.”

“I was awake at half past ten, and you had not returned,” she said.

“It’s none of your business when I come home . . . I may be late again this evening; there’s some more business I have to transact. And you can’t complain that I disturb your sweet slumbers when I arrive. The dead trunk of a tree has more life in it than you, once your thick head flops on the pillow!” He

sipped the last of his coffee and walked out of the house, saying to Rosa, "Send me some breakfast to the shop later; my father can bring it."

Rosa thought, "Wish I could send you poison and crushed glass to rid us all of you! Why don't you die? Hundreds of decent people, loved by their families, useful to the world, die every day. But you'll bury us all and live to be ninety!"

Faris Deeb walked briskly down the footpath that led to his orchard and the pool beyond it. The agitation in his spirit communicated a jerky, stumbling impulse to his legs, and the distant view of the pool drew him with a teasing magnetism. It was still early morning and there were few people about, but the straight golden shafts of the climbing sun were striking here and there into the valley, lighting up pocket after pocket of it. This was the real world, not the phantom world of the moonlit night; but that phantom world was all that Faris Deeb saw with his mind's eye. Vanished from earth and sky now, yet filling his mind, it had a secret reality which made the day seem like a dead reflection of it. The orchard, when he reached it, was just a congregation of apple trees, as it had always been till the night before, having no meaning beyond itself. He stood behind the tree that had concealed him while he watched the bather, and gazed at the pool. The water sparkled in the sun, but it was nothing more than just water. The rock on which the bather had left her clothes, on which she had stood drying herself, when she came out of the pool, lay above the water—a grey, flat ledge of stone, sterile, yielding nothing. Faris Deeb was bitterly disappointed in all this commonness and barrenness. He had come hoping to recapture the vision, the reality of what he had seen. But what his eyes saw now only interfered with the picture in his mind.

There was only one hope—that the bather would come again that night. This possibility had first occurred to him while he was talking to Rosa a few minutes earlier; and the promise and the challenge of it were now pounding in his heart. Opposite extremes of fear assailed him—fear of doing the thing he desired if he was tempted again, and fear of being too cowardly to do it. Perhaps it was better that he should not come to the pool again that night; anyhow, who said *she* was coming again? And if he came and there was nobody, it would be a bitter disappointment, and he would feel a fool and be tired and sleepy, waiting in vain till after midnight. And if he came and found her . . . ? He turned away from the pool, walked through the orchard and headed for his shop. The sight of the apples hanging heavily on the boughs deflected his thought. The greedy doubt which he always felt after concluding a transaction, however profitable, assailed him again: could he have squeezed another few pounds out of the buyer? But if he was greedy, he was also vain, and he dispelled the doubt with a quick reassertion of his vanity as the most

astute dealer in the village, who always got the best of a bargain.

## 6

Rosa was not surprised to see the village Greek Orthodox priest coming towards the house in the middle of the morning, accompanied by the boy who carried for him the little vessel of holy water with which he sprinkled benediction over the houses of the members of his flock, in return for a small contribution for the Church—which meant, as the parishioners knew, a present for himself. Rosa hurried to the drawer where she kept her purse, and took out a couple of twenty-five piastre notes—the equivalent of a shilling—which was the usual amount she gave for this unsolicited blessing. It was enough for the holy beggar—that and the cup of coffee she would have to make him!

Having equipped herself financially for the visit, she removed her apron, put a comb through her hair, and did some rapid tidying in the sitting-room. Then she went out to welcome the visitor, as he reached the garden gate. He was an elderly priest, with a greying beard; and he wore the long, black habit, black cloak and tall, black hat of his office; it was like a top-hat, but instead of a curving rim at the bottom, it had a short, flat rim at the top. The hem of his garment was grey with dust from his walk up the hillside.

“Welcome, welcome, Abuna,” said Rosa, opening the gate. “Good morning to you; do me the honour to come in.” She took his hand and kissed it.

“Good morning to you, and may God bless you, my daughter,” he said, coming in with his acolyte. “I hope I have not interrupted you in your work.”

“Abuna’s visit is always welcome, whatever it interrupts,” she said, leading him into the house and thinking that if he had come the day before, when her lover was there, the interruption would have been most abominable.

“You are very kind, my daughter,” he said, then, as they entered the hall, he turned to his water-carrier, took the small whisk from the vessel and sprayed a few drops of benediction in various directions, mumbling the appropriate formulas. Rosa took out her two twenty-five piastre notes and pushed them into the boy’s hand, as though they were a tip for him, whereas in fact all three of them knew that, by a polite convention, the poor lad acted only as a recipient for the priest.

When these formalities were over, Rosa ushered the priest into the sitting-room, and went into the kitchen to make him the customary cup of coffee. The boy sat out by himself on the terrace, eating an apple which Rosa had given

him.

The priest had a delicate mission to carry out. He had not come merely for the fifty piastres Rosa had given him, but for another purpose as well. In her confessions to him Rosa had never mentioned anything about her lover; but rumours had reached him of late, and he had decided to convey a veiled warning to the erring woman. It was both in her interest and in his that he should do so. The more he knew about the secret weaknesses of his parishioners, and the more they knew that he knew, the greater would his power be over them, the more generous their donations to the Church. Father Boulos was not above a little indirect blackmail in such matters, but it had to be very indirect and delicately practised.

When Rosa came back with the coffee therefore he began by asking her the usual questions about the health and well-being of the family.

“As to health,” said Rosa, “they are all well, thank you, Abuna, and praise be to God. But you know what Faris is like. What shall I tell you?”

“You need not tell me anything, my daughter. I know what Faris is like. I know everybody and everything in this village.”

Rosa started slightly at the almost imperceptible stress he laid on the word “everything.”

“Of course, of course,” she said plaintively, deciding to ignore any possible innuendo and assume that Father Boulos was merely referring to her husband’s ill-treatment of her and the children. “You know all our secrets.”

“Does he still beat you?” asked the priest.

“He struck me in the face only yesterday morning. Look. Perhaps you can see the mark. But I don’t care about myself. It’s the children, the children, Abuna! He makes their life a misery. That’s why he struck me yesterday—because I was standing up for them. My heart bleeds at the way he treats them. He’s a tyrant. He has no love or mercy in his heart.”

“Never mind, my daughter. You must forgive him. It is his temper. God made him so, and we cannot understand the ways of God. But we must remember that we are all sinners and in need of God’s mercy. Every one of us is a sinner, is that not so?”

“Of course, Abuna,” she said, avoiding his eyes that were fixed on her significantly, while she looked down on the floor with an expression of conventional religious humility, as though merely acknowledging her share of the universal sinfulness of mankind. She still was not sure whether there was any hidden meaning in his words.

“I hear a lot about the unhappiness and the wickedness of people,”

continued the priest, “not only from what my parishioners tell me about themselves in the confessional, but also from the gossip that goes on. In a small village like this there is much gossip. God preserve us from malicious tongues.”

“Amen,” said Rosa, still seemingly taking the priest’s remarks as expressions of general truths, but convinced now that he knew of her sin and was admonishing her in particular.

“The most important things in life,” exhorted Father Boulos, “are fear of God, and a good reputation. If Abu Mitry will not mend his ways, you have the satisfaction, at least, that you have never given him cause to ill treat you; and if your conscience is at peace, nothing else can really hurt you. God be with you, my daughter. I will have to leave you now.” He slapped his knees, with large and fleshy hands, as though spurring a mount, and prepared to rise.

“Just a moment, Abuna; you must take some of our grapes and apples; they’re the best we’ve ever had. I’ll fill you a small basket, and the boy can carry it for you and bring it back when you’ve emptied it.”

“Don’t trouble yourself,” he said, after Rosa’s retreating figure, and in a protest which he did not mean to be taken seriously. “I’ve got some in the house.”

Rosa came back with the basket of fruit, but knowing that Father Boulos preferred cash to presents in kind she pushed another twenty-five piastre note into the boy’s hand as he and his master were departing.

“You shouldn’t have done that,” said the priest. “You’ve already given him something.”

“Never mind,” said Rosa, full of amiability. “It isn’t every day I have the pleasure of seeing Abuna. You have honoured and blessed the house.” To herself, she thought: “Beggars and hypocrites!” as she stood watching him and the boy going down the hill. Who had told him? How had he come to know? She and Yusef had been lovers for two years now, and she had been so careful that she thought nobody knew about it. She was not afraid of Father Boulos. He would not say anything to her husband. A few piastres every now and then were enough to keep his mouth shut. Faris never gave him a bean. No, he wouldn’t tell on her. He was just giving her a friendly warning to put her under an obligation, so that she should give him a few extra piastres. She knew the old fox well enough. Holy man indeed! Nevertheless, what he had reported by his oblique remarks alarmed her. If people in the village—wicked, wicked gossips, what business was it of theirs?—were talking, Faris might pick up something, and then. . . . She must warn Yusef at once. Yusef had a silly, swaggering streak in his nature, and he drank. He might have said something

incautious, perhaps boastful, when drinking with a friend.

Rosa took a red towel and went out into the garden. There, she placed the towel triangularly on the clothes line at a certain point. That was an agreed signal between her and her lover. Yusef would see it from his garage, and know what it meant. It meant Rosa wanted to see him urgently, but not in the house (the signal for the all-clear in the house was a blue towel); in such circumstances, they met in a derelict, half-finished house (whose owner had returned to South America to make enough money to complete it, but had not been heard of for many years) in the outskirts of the village. As soon as Yusef was able to leave the garage, after seeing the towel, he would sound three sharp hoots on an old motor horn which he kept in the garage specially for the purpose. Then Rosa would set out for the derelict house.

The signalling system having functioned successfully, Rosa and Yusef met half an hour later. She was the first to arrive, and when he came in, she said apprehensively:

“You made sure no one saw you enter?”

“Yes. What’s the matter? Anything happened? Has he struck you again, the beast?” He was about her own age, a little over forty, and not much taller; good-looking in a robust, undistinguished way, with ruddy cheeks and thick black hair; and his hands, in spite of the wash he had given them before leaving the garage, still bore the stains of engine oil.

“No; I wouldn’t call you out here in the middle of the morning just to tell you that.”

“Never mind what you called me for. Now that you’re here, I’m going to take what I want.” He smiled naughtily, taking her in his arms and pressing her close to him. “It does your looks good to be made love to. You looked fine yesterday, but to-day you are the queen of Lebanon! When can I come again to the house?”

“It seems you’re already coming too often.”

“What do you mean?”

She told him of the priest’s visit.

“I’ll pluck the old gossip’s beard if he doesn’t keep his mouth shut!” broke out Yusef, who had no more respect for the local clergy than Rosa, and who expressed his sentiments with the swagger which Rosa feared.

“He’ll keep it shut all right, but it means others are talking.”

“Who’s talking? Let me know who it is, and I’ll give him such a bleeding mouth that he’ll never be able to talk again.”

“And much good that’ll do us. The whole village would know then.”

“Well, let them know; let them talk. They all know the beast beats you. Let them know you’re having your revenge on him.” His voice dropped its defiant swagger and became softly amorous, seductive, as he lifted her skirt and began caressing her thighs. They were now sitting on a long stone which had been left lying on the floor of the half-finished room. A few thorny plants grew around it from the untiled floor.

“We must talk of serious things just now,” she said, but without attempting to arrest the progress of his caresses. “You must be very discreet, Yusef!”

“But I am discreet. Why, when we meet in the village, I pretend not to see you.”

“It’s not your eyes I’m afraid of; it’s your tongue. Have you told anyone about us? Any of your friends?”

“I swear by the bones of my father and mother not a word has come out of my lips.”

“Not when you’re sober, but you can’t always be sure what you say when you’re drinking with your friends, and they start talking of Faris and of how cunning and astute he is, and of how everybody fears him in the village, and of how he underpaid you for the lorry he hired from you for the transport of the grain; you might be tempted to let drop some word.”

“No, no, my heart. Never fear.”

“I’m not afraid on my own account; I don’t fear him and I can look after myself all right. But I fear for you, my love. Faris might do something dreadful to you if he came to hear anything.”

“If you can look after yourself, so can I. I am stronger than he is, if it comes to a fight. I’ll knock him down in the middle of the market place. I’ll kill him!”

“And be hanged for it or go to prison for the rest of your life?”

“Not if he attacks me. But you don’t have to worry about it Rosa; he will never come to know anything. Nobody will tell him; they all hate him.”

“Exactly. Someone may tell him just out of hatred, to humiliate him. Besides, it isn’t only Faris I’m thinking of; I don’t want the children to hear anything.”

“But who will tell them? People are sorry for them because they have such a bad father.”

“You never know. If Mitry or Antoine quarrels with somebody, if a girl becomes jealous of Genevieve, they might easily try to insult them—say, ‘Go and see what your mother is doing,’ or ‘Who are you to talk to people like that when your mother is not a respectable woman?’ ”

“They wouldn’t dare; they would have me to answer to then. I’d break the jaw of anyone who said that.”

“But they would be right,” she said, changing her tone from the warning to the penitential. “I am not a respectable woman, am I?” She looked down on her exposed thighs and on his hand that was sweeping them languorously.

“Oh, Rosa,” he said, “you are a beautiful and lovely woman.”

“Go on with you. I’m no longer young; I have three grown up children.”

“And you have thighs like the full-blown inner tube of a car tyre—just as firm and smooth and beautifully rounded! Oh, if he would only die, we could get married, Rosa, and be together always, and do this every day, every day.”

“He won’t die. The likes of him never do. He will live to bury us all; so you must be very careful, my love.”

Faris Deeb found it difficult to settle down to any work that morning. He pretended, before Mitry, to be going through some old accounts, but not even the fascination of figures that represented his profitable transactions and symbolized his astuteness, power and modest wealth could divert his mind from the strange experiences of the night before and the disturbing desires and speculations they had given rise to. He ordered two or three cups of Turkish coffee from the café near his shop, and smoked more than half the packet of American cigarettes which the estate agent in Tripoli had presented him with the day before. Twice he left the shop, as though going on important business, but merely walked through the village in the direction of the hotel, then came back. Even if he saw her by daylight, he doubted whether he would recognize her; and he wasn't sure that he wanted to see her by daylight. By midday he had made up his mind, while returning from his second walk towards the hotel, that he did not want to see her again at all, that he would not go to the pool that night even if he was sure that she was going to be there. Instead, he would go to Tripoli and clinch the deal with the estate agent; at least he would tell him that he was going to buy the land, perhaps pay him a deposit. And that would make the agent take him to the cabaret again. He would take with him twenty-five pounds in addition to the deposit money. He would have that Egyptian dancer. She was there to sell her body, wasn't she? And he could afford to buy it. It was a commercial transaction which, strange as the cabaret world was to him, he could understand. He might feel awkward about it, but it did not frighten him like the experience at the pool.

On his way back to the shop, he stopped at Yusef's garage to ask if there were any cars going to Tripoli in the afternoon.

"Where's Yusef?" he asked one of the boys who worked in the garage.

"He's gone out on a job," said the boy. "Will be back soon."

"I never find him here when I want him," growled Faris Deeb. "Where the hell does he keep buzzing out to?"

"Don't know. Was it about the lorry for the grain you wanted to see him?"

"No. Are there any cars going to Tripoli after lunch?"

"Don't know."

"There isn't a single cursed thing you do know, is there? Let Yusef send

me word when he comes back, do you hear?"

At that moment Yusef walked into the garage, whistling a gay tune. He had left Rosa ten minutes before.

"You seem to be very pleased with the world," said Faris Deeb, turning to face him. "Must have been a very profitable job you were out on."

Yusef stopped his whistling abruptly, startled to see Faris Deeb in the garage.

"It is you, Abu Mitry, who make all the profit in this village. The rest of us just scrape along," he said defensively.

"Ah, you don't do too badly, Yusef, judging by the price you charged me for that lorry."

"The lorry!" said Yusef, his alarm allayed. "By Almighty God, you still owe me a pound for that lorry!" The loud protestation of his financial grievance against the cuckold caressed him with its pleasing irony.

"Never mind about the lorry," said Faris Deeb. "Do you know of any cars going to Tripoli this afternoon?" The embarrassing purpose for which he wanted the car made him less aggressive than usual.

"No, all the Tripoli cars have gone now."

"And the 'buses?"

"There are none to-day."

Faris Deeb had feared this, but his desire for the Egyptian dancer was so urgent now that he was prepared to surmount the transport obstacle by a method he had never resorted to in his life before. For no purpose whatever had he once hired a whole car for the journey to Tripoli. He had always travelled by 'bus, or paid for one seat in a car that took several passengers. By these methods of public transport the journey cost the trifling sum of forty or fifty piastres. A whole car would cost at least four times that amount, and if only a large car was available, six times.

"I've got very important business in Tripoli," he said. "I will hire a whole car. Can you let me have one?"

"A whole car?" said Yusef amazed. "Single journey, or return?"

"No, single journey; I shall be staying there a few hours. I shan't want to keep it all the time. I can always find a seat for the return."

"It must be very important business indeed," said Yusef, quickly working out in his mind a figure that would make up to him his loss on the lorry.

"Not so important that I will let you fleece me," said Faris Deeb, with a return of his aggressiveness and afraid that he had betrayed too much

eagerness. “The matter can wait till to-morrow, but I’d rather go to-day if your price is reasonable.”

“I don’t think I can spare you a car,” said Yusef, determined to make most of the situation, psychologically and financially. To torment the old bully in this way was almost as agreeable as sleeping with his wife!

“What about the Buick, there?”

“That’s promised for another journey at four o’clock.”

“It could take me to Tripoli and be back here before four.”

“Scarcely; and certainly not if it had a breakdown on the way.”

“Who’s it promised to?”

“Some people at the hotel; they want to go up to the cedars.”

“What people?”

“A party of Americans. What time were you thinking of starting?”

“Round about two—just after lunch.”

“That makes it out of the question. The car couldn’t go to Tripoli and return in two hours.” Yusef felt his power growing. To his amazement Faris Deeb was becoming almost humble. He looked embarrassed, confused.

“I could leave a little earlier. I’ll give you a pound for the trip.”

“A pound for the Buick, all the way to Tripoli! No, Abu Mitry, you’d better wait till to-morrow and go by ’bus. You say it is not a matter of great urgency.”

Faris Deeb’s aggressiveness returned. “Come on,” he commanded, “let me have that Buick. I can’t spend the day bargaining with you. I’ll give you a pound and a quarter, and that’s my last word.”

“Two pounds.”

“By God, you’re presuming too much. Don’t make me angry, I tell you. I’m having that Buick for a pound and a quarter. Here it is. . . .” He took out his wallet and produced the money.

At this stage, Yusef felt that he had gone far enough. And the presentation of the money ensured him against default.

“By Almighty God,” he said, but in a relenting tone, indicating that he had accepted the price, “it is too little.”

“Come on, come on, it is quite enough,” said Faris Deeb, becoming almost amiable now that he had secured his object. “And I’ll tell you what, if your driver can pick up another passenger on the way, I shan’t mind sharing the car, and you’ll get the extra fare.”

“God be with you, Abu Mitry,” said Yusef, unable to resist the irony, “it is good of you to share what is yours with others.”

Faris Deeb arrived in Tripoli soon after three and made straight for the estate agent’s office. He had shaved, put on his best Sunday suit, and brought with him one hundred pounds—seventy-five to be paid, if absolutely necessary, as a deposit on the land, and twenty-five to be spent with the estate agent in celebrating the conclusion of the deal, in the manner indicated by that artful salesman.

There were many questions that still troubled him. For instance, where would they go after the cabaret, and the drive in the car? To the dancer’s rooms? To a hotel? To the estate agent’s flat? And when would he be required to pay the money? He was not going to be made a fool of. He would only pay at the end, if he had got what he wanted. And how exactly was he going to get it? He still did not know, could not envisage the precise sequence of events in these matters. He supposed that at the cabaret, when they invited the girls to sit with them (there would be *another* girl for the agent; the Egyptian was going to be his), they would talk and drink, becoming gradually merrier, more and more intimate. Then, he supposed, Khawaja Jamil would intimate to the girls that they wished to have their company after the show, say something about a drive in his car. That was the procedure Khawaja Jamil had suggested; and he had more or less offered him the Egyptian girl. Well, he must make sure that in the car he had her to himself in the back seat, while the estate agent had the other girl in front with him. Then. . . . Here Faris Deeb’s imagination faltered, knowledge failed him, but an instinct deeper than knowledge came to his aid—the awareness of an urge which somehow or other would cause him to begin, to take the girl’s hand, to make the first contact with her body. He would have had a few drinks. That would give him courage. Then. . . . Curse her, she was there to take his money in return for her services! He should not be afraid to demand what he was going to pay for. She herself would offer it, would help him along. . . .

He was bitterly disappointed to find that the estate agent was out. His clerk said that Khawaja Jamil had gone to see a property in a village a few miles outside Tripoli.

“But he will be coming back?” asked Faris Deeb.

“Maybe he will, maybe not. He said if he wasn’t back by six, I was to lock up and go. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“No, I want to see him personally; I will wait.”

“Please take a seat. Boy, fetch a cup of coffee for the gentleman—or would

you rather have a coca cola?”

“Please don’t trouble yourself.”

“But you must. Khawaja Jamil would be angry if you had nothing.”

“All right; coffee, then.”

“From what village does Your Presence come?” asked the clerk, while Faris Deeb was waiting for his coffee.

“Barkita,” said Faris Deeb, stung by the fact that the clerk had seen, even through his best clothes, that he was not a man of the town.

“It is my misfortune that I have never been to it. They say it is a lovely place, with a river and a pool in the valley.”

“Yes, it is not a bad little place.”

“And the new hotel is doing very well—very popular with the Americans and the English of the I.P.C. and the Tapline. Got many of them staying up there now?”

“Quite a few.” The memories of the previous night, which for some time had lain quiescent in his mind, subdued by thoughts of the Egyptian dancer, quivered into activity again—image after image, movement after movement, teasing him with their vanished sweetness. He lit a cigarette and sipped his coffee in silence, glad that the clerk had stopped talking to him.

Four o’clock came and there still was no sign of Khawaja Jamil. Faris Deeb had been waiting nearly a whole hour. Outwardly, he registered the entrance and exit of several clients who came to see the estate agent, had a few words with his clerk and left; the appearance of two or three beggars in the doorway, one of them a Moslem woman, all dressed and veiled in black, carrying a sickly-looking infant; the clerk, working at his papers, occasionally answering the telephone or hammering a few lines on the typewriter. But the whole time, his inner thoughts and the vision of his mind remained fixed—or rather moved in a see-saw fixation between the girl in the pool and the cabaret dancer.

“Khawaja Jamil is being a long time,” he said at last.

“I am very sorry,” said the clerk, looking up from his files. “Did you have a definite appointment with him?”

“Not exactly, but he was expecting me to get in touch with him. It’s about a property I want to buy in Tripoli; we saw it together yesterday, and I said I’d think it over and let him know my decision. That’s why I’ve come to-day.”

“Have you decided to buy then?”

“Not exactly. I want to discuss the matter further with him.”

“Well, if he knows you may be coming to-day he will probably be returning quite soon. Here are some newspapers; they will help you to pass the time. Would you like another coffee?”

“No, thank you.” Faris Deeb took the newspapers and began to glance at them. There was little in the first two that held his attention. But the moment he looked at the third, he stiffened in his seat with a shock of amazement. On the front page there was quite a large picture of the head and shoulders of a young woman, whom he instantly recognized as the girl in the pool. The fact that it was a black-and-white picture and that the eyes were in deep shadow, as he had seen them the night before, leaving the face to appear as a piece of sculpture in which only projections and depressions and general outlines formed the image, made it much more recognizable than if he had seen the colour and expression of the eyes, the paint on lips and cheeks. What he had seen in the night was a pattern of light and shade, and this was what he saw now.

“Anyone you recognize there?” asked the clerk, who happened to look at him just then and notice the fixed expression with which he was gazing at the pictures.

“Oh, no! I’m just looking.”

“That girl there is an American film star—you haven’t got a cinema at Barkita, have you?”

“No, but I’ve often been to the cinema in Tripoli and Beirut,” said Faris Deeb, anxious to let the clerk know that he was a cultured man.

“Ever seen her there? Jeannette Waverley?”

“No, never seen her.”

“She’s been in the Lebanon for a few weeks, playing a part in the film they’re making at Baalbek. Now, she’s gone to have a quiet holiday somewhere in the mountains before she returns to her country. Maybe she will come to you at Barkita!”

“What would bring her there,” said Faris Deeb, jealously, fearfully guarding his secret.

“She doesn’t want people to know where she’s gone. They say she’s a woman of mystery and likes to be by herself; and when she was here and in Beirut, my, my, you should have seen the crowds that swarmed around her!”

Another client came into the office, and the clerk became engaged with him in a business conversation. Faris Deeb put the newspaper down with a gesture of pretended indifference, and lit another cigarette; but his eyes kept going back stealthily to gaze upon the picture. American or European film

stars, as such, had little glamour for him since he did not know much about them. When he went to the cinema in Tripoli or Beirut, it was to see Arabic films featuring mainly famous singers. Also, what the clerk had told him destroyed, in a sense, the magic of the previous night. The woman he had seen in the pool was an impersonal being, the creature of a dream. To see her picture now in a newspaper, to know her name, to be told who she was—all that came between him and the vision he had seen. The Egyptian dancer was different. He had seen her in public, on the floor of a cabaret; and she was still the person he had seen—a semi-prostitute to be had at a total cost of twenty-five pounds or so, if only Khawaja Jamil would come. Faris Deeb began to feel a mounting animosity towards the estate agent for his continued absence. At five o'clock, he accepted another coffee from the clerk; and while he was drinking it and smoking another cigarette, his hopes that he was going to be rewarded for his long wait revived for a while, but, as five minutes after five minutes slipped past on the clock, they began to dwindle again, and his gloom deepened into bitter frustration.

At five to six, the clerk said: "It doesn't look as though Khawaja Jamil was coming," and he began to tidy up his papers for the night.

"No; I will be going," said Faris Deeb.

"If you'd only made a definite appointment with him for this afternoon, he wouldn't have gone out of town, I'm sure, or he'd have been back before now. I'm very sorry you've had to wait all this time to no purpose. Will you be coming again to-morrow?"

"No. I have work in the village to-morrow. I will get in touch with him later. Good night."

Faris Deeb had come to a very daring decision. He would go to the cabaret by himself. He would dispense with the introductory services of the cursed estate agent. After all, it was the money that mattered, and he had that in his pocket. He might even feel less awkward if he went alone. He would take a secluded table, give his waiter a good tip and let him fix things up for him. He would hire a taxi for the drive after the show. The girl must have her own rooms, and when she saw how lavish he was with the drinks and the tips everything would be all right.

But the cabaret didn't open till eight, so he had another two hours to while away. He walked about for some time, then went to a café and ordered himself a flagon of arak. As he sipped the drink, his resolution became stronger and stronger, his hopes of success brighter, his recurring anxieties dimmer. Under the influence of alcohol, the time passed much more quickly than during his dreary hours of waiting in the estate agent's office. The minutes became a

pleasant stream down which he floated, between verdant banks, towards eight o'clock.

He left the café a few minutes before eight and arrived at the cabaret just as it was opening. A waiter advanced helpfully towards him. "Where would the Bey like to sit?" he asked. "These tables here are reserved, but all the others are at your disposal."

Faris Deeb selected a table at some distance from the dancing floor—a table with two chairs—and sat down with some awkwardness.

"What would the Bey wish to order?" asked the waiter.

"Whisky."

The waiter withdrew, and Faris Deeb cast his eyes about. The show had not started yet. The Egyptian dancer was not to be seen anywhere. But the cabaret was rapidly filling with its patrons, and Faris Deeb was glad that he had arrived so early. He would make sure that nobody invited her before he did.

In a moment the waiter was back with the whisky. The price was five shillings, but Faris Deeb, scarcely believing what he was doing, said to the waiter, "Keep the change," as he gave him the equivalent of a whole pound in the local currency.

"*Merci*," said the waiter with an immediate increase of attentiveness. "Is this table to your satisfaction? Would you like me to bring you a few more chairs before they're all taken? Are you expecting friends?"

"This other chair is enough, thank you," said Faris Deeb.

"You're expecting one friend?"

"Yes."

The waiter, well-versed in these matters, and noticing his patron's awkwardness and country manners, was quick to understand the situation and the opportunities it gave him—opportunities which the size of the tip he had just received made plainer still. He said, confidentially:

"Which is the one you want?"

"I don't understand," said Faris Deeb, plunged into confusion by the starkness of the question.

"I mean," said the waiter, knowing that the clumsy countryman was suffering from embarrassment and not from lack of understanding, and trying to help him by a more tactful approach, "which of the young ladies you wished to invite to sit at your table, because I could convey your invitation to her before she accepts another. Or perhaps you haven't seen them yet? Have you honoured us with a visit before?"

“Yes, I have been here before,” said Faris Deeb, assuming the air of an *habitué*.

“I thought so,” said the waiter flatteringly, as though recognizing the manner, then, as two young men sitting at another table called him, he said, “Excuse me a minute, please; I will come back to you.”

As the waiter departed, Faris Deeb cursed himself for his craven faltering. The waiter had as good as offered him what he wanted on a plate, just like the glass of whisky he had brought him, but instead of taking it promptly he had fumbled and hesitated. The waiter, like the clerk in the estate agent’s office, must have seen that he was a villager and not a man of the town. The Egyptian dancer would see that too. He would not know how to set about matters, like the knowledgeable townsmen she was used to. If he could just take her without these preliminaries, without speech and social courtesies and the intermediary offices of a pimp-waiter! But, curse her, he couldn’t! He could have done that the night before, at the pool, when the lonely bather came out of the water. That would not have required any of these awkward social preliminaries. It only required the courage of a virile man. But even in that he had been deficient. An Egyptian holiday-maker at Barkita, the summer before, had told him all sorts of things about American and English girls. He had told him that some of them, who came to Cairo, got Cook’s dragomen to make love to them by moonlight behind the Pyramids. Why should he not have been as acceptable as a Cook’s dragoman? Fool, fool, he had thrown away an opportunity that usually came only in dreams!

These bitter memories and reflections were cut short by the appearance of the impresario on the stage to make the first announcement of the evening. This was to the effect that the evening’s programme, a spectacle of unprecedented attraction, was just about to be opened by the world-famous Egyptian dancer, Miss Nadia Fahmi, in an entirely new and original dance called “The Slave of the Sphinx.” The announcement was greeted with a loud clap from the audience, and the clapping became thunderous when the slave of the Sphinx herself appeared, wearing what was intended to be an ancient Egyptian costume of black and gold drapery that hung from her waist, leaving her belly and breasts completely uncovered, except for the nipple-caps of tinsel and glass beads, and half-revealing her thighs as she put forward first one foot and then the other, and swayed her body backwards and forwards. Faris Deeb sought courage in a gulp (which, he reckoned even while he drank it, had cost him four or five shillings, taking into account the tip he had given the waiter) from his whisky and soda. If this creature was the slave of the Sphinx, then Faris Deeb’s most urgent wish at that moment was to be the Sphinx—even if the Sphinx had to pay for a bottle of champagne and a lot more to secure the

ministrations of his slave.

While the dance was in progress, the waiter, having delivered another order in the neighbourhood, paused at Faris Deeb's table.

"Is the whisky to the Bey's taste?" he inquired.

"Yes. It is good whisky," said Faris Deeb, taking another gulp and hoping the waiter would pursue his solicitous inquiries in another direction.

Not disappointing him, the waiter said: "And the dance? Are you enjoying it?"

"She dances well. What did the man say her name was?"

The waiter repeated it in a low voice, adding, "Would you like to invite her? I'll see what I can do about it."

"And another whisky, please," said Faris Deeb, putting another pound into the waiter's hand to encourage him on his mission, which he had so obligingly volunteered to discharge, thus relieving Faris Deeb of the embarrassment of asking for the girl in so many words.

The waiter sped away. The dance came to an end. The applause was tempestuous. The slave of the Sphinx bowed repeatedly (and Faris Deeb noticed that even when she did so, her breasts did not droop, like Rosa's), scattered smiles and kisses among her admirers, and withdrew. Faris Deeb's embarrassment burned hotly at this demonstration of the dancer's popularity. All eyes would follow her when she came to sit at his table, would look at him. He was seized with something like panic. A shame greater than desire urged him to get up and slip out of the place before any further developments took place. But then the tide of desire came back, submerging shame, and he remained seated, waiting. Desire and a truculent pride. He would make these townsmen jealous. He had the money, hadn't he? And that was all that mattered. Or, was it? Would she accept his invitation? Desire, made sick by fear of denial, consumed him. He waited. And just when his hopes were at their lowest, his emissary reappeared. Had he been successful? Curse him, he had had a pound and a half from him already, and doubtless he hoped for more.

"She has accepted your invitation," whispered the waiter, depositing the whisky and soda. "She will be with you in a moment. I've given her the number of your table."

Faris Deeb's mind reeled. For a moment it was as if he had become aware of the spinning of the earth on its axis and was terrified of being flung off its surface. The incredible had happened. The unattainable was his. The queen of the cabaret, the beauty whose naked belly and breasts he had seen, and would be caressing before the night was out, was coming to him. He straightened his

coat, pulled at his tie and waited, rehearsing nervously a few opening phrases.

In a moment she appeared, fully clothed in a tight dress that emphasized all that it was supposed to hide, and threaded her way to his table. The waiter came back just in time to hold her chair for her as she approached. Faris Deeb rose in a trance. She gave him a restrained smile.

“Do me the honour to sit down,” he said.

“Thank you,” she said, sitting down languorously. Her lips, naturally full, were amplified by the lipstick she wore, and the make-up lengthened the almond points of her eyes and added blackness to her eyelashes. A strong perfume, such as Faris Deeb had never smelt before, came with her, sat with her and, like a sweet, magic drug, caressed more than his sense of smell. She was no longer a mere cabaret dancer, a semi-prostitute, the slave of the Sphinx. She was a divinity.

The waiter remained, waiting for the order, and Faris Deeb, recovering sufficiently from the daze of the first few seconds, said:

“Ask the lady what she would like to drink?”

“Champagne,” said the goddess.

“Champagne,” repeated Faris Deeb.

The waiter withdrew nimbly. The goddess gave Faris Deeb another smile of limited significance. Another number was now in progress, and the audience was looking at the stage. Faris Deeb, relieved at the sense of privacy this gave him, said:

“The lady is a great artist.”

“Your Presence likes Egyptian dancing?”

“Yes, I like it. I hope you like our country?”

“Very much; the country and its people.” The amplified lips and the black-ringed eyes stretched again amiably. Faris Deeb’s heart thumped more tensely. If he had been completely sober, he could not have faced the reality through which he was living—the reality of the goddess sitting at his table, talking to him, smiling at him. But the arak and whisky he had already drunk blurred the situation sufficiently to make it just bearable—to make him capable of handling it, at least on this level of general, polite conversation. He said:

“And we too like the Egyptians. They’re always welcome here.”

“The people of the Lebanon are also welcome in Egypt. Has Your Presence ever been to Egypt?”

“No; it is my misfortune that I have not.”

“You must come soon, then.”

“God willing.”

“Is Your Presence from Tripoli or from the mountains?”

“From Tripoli,” he lied, suspecting that she had recognized him as a countryman.

The waiter returned with the champagne, and the bill. It was for three pounds. Faris Deeb paid the price, then gave the waiter a fourth pound, saying: “This is for you.” The size of the tip to the servant in her temple would indicate to the goddess the amount of tribute she herself would receive for the favour that was going to be asked of her—the favour she must already know was expected of her; for surely, she did not think he merely wanted her to sit and drink with him, drink champagne at that fantastic price! She would not have come and asked for champagne unless she were willing. The estate agent had said this was the way these things were arranged. But how, when it came to the point, was he going to ask her? His imagination still failed him when he reached that final and delicate edge of his speculations.

“To your health,” she said, raising her glass.

“The lady’s health,” he said, and they drank.

“This is a good dance, too,” she said, turning to look at the performance in progress.

“Yes, it is a good dance, but you dance better.”

“What is it you like about my dance?”

“Everything,” he said, in some confusion, thinking of her belly and breasts.

“You praise me too much,” she said, showing only a tepid interest in his compliment, and drinking another sip of her champagne. He took a large gulp of his and said:

“The lady is modest. I speak the truth.”

“If another artist was sitting with you now, you’d say the same thing to her,” she said, turning her eyes from the stage to look at him again.

“But I did not invite another artist; I invited you.”

“Your Presence is very generous.”

“I am grateful to the lady for accepting my invitation.” He emptied his glass, feeling the fumes rising pleasantly to his head. The waiter appeared promptly and refilled his glass. While he was doing so he masked the dancer, who quickly seized the opportunity to tip out the remainder of her drink into the ice-bucket. The waiter then turned and refilled her glass. Faris Deeb did not notice this little operation. He did not know that cabaret girls had to pretend to drink much more than they did, so that their hosts should pay for as many

drinks as possible, and get drunk themselves if they wished, while the girls retained their sobriety, both in order to be able to dance again and to handle the client to the maximum advantage in any situation that might develop.

“Is the champagne to the Bey’s satisfaction?” inquired the waiter, now profuse with his attentions.

“Yes, it is good champagne,” said Faris Deeb, and this time it was he who raised his glass first. The intoxicating sparks flying about his head gave him a confidence that was becoming more and more exhilarating. A man who was entertaining another dancer at a table not far from them was fondling her arm and playing with her fingers. Faris Deeb had been watching him for some time, at first feeling enviously and helplessly incapable of taking such liberties himself. But after a few drinks from his second glass of champagne, his courage caught up with his desire, and the cunning of which he was a master in business transactions came swiftly to help him in this situation that was so new to him. The goddess had just put her glass down, after another little sip, and let her hand drop onto her knee.

“That’s a beautiful ring you’re wearing,” he said, and, as his heart reached a new crescendo in its wild beating, he put out his hand and, for the first time, his flesh touched hers. It was the only woman’s flesh—apart from Rosa’s—that he had ever touched in desire; and the touch gave him a rapture which Rosa’s whole body could not give him now. He lifted the hand, soft and slender, as though to admire the stone.

“It must be an expensive ring,” he said. “How much did you pay for it?”

“I did not buy it myself. It is a present.” She began to withdraw her hand, but he held it tightly. The miser in him was fighting a desperate battle against the intoxication and overwhelming impulse of the moment. Wasn’t that a clear hint from her—the way she said it? But he was not going to be made a fool of. They were no longer goddess and worshipper, but buyer and seller; and he was giving nothing in advance—except the champagne. Only a promise; and what was there binding about a promise like that? He would fob her off with some little trinket.

“I could buy you a present too,” he said at last. “There’s some nice jewellery to be picked up in Tripoli.”

“Is there?” She allowed him to keep her hand and start caressing her arm.

“Yes. I know a good dealer. Perhaps to-morrow I may be able to see him.”

“No, no, you must not put yourself to such expense.”

“It will be a pleasure. I like to give pleasure to those who give pleasure to me, as the lady is doing this evening. But you are not drinking.”

“This glass has become tepid; it is so warm to-night. I only like champagne when it is very cold. Will you permit me to empty it into the bucket and have another glass from the bottle?” This was a tactic she resorted to when the waiter was not there to mask the operation with his body.

“Of course,” said Faris Deeb, horrified at the thought of so many shillings’ worth of good and monstrously expensive drink being thrown away because its temperature had risen by a few degrees. But he was caressing the dancer’s arm, and she was as good as pledged to him now for the night, and the champagne he himself had drunk was singing in his veins and—well, he was willing to pay the price of all that. He refilled her glass and his. She gave him a smile, and they drank again; she, another cautious sip; he, a gulp that half emptied his glass. As the liquid entered his body, it seemed to create a sunny, sparkling sea under him and around him, on which he floated dreamily, caressed by its gently dancing waves, freed from gravity, from all burdens of inhibition, fear and doubt, towards an enchanted and perfumed island where all desires were fulfilled and all dreams came true.

But if Faris Deeb was a cunning customer who did not intend to give the dancer that ring until she had earned it, Miss Nadia Fahmi was no less astute, and had no intention whatever of earning it in the manner her admirer desired. She would get it (and a few bottles of champagne for her and the management) at a far lower price—her company at his table for a disagreeable half-hour or so every night until she left Tripoli, letting him take her hand and caress her arm (she might go so far as to allow him to put his hand on her knee), giving him a few smiles, and vague promises every evening for the following night. She would madden him into capitulation by alternately arousing his hopes, and dashing them; accepting his invitations, and refusing them; offering herself then withdrawing. And now, the time had come to withdraw herself. She had given him enough of her presence for the first evening. Disengaging her arm from his hand, she said:

“I regret I have to leave you now.”

“Leave me? Where are you going?”

“There is another number in which I have to appear. I must go and prepare myself for it.”

“But you will come back after the number?”

“I’m afraid I cannot.”

“I thought you accepted my invitation for the evening,” he said, meaning “the night.”

“Oh, no; I am sorry if there has been a misunderstanding. I have other engagements after the next number.”

He swallowed with difficulty and said:

“But after the programme?”

“I regret. Perhaps some other time.” She gave him a smile not devoid of favour and promise.

“To-morrow?”

“I cannot promise, but maybe, if you come. Good night.” She rose, smiled at him again and departed. He followed her retreating figure with smouldering eyes, no longer floating on his pleasant sea, but sinking like a stone into its dark depths. The enchanted island had been snatched from his sight. The perfume had gone out of the air. The soft arm was no longer in his hand. And gradually, his thwarted desire was turning into rage. He had been made a fool of. Paid six pounds for nothing! So that a glorified prostitute should drink a few sips of champagne with him and let him stroke her arm, then slip like an eel out of his grasp! Fool! Fool! Did she really think he was going to buy her a ring if she gave him nothing more than that? Let her wait, the accursed bitch!

He poured himself another glass of champagne and drank it in quick gulps. Subtly, slowly, returning hope and enhanced desire began to allay his wrath. Perhaps he had expected too much from the first encounter, had been unreasonable to expect everything immediately. After all, she had had no notice of his intentions, had not known he was coming to invite her that night. She had probably told the truth when she said that she had other engagements. It would be surprising if she didn't, seeing how lovely and popular she was—the star of the show! The thought that she might be going to spend the night with some other man burned him with jealousy. But the jealousy only increased his desire and determination. He would have her before she left Tripoli. He had not made a bad beginning. She had not refused his invitation. She had sat with him for nearly an hour, she had let him caress her arm, she had said, “perhaps some other time.” She had given him smiles showing favour. Even if she were free that night, to have given herself to him at the first request would have made her look cheap. The hard dealer in him respected a seller that did not show too much eagerness to sell. Besides, she was not really a prostitute; she was an artist. She had her pride. He would buy her a ring, not an expensive one but something presentable, and he would intimate that a more costly one would follow.

Just then, Khawaja Jamil walked into the cabaret. His appearance gave Faris Deeb a start. He did not wish to be seen by the estate agent at that moment. He no longer needed him as an intermediary in the venture upon which he had embarked. Indeed, the estate agent's intrusion into it at this stage might spoil everything by depriving him of the privacy he needed to pursue the

matter, and throwing him into embarrassment and confusion. The champagne bottle was still on the table. Khawaja Jamil would know that his client had been entertaining one of the dancers; he would become inquisitive. Quickly, Faris Deeb rose from the table and made his way out unobtrusively, while Khawaja Jamil was talking to a friend at another table.

The dancers' dressing-room was close to the cabaret exit and had a window opening onto the street Faris Deeb had to go through on his way out. As he approached the window, he heard a girl's voice saying:

"Who was that clumsy customer you were drinking champagne with?"

Faris Deeb's feet stopped in their stride, and his ears waited for the answer, which came in the voice of Nadia Fahmi. She said:

"My dear, a donkey from the mountains, but laden with gold. He wanted me to spend the night with him!" A low, mocking laugh, in which the other girl joined, followed this speech.

"I say, pretty forward for a peasant like him!"

"It was the champagne, love. I bet he'd never tasted it before in his life; you could see that by the expression on his face when he took the first sip." There was more laughter, then the other girl said:

"Well, you take the gold, and keep him dangling. Send him back to his village without his load. All you have to do with a donkey is to lead him on with a carrot."

"That's what I'm going to do, light of my eyes; he's going to buy me a ring."

"Be sure to make it a diamond, dearie. They say there are some lovely sparklers here these days, coming from Sierra Leone. The Lebanese merchants there smuggle them through. . . . Be an angel, and pull this zip for me."

"Angel!" growled Faris Deeb in his heart. "She-fiend, daughter of sixty dogs, harlot, prostitute!" A black fury filled him, compounded of cheated lust, wounded pride and bitterness over wasted money. He turned back a step or two on an impulse of savage revenge, wanting to force his way into the room from which the voices had come, to kick and smash everybody and everything in it. But as he approached he saw Khawaja Jamil in the entrance hall; and walking towards him, having just emerged from the dressing-room, was the Egyptian dancer, wearing a new costume and a broad smile. Had he seen the girl first, he would have rushed straight at her and slapped her in the face, but the sight of the estate agent, while adding to his fury, inhibited his purpose. He spun round and walked away swiftly from the door, anxious not to be seen, not to have his furtive and humiliating amatory adventure exposed before that accursed agent who had brought him to this vile place and laughed at him to

hasten the conclusion of the deal. The deal! Not one square inch of land would he buy through that agent. Let him wait for his commission! Let the harlot wait for her diamond ring! They were all out to fool him, but now he was going to fool them all! He had given nothing in advance, except that bottle of champagne, and anyhow he had drunk most of it. Let them wait for the donkey from the mountains to come back laden with his gold. Let them see who was the donkey!

With such thoughts Faris Deeb allayed his rage as he made his way to the town centre to get a seat in a car going to Barkita. But as he waited for the car to start, and then slowly on his way back to the village, the sweetness of his dubious revenge turned once more into the bitterness of defeat and lust left unsatisfied, after it had been led to the very threshold of fulfilment, after its desirable object had almost come into his grasp—*had come* into his grasp. The hand with which he had stroked the dancer's arm itched with remembered sensations, strayed in imagination over the charms he had seen but was not to touch. Even the poor alternative of Rosa would be now denied him, for the cow would be asleep at this hour, as she had been the night before; and once she was asleep, nothing would wake her.

It was at this moment in his cogitations that the bright vision and the dark desire from which he had fled to Tripoli and the cabaret assailed him again. They came with a fierce and tormenting challenge. The bather in the pool—if she came again that night—would not be in a position to deny him what he wanted, to ask for a bottle of champagne and then walk away and jeer at him. No begging, no paying of money, no waiting and maddening uncertainty. No awkwardness in public. No talking even. Just taking. What had he to fear? Nothing. Even if she was not willing, she would have to yield. If she shouted, nobody would hear her from the well of the valley at that hour of the night. And afterwards, she would not have the face to complain. A woman who did that sort of thing could not complain of anything that happened to her. And the clerk in the estate agent's office had said that she liked solitude and privacy, that she had gone to the mountains to be alone and unknown. She would not want to go to the police. And, well, even if she reported it to the police, they wouldn't know who it was. She did not know him, wouldn't be able to prove anything. . . .

## 8

Barely an hour later, Faris Deeb stood, dazed and quietly trembling at the edge of the pool, with the naked body of the bather lying at his feet in the crumpled stillness of death. For, in his calculation of the risks he was taking, there was one possibility he had entirely overlooked—that his victim would struggle and compel him to use a ferocious violence in overcoming her resistance. It had all happened so quickly. She had slapped his face, pounded him with her fists, kicked him, screamed. And even in the lonely well of the valley, her screams had frightened him. Her resistance had enraged his desire. He had struck her blow after blow, clawed her with his long nails, put his hand on her mouth, clutched her by the throat, and suddenly become aware that he had killed her, as the vigour of her struggle was succeeded, in a brief moment, by utter limpness.

At first, not fear but anger and a raging sense of injury filled his brain. The stupid, vicious fool had brought in all on herself. She had made him kill her, and she deserved what she had got! All women deserved to be killed—that cow, Rosa, and the cheating prostitute of the cabaret, all! all! Raped and killed, raped and killed! He gazed upon the dead body with a baleful animosity. He would push it into the pool, and when it was discovered, the next day, everybody would think that she had got drowned while bathing—bathing naked without shame, no better than the cabaret prostitute!

For a moment he continued to look at the body, unable to move. Then, the first alarm bell rang in his brain, piercing through the turmoil of his other feelings. He must get away quickly from that place, or someone might see him walking away from the orchard, some late homecomer on the main road he had to cross, or on the footpath up the hill. He was startled at the thought that Antoine did late evening duty at the hotel on some days and did not come home till midnight. Was that one of his late evening days? He could not remember. But on no account must his son see him returning that way, or, when the body was discovered the next morning, the boy might remember and perhaps see some connection. The awareness that he was now afraid of his son, that the relationship of fear between them was strangely reversed, came upon him with a shock. A vulnerability he had never known sickened his heart. And another fear assailed him—that it might not be safe to leave the body in the pool, where it was bound to be discovered on the morrow, in case of an unlucky encounter with someone who knew him, on his way home from the

direction of the pool at that unusual hour. This fear was immediately confirmed by another—that the police and the doctor might be able to tell that the woman had not died from drowning, but had been assaulted and killed before she was thrown into the pool. He remembered reading in a newspaper about a case like that on the beach at Tripoli. He bent down and examined the body, and what he saw left him in no doubt that his fear was justified. There were bruises and scratches on the body, on the face, on the neck. The corner of the mouth had been slightly cut and there was a little blood around it. His feet felt weak. He sat down behind a rock to think. Even if no one saw him going home, things might get awkward for him if the body was discovered immediately and murder suspected. The pool was close to his orchard. The police might start asking him questions, might get on to the driver of the car that had brought him back from Tripoli and discover that the owner of the orchard had been deposited near it an hour before midnight. Rosa, who never woke up in the night when he wanted her to, might, just to spite him, wake up as he entered the house, and notice the time. The police might find out from her that he did not get home till an hour and a half after he had reached the village. He felt the same fear of her as he had felt a moment before when he had thought of Antoine. He could be at their mercy. . . . “No!” he fiercely reasserted the power which for an instant he had felt slipping from him. “She wouldn’t dare breathe a word, nor would Antoine. They would still be afraid of me. By God, they would not dare! But I must conceal this body—bury it, so that it will not be found to-morrow, so that it will never be found! And if it is never found nobody will ever know what happened to the woman.”

Around the orchard was a low wall of loose, uncemented stones. Faris Deeb had built it with his own hands in his younger days. He knew that under it the earth was, in some parts, sandy and soft and stood four or five feet above the rock shelf that formed its bed on this side of the mountain. Buried under that wall, the body would not leave a trace. All he had to do was to remove the loose stones for a distance of two yards or so, dig a deep trench, bury the body in it, then replace the earth and stones. The earth that formed the floor of the orchard was rough, dry, broken earth that had been turned only a few weeks before. No trace of the night’s digging would show on it, and the continuity of the wall could be restored without showing any sign of where it had been broken. Only, he needed a spade to do the digging, and a few hours in which to complete the job. It could be completed before dawn if he could get the spade quickly. But to get the spade he had to go to the house. And if the body was not going to be discovered the next morning—or ever—there was no danger in his being seen walking back from the orchard. Even if he met Antoine there would be no danger. No danger, only a dark discomfort of the heart, which he wished to avoid. He would wait another half hour to make sure that his son had

got back home even if he was doing late duty. He felt for his watch in his waistcoat pocket. It wasn't there. The chain hung loosely from the buttonhole through which it passed into the pocket on the other side. After a moment's bewilderment, the explanation flashed into his mind. In her struggle, the woman must have wrenched the watch off the chain. He looked around him on the rocks, among the stones, but could not see the watch anywhere. He got up and searched for it as far as the edge of the pool. It wasn't there. It must have fallen into the water, from which he could not retrieve it at that dark hour, even if it was near the edge and had not sunk to the bottom. That made it all the more imperative for him to bury the body. If the body was discovered the next morning floating on the pool, and his watch was found by the police at the bottom, he'd be as good as hanged. But if the body disappeared, it didn't matter about his watch. Nobody would look for it; he would be able to recover it at his leisure. The time was passing. He reckoned it must be already past midnight. Antoine would be home by a quarter past twelve at the latest. If *he* arrived at half past twelve he should be quite safe. The spade was in an outhouse in the garden. He could get it without being heard or seen by anyone in the house, and be back at the pool by a quarter to one. That would give him three or four hours before daylight. And if Rosa woke up when he was getting into his bed at dawn, he could say—curse the cow, he was not afraid of her! He could go and come when he liked. He had never had to account to her for his movements. All the same, he could say that the car in which he was coming back from Tripoli had broken down on the way, that he had had to walk half the night. As long as the body disappeared, none of these things mattered.

He found that he was perspiring. His handkerchief, with which he had tried to stop the bather's screams, lay beside him on a stone, close to the bather's own pile of discarded clothing. He picked it up and mopped his face, and when it became too wet to absorb any more moisture, he took one of the dead woman's garments and put it to the same use. It had a faint, elusive perfume, not like the heavy scent used by the cabaret girl. The smell of it gave him a feeling of nausea, which increased his sweating. He had never known the perspiration of fear—never since the day when, as a boy of twelve or thirteen, he had broken his father's bottle of arak, trying to taste a sip of it. And now, he would not admit the cause of his sweating. It was just the physical struggle he had had with the woman—the accursed fool! What right had she to come so close to his orchard and show herself naked, shameless American harlot? Yes, by God, worse than the cabaret dancer, who at least did it in public and wore a few clothes! He tried to light a cigarette, but failed several times because of the unsteadiness of his hand. That too was the result of the struggle: his hand was just a little tired, and there was a rising breeze which made the matches go out quickly. A large cloud sailed before the moon, and the valley darkened with its

shadow. He felt a little more comfortable in this passing darkness. The dead woman's body ceased to gleam when he looked at it. Its reflection in the pool was extinguished. The pool itself turned from silver to lead, and he preferred it so. Of course, he was not afraid, but he preferred the darkness to the light: that was only sensible caution—he was less likely to be seen.

He heard footsteps in the distance—footsteps of more than one person—and the comfort which the darkness had brought him was snatched away. He strained his ears to determine the direction of the noise. It seemed to be coming from the hotel towards the pool, and it was accompanied by voices. Faris Deeb sat up rigidly and his brain worked quicker than it had ever done before in his life. Suppose the woman had told someone at the hotel that she was going to bathe in the pool, and they had become worried at her long absence, sent out a search party to look for her? These could be their footsteps and voices coming towards the pool. He must flee from both the body and the pool, push the body quickly into the water and flee. He could hide in the shadow of the wall between the orchard and the road until the searchers were at the pool on the other side, and then slip out and make his way home, taking a chance on not being seen, on the police finding nothing to connect him with the body, even if they suspected that the cause of death was not drowning. And they might not suspect that at all; they might think the bruises and scratches on the body had been caused by her slipping and falling down the rocks around the pool, or—at this point the extreme cunning of which he was capable suggested an altogether new idea: would not his best defence be to attack? to call for help, to tell the searchers that as he was passing by his orchard on his way home he had heard screams for help coming from the pool; that he had rushed down and found the woman drowning, jumped into the water to rescue her, had to struggle with her because he could not swim and she was frantic with terror and hit at him wildly, so that he had to hit her back and clutch her under the chin to save her and prevent her from drowning him with her. That would clear him completely, explain the watch, save him from the task of spending half the night burying the body. Only, his clothes were dry. He must jump into the pool to wet them. That would completely prove his story . . . or would it? The question made him pause at the edge of the pool as he was about to go into it. There would be the medical evidence. He did not know how much the doctors could tell in a case of rape, what invisible injuries he had caused to the woman. Might he not be putting his head straight into the noose by trying to be too clever?

As he was debating these crucial questions with himself, he became aware that the footsteps and voices were receding. Nobody was coming to search at the pool. It had been a false alarm. The beating of his heart slowed down again

to its normal rhythm and his original purpose returned. He would go to the outhouse in his garden and fetch the spade. But in his absence he must not leave the body exposed to view where it lay. He must conceal it temporarily. Behind him there were three rocks leaning against each other in such a way as to make a small, dark cavern underneath. He picked up the body, which surprised him by its lightness, and pushed it into the cavern, then he took the woman's few garments and stuffed them in after it. In the shadows, their creased shapes and colours blended dimly with those of the rocks. Fool! he thought with savage anger at all the trouble she was going to put him to. Why did she have to struggle like a wild cat? Is it better like this?

He made his way through the orchard cautiously, halting repeatedly as he approached the wall that bordered the main road. Having satisfied himself that the road was empty on both sides, he climbed quickly over the wall and lowered himself without a noise onto the road. There still was nobody to be seen, and in a moment he had crossed the road and was walking along the footpath that led up the hill to his house. Apart from the noise made by the crickets in the pine trees, all was still, and not a light burned in any of the houses he had to pass on his way. Antoine by now would be home and fast asleep, and no other member of the family was likely to be awake at such an hour. In Barkita, apart from the hotel, everybody was in bed by ten, and it was now, he guessed, after half past twelve. All these thoughts were reassuring, but for the first time since he had become a man, Faris Deeb approached his house noiselessly and with timid caution, like a thief afraid of all the sleepers. He started when the garden gate creaked mildly as he opened it, and waited for a moment before going in, then with great care he shut the gate after him.

Fortunately for him, the outhouse was at the bottom of the garden, well away from the house. To reach it, he would not have to pass near any of the bedrooms. He could walk all the way round, hugging the garden wall, and any noise he made in opening the outhouse or looking for the spade would be too distant to wake any of the sleepers. He felt in his pockets to make sure that he knew where the matches were which he would need in his search for the spade, then he began to walk in the shadow of the garden wall, on the side that was not lit up by the moon. Again he noticed that his heart was pounding uncomfortably, and he stopped abruptly several times, imagining that someone was astir in the house; but it was only his father's loud snoring, and he was grateful to it as a symbol of the profound slumber of the whole family. His nervousness was subsiding as he reached the outhouse. The first part of his plan had gone without a hitch and was on the point of completion. In another moment he would have the spade.

He stopped with a great shock as he was about to open the door. There

were voices in the outhouse, whispering, caressing voices—lovers' voices. He listened. He caught a word, a phrase, a name. It was Genevieve, his daughter and her young man! The young man he had forbidden her to see, he had thrashed her for going about with! His immediate impulse, coming from a primitive, unthinking reaction of rage, was to storm into the outhouse and beat the life out of his daughter and her lover. But even as he reached for the door handle his purpose was stricken dead. Swift recollection came back of his own need for secrecy. He stood checked by a fear greater than his rage. If he broke into the lovers' den and beat up the culprits, his daughter would run into the house howling, the whole family would wake up, it would become impossible for him to take the spade and go back to the pool. He would have to wait until they were all asleep again, and the passing of the hours might be fatal to him. These were the concrete thoughts, coming in quick succession, that caused him to pause. But he was inhibited by a great, intangible fear as well—the fear of being discovered at all at that particular moment, of having to encounter the whole family in the glare of sudden light, when he needed secrecy and darkness to cover the rawness of his crime. In the morning it would be different. Now, he was fresh from his deed, and though the blood on his hands was invisible, he shrank at the thought of the hands being seen.

Breathing heavily, he stood still at the door of the outhouse, not daring for a moment even to retreat lest he should make a noise. He heard more whispers, more sighs. The tyrant's fury and the father's jealousy, impotent to act, came out of his nostrils like the snorting of a chained bull. His very torment made him eager to hear every word. Without moving his body, he lowered his head so that his ear came closer to the keyhole. If he could not disclose himself and catch and thrash the bitch red-handed, he must at least know everything she was saying, doing. There would be a time later to make her pay for her disobedience and the filth of her vice. He would appal her, when his own danger had passed, by confronting her with what he was going to hear now. That would show her he had a power over her which she could not escape, even in the depth of night when she thought he was asleep and she was safely beyond the reach of his eyes and ears and hands! Yes, now he could hear——

“Take it off, please take it off,” said his daughter's lover.

“I'm afraid.”

“Then I will.”

“No, no, please don't.”

“Why? Don't you love me?”

“You know it isn't that. If I didn't love you, I shouldn't be with you here to-night. My father beat me for going about the village with you. If he knew what I was doing now he would strangle me. Doesn't that show you how much I love you. I said I would marry you, didn't I? I said I would run away with you when we had saved up enough money.”

“I love you, Genevieve. I want you.”

“And I want you, my love. Only, we must be patient for a little while. Don't make me take it off. I shouldn't have asked you to come here to-night if I had known you were going to be so naughty.”

“But what's the harm in it? Your father isn't going to know, and it's much nicer to lie together without any clothes on, isn't it?”

“I don't know. It's very nice like this. I'm happy enough to lie close to you and feel your strong arms around me.”

“But you'll like it better when you've taken everything off.”

“How do you know? Have you tried it before with another girl?”

“You know I haven’t. You don’t learn these things from experience. Your blood tells you when the time comes. When a baby is born it turns to its mother’s breast by instinct. Take it off, Genevieve, please. Don’t be afraid, my darling. I won’t do anything you don’t want. Can’t you trust me?”

“No. Yes. I mean, it isn’t just you I don’t trust. I don’t trust myself. I don’t trust our feelings. I don’t want to start having a baby before we get married, before we are ready to leave the village. I believe my father would really kill me if that happened.”

“But it won’t happen, my love. We will not let it happen. We will be very careful. Please take it off.”

“All right, if you promise. Only you must not switch on your torch till I’m dressed again. I will not let you see me undressed. I am shy.”

Shy? Bitch! Harlot! Daughter of Satan! Again, Faris Deeb for a second forgot his peril, whipped into an avenging fury by what he had heard, by what was taking place, by what he knew was about to take place in the outhouse. The urge to assert his outraged power, at that supreme moment, became irresistible. He shifted a foot and seized the handle of the door, and his mouth opened to let out the blast of his rage. But his will was paralysed instantly by the next thing he heard. Genevieve said, “What’s that? Didn’t you hear anything outside?” Her dread of discovery struck the walls of his mind and boomed back with a terrible echo. The fear in her whisper was transferred to him. His hand silently released the handle of the door, and he listened, scarcely daring to breathe.

“It’s nothing,” his daughter’s lover reassured her. “You’re imagining things.”

“I thought I heard something,” she said with weakening conviction.

“The night is full of strange noises. It could have been a branch of the mulberry tree scraping the roof,” said her lover.

“I suppose it could.”

“Do you hear anything now?”

“No. It was only for a moment.”

“You see that it couldn’t have been anybody. No more excuses now. Take it off.”

“But you promise you won’t switch on your torch? Where is it? Give it to me. I don’t trust you.”

“What’s the difference between my touching you and my seeing you?”

“I don’t feel so shy in the dark. I haven’t got a fashionable figure.”

“I don’t care for fashionable figures. They’re all skin and bone.”

“The American girl who is staying at the hotel has a lovely figure. I’m jealous of her.”

“You’ve only seen her in her clothes.”

“You can tell.”

“Anyhow, she isn’t my girl friend; she is Antoine’s.”

“Poor Antoine, she spoke a few words to him and he fell in love with her!”

Faris Deeb could not bear to hear any more. Picking his steps with the noiselessness of a cat, he retreated from the door and walked round to the other side of the outhouse, where he sat behind the trunk of the mulberry tree to wait for the lovers to come out of their hiding place and give him access to the spade. Let his bitch of a shameless daughter take off her clothes and receive, naked, her lover’s caresses! Let him take her and make her pregnant! Let them leave the village! No! he would not wait for them to leave of their own accord. He would give her the beating of her life and kick her out of the house before they were ready to leave, and the whole village would witness the power of his wrath—the wrath of a father bringing to justice a daughter who had dishonoured herself. Justice! The word boomeranged unexpectedly against him, but it only brought fear, not remorse. And once the body was buried, he would have nothing to fear. So that young fool, Antoine, was in love with her, was he?—another shameless woman whose destruction, though he had not willed it, was another act of justice. Was he not a man of flesh and blood, subject to their temptations when provoked beyond control? It was the woman that deserved to be punished, not the man. By God, the Moslems had been right to veil their women and lock them up. Give them liberty, and this is what they do—the woman whose body lay lifeless in the cavern among the rocks, and his daughter in the outhouse! In the outhouse, just beyond the wall at which he was looking, and he not daring to stop her, afraid to make the slightest noise! He, in greater dread of her than ever she had been of him!

He was afraid even to light a cigarette lest the striking of the match should be heard in the outhouse. There was a window in the back wall of the outhouse, and though it was shut there were cracks in it through which even faint noises might be heard—faint noises such as he heard coming from the lovers’ couch. He steeled himself against their meaning, and waited. The minutes passed, prolonging themselves into eternities, as the moon slowly declined towards the east, marking the passage of the night and the inexorable approach of the dawn. In a few hours it would be daylight. Labourers would be coming out of their houses, going to work. If by then he had not been able to

bury the body, it would be too late.

Slowly, a lump of catarrh began to gather in his throat, irritating it into an urge to cough impossible to suppress. Yet, a cough from where he sat might be fatal. Or would it? The guilty couple would be too terrified of discovery to come out and investigate the source. And they would be too frightened by this second alarm to remain much longer in the outhouse. Faris Deeb, having been stifling his cough for a few moments with his handkerchief and letting it out in little whimpering dribbles, removed the handkerchief from his mouth and relieved his throat with a noise loud enough to be heard in the outhouse. Apart from physical relief, the action restored his morale. For a moment, he ceased to be the fugitive, and became the attacker. His sense of power returned. He could still frighten his daughter, even though by this anonymous means. And it would not be long now before the spade was in his grasp.

All noise from the outhouse ceased instantly. Not even a whisper could be heard. Faris Deeb's triumph was complete as far as the initial reaction to his move was concerned. He waited in complete silence again. The heavy moments dragged by with unbearable slowness. The moon seemed fixed in the same position above the hill on the opposite side of the valley. A dog barked in the distance and was answered; then, from the carter's house next door, a donkey began to bray. Profiting by the protective chant of this animal, Faris Deeb crept closer to the window of the outhouse. He wanted to know what whisperings were going on, what decisions were being taken inside, as a result of his cough and the silence that followed it. He wanted to make sure that the silence had not given the lovers new confidence, that his cough had not overreached its purpose and frightened them into an indefinite wait before they tried to escape. Either result was possible, and either would be disastrous to him. As he put his ear close to the cracks in the window, he heard the door on the other side being faintly and slightly opened, and his daughter's lover saying to her, in a whisper from the partial opening, "There's not a soul anywhere, I told you."

"The cough came from the other side," said the girl.

"Well, whoever it came from isn't sitting there waiting for the sun to rise. It must have been somebody walking along the footpath."

"I could have sworn it was someone in the garden, just under the mulberry tree."

"A thief?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid it was someone from the house. Perhaps my father looked into my room and saw I wasn't there. He may have heard me coming out."

The door of the outhouse was shut again with the faintest noise, and Faris Deeb heard his daughter's lover picking his steps carefully back to where Genevieve was speaking from. When he was back with her he said: "Don't get frightened, my love. I swear you're imagining things. I swear there isn't a mouse in the garden. Everybody's asleep in the house."

"I think I'd better go back to my bed now, and you go home," she said.

"Oh, not yet. I tell you there's nothing to be afraid of. Didn't you say that you had put the bolster under your blanket and your cut hair on the pillow to make it look that you were asleep in the bed?"

Genevieve giggled, saying, "Lucky my mother made me keep my hair when it was cut!"

"Well, then, if your father looked into your room, he would have seen this lovely body and head where he expected them to be. And if he had come out for any other reason, we'd be very foolish to stir until we made sure that he had gone back. Isn't that so?"

"We'll stay a little longer, then; but only a few minutes."

Faris Deeb waited. The minutes passed. He looked again at the moon. It had begun to dip behind the rim of the hill. That suited his purpose. Soon, there would be little light left in the sky. The risk of being seen and recognized by anyone would be eliminated; and the dawn would still be two or three hours away.

"Let's go now," said his daughter, after a while.

"But why?" whispered back her lover. "Don't you see that your fears were groundless. It couldn't have been your father."

"He may have gone out to look for us in the village, on the hillside. Please, let us go."

"If he's discovered you're not in your room there will be trouble anyhow; let's get the most in return for it. It's still a long time till morning. You could always say you spent the night with your cousin Selma. She'd back you up. And that's less risky than going back now."

"No, no, please. I'm afraid. I am going back to my room; and you go home, but be very careful on the way, especially when you leave the garden. He may be ambushing you just behind the gate. Oh, my love, he might kill you if he saw you going out. He's stronger than you, and you've got nothing to defend yourself with. I'll come with you. I'd trip him up if he attacked you; I could do that!"

"Don't worry on my account. I can look after myself."

"But you are unarmed, and he may be carrying his stick. Take something

with you from here. There are some garden tools in the corner behind you. Take the spade.”

“But, sweetheart, it isn’t really necessary. I’m sure your father is fast asleep in his bed.”

“All the same, take the spade; it will put my mind at ease.”

“And if it’s wanted in the morning? How am I to bring it back?”

“Have no fear, it won’t be wanted. I’ll smuggle it back to-morrow evening after dark. Do take it.”

“All right, to please you.”

“I’ll watch you until you’ve gone out of the gate.”

Faris Deeb was not a religious man, but he had a few superstitions, and he now became convinced that Satan was hitting at him with peculiar malevolence, using his daughter and her lover to obstruct his urgent purpose, having perhaps used the cabaret girl and the bather in the pool to make him do the thing he did. The feeling that he was struggling against a mighty and evil enemy unnerved him even more than the thought that the spade was going to be snatched away from his reach. There seemed to be a diabolical purpose behind the fact more sinister than the fact itself. Helplessly, he heard the door of the outhouse open and, a moment later, he saw his daughter’s lover, with the spade in his hand, walking down towards the garden gate. Genevieve herself he did not see, because she remained standing on the other side of the outhouse. Could he ignore her, pretend that he knew nothing about the clandestine meeting in the outhouse, pretend that he did not know who the young man was, just storm after him, crying, “Thief!” and wrench the spade from his hand? But would the boy let go of the spade? Or would he hit him with it and compel him to hit back, bring Genevieve rushing to his rescue, shattering all secrecy? He stood behind the outhouse, unable to move, watching the cautious progress of the escaping lover in the shadow of the wall, watching the spade going away, away, away. His brain was dull. No more ideas came to his rescue. He just watched, and in a moment the young man had reached the bottom of the garden. There, he paused for an instant, then, opening the gate and looking carefully to either side, he slipped out and was on the road. The next moment, Faris Deeb heard his daughter moving away from the outhouse. The young bitch had made sure that her lover was safely out of the garden, and in a few seconds she would be back in her bed. The idea which had come to Faris Deeb a moment before, but which he had been too frightened to put into execution, became actively urgent again in this altered situation. He waited until he heard the kitchen door open with a faint creak and knew that his daughter was inside the house, then he tore down the garden and

was on the road himself in a moment. Here, there was no danger of a noisy scene that would rouse the whole household. This was his last opportunity to get the spade, and a safe opportunity. The young man had not gone far, and Faris Deeb, running after him shouted, "Who's that? Thief! What have you stolen from my garden?"

His plan achieved instant success. The young man, wishing above all to avoid recognition and to escape unknown, dropped the spade and sprinted away at a pace which he knew would leave his pursuer far behind. "Thief! Dog!" shouted Faris Deeb after him, calling off the pursuit as soon as he had reached the spade. He picked it up, watched the running figure until it disappeared, then headed for the pool.

When he got there, the moon had declined below the hill, and he felt safer in the greater darkness. Not a sound was to be heard from any direction except the occasional barking of a dog and the gentle gurglings of the river. There was no danger whatever of anyone coming upon him while he was engaged upon his task. Only, he had to work quickly, very quickly.

He chose that section of the loose stone wall under which he knew the soil to be light, and began removing the stones, piling them up on the orchard side of the wall. He reckoned that if he made a breach of some six feet, he would be able to dig a long enough trench in which to bury the body safely—long and deep enough to make sure that no suspicious smells came out of it. Four or five feet deep should be safe enough. Besides, smells of putrefaction were not uncommon in the valley, coming from a dead cat or dog. Still, he must take every precaution.

It took him about half an hour to dismantle the wall, but to him it seemed like an hour and a half. If only he had his watch! He needed to know the time desperately. He looked at the sky, at the plough and other constellations he knew. But their positions gave him only a very rough idea. Curse the woman, how had she been able to wrench out his watch! He had not felt it go.

He started to dig, lifting large clumps of earth and making of them another pile close to the stones. The soil was harder than he expected to find it. He had to push the spade in with all his strength. The sweat poured out of him and, as his mouth was half open with his panting, the salty rivulets streaming down his cheeks ran into it. He spat them out and mopped his face on his shirt sleeves. And he went on digging, afraid to waste time in resting. But his back began to ache and his breathing became so uncomfortable that he had to pause for a moment, leaning on the spade. The trench was now about a foot deep, and he did not know how long it had taken him to dig that fraction of it, but the thought that he would have to repeat his effort another three or four times almost overwhelmed him. In a panic, he began to doubt whether he would be

through before daybreak. Still panting, he began to dig again, promising himself another moment's rest when he had excavated another foot—only a moment, a moment after each foot. But his vigour was slowing down, and each foot would take longer than the one before. The night was passing. The plough had moved quite a distance since he had last looked at it. And each time he lifted a spadeful of earth, his bones groaned with their increasing ache. Perhaps three feet would be deep enough. Surely, no smell would reach the surface from under all that weight of earth. And if it did, he could camouflage it by spreading animal manure in the orchard near the spot—not on the spot itself, since that might be dangerous, but near it.

As he was digging the spade in after his second short pause, when the trench was just over two feet deep, the implement struck a stone. He pushed the handle forward in order to force the blade behind the obstruction. The ground resisted. He leaned on the spade more heavily, thrusting the handle another inch forward; and, as he did so, the handle broke. He heard it crack and felt it going limp in his hand, and his heart turned faint with the realization of what had happened. Carefully, he pulled the spade out, hoping that it might be possible to bandage the broken wood with his handkerchief, using a couple of twigs from his trees as splints. But the moment he examined the damage, he knew that this was impossible. For although the wood had not parted completely, and the blade came out with the handle, the fracture was at the very base and there was no length of intact wood above the metal to provide the necessary grip for a bandage.

“Cursed, rotten wood!” he growled, throwing the handle out of the trench and starting to dig with the blade alone, stabbing and scraping the earth feverishly. This was going to take him much longer. But he must make the trench deep enough, he must! It was now deep enough for his crouching body not to reach its top. He clawed at the earth like a savage animal, racing the minutes of the night. And every few minutes he stood up to throw out the earth he had scraped. His back did not trouble him so much now that he was on his knees, but his wrists and arms were becoming exhausted, almost nerveless with exhaustion, yet aching unbearably with the pain of a thousand nerves. In the trench, it was so hot now that he could no longer bear to have his shirt on. He took it off and put it beside his discarded coat. He was about to go on his knees again inside the trench, when he stopped and began to roll his trousers up, up above the knees. Fool, fool! He should have thought of that before. The earth on the floor of the trench was now moist from its proximity to the river. Rosa might notice its marks on his trousers knees. Even if he tried to clean them, he might leave smudges. He could hear Rosa saying, with her usual sarcasm, “What have you done to your trousers? Knelt in them to pray on the

river bank? What were you doing there in the middle of the night?" He pulled himself sharply out of this momentary fright. He must not lose his nerve. That would be a more dangerous thing than soiling the knees of his trousers. Let Rosa think or say what she damn well liked. As long as the body disappeared, he would not have to worry about anything like that. The river ran past his orchard. It was natural for him to go there, possible to stumble on his knees in the wet soil. All the same, it would be better if no one knew that he had been there that night. He must guard himself against all possibilities. Not lose his nerve; only be careful. He had never made a false step in a buying or selling transaction, and he was not going to do it now. Now your trousers are rolled up above your knees, dig, dig, Faris Deeb! You still have another foot to go, and the night is passing. Already, there is a faint light in the sky. Pay no heed to your aching wrists and arms. Anyhow, you're not sleepy, are you? The fumes of the arak and whisky and champagne you've drunk have floated away from your brain. Your mind is alert and thinks of everything. Only, dig, dig! Dig and curse the estate agent and the Egyptian prostitute and this shameless and foolish American woman lying there under the rocks, and soon to be lying for ever—if you make it deep enough—in this trench you're digging. Curse them all for provoking you to do what you've done. It was their doing, not yours. You never touched a woman in your life that way; never thought of doing it, not to any real woman, anyhow, only to dream women that filled your mind sometimes when you imagined yourself a sultan having a slave girl, or a conqueror seizing a captured beauty. But dig, dig! The day is approaching, and you must make the trench deeper, deeper, and your hands are getting numb and slow, and you still have to rebuild the wall when you have buried the woman.

Each time he stood up to shovel out the earth he had scraped, he measured the depth of the trench against the height of his body. For a long time it seemed to be level with his waist. Then, almost suddenly, there was a sinking in it, the edge was rising towards his shoulder. He was not a tall man, but he reckoned that once the edge reached his shoulder, it would be deep enough. It would have to be deep enough. He could not dig any more. He must preserve some of his strength for rebuilding the wall. And the plough was no longer visible, which meant that dawn could not be more than an hour or so away.

As he stood leaning against the edge of the trench for another moment's rest before his final effort, he became aware of a great thirst which had been growing upon him, unheeded, for some time. His body was drained of moisture, his throat was like a sponge that had been left out in the sun for a year. He could not make another move without drinking, and the pool was only a few yards away. It was now completely dark—a patch of ink under a lightless sky. Faris Deeb climbed out of the trench and, possessed only by the

raging desire to drink—greater even than that other desire that had brought him to the water’s edge a couple of hours before—made for the pool. His was not a mind sensitive to associations. The pool now was just water and nothing else. He went down on his knees on a flat stone just above the water’s edge and, lowering his head until his mouth touched the surface, began to gulp. As the cold water flushed his gullet, he experienced an immediacy of pleasure which, for the moment, excluded from his mind all the events of that night and all thought of the labours and dangers that lay ahead of him. He drank, and drank; and he would have drunk like that and continued to drink until he had quenched the fire in him, even if all the police in the land were advancing on him, even if this was to be his last hour on earth. When he had finished drinking he stood up and thought dully, “Men are stupid to want women. A draught of cold water when you are thirsty is sweeter than any woman; and you don’t have to beg for it, to pay for it, to kill for it!” Then memories came back and he thought, “You can be thirsty for women as you are for water. Why can’t you have them when you want them, as you can drink when you’re thirsty? Why? . . . Why? . . . Why?”

Upon this note of philosophic speculation—a rare occurrence for him—he went back to complete his job.

# 10

Dawn was just breaking when Faris Deeb reached his house for the second time that night. He had buried the woman and her clothes under four feet of earth, and reconstructed the wall so that nothing in its appearance would draw attention. These loose stone walls of the mountain orchards and vineyards were, anyhow, so irregular, with a bulge here and there in the side and a cavern here and there on top, that nobody would notice any disturbance in their structure.

And nobody had seen him on his way back; life in the village had not yet begun to stir, and everybody in the house would be fast asleep. It would, he guessed, be about half past four. He could slip into his bed and have a couple of hours' sleep before Rosa and the others began to get up. And he needed that sleep as urgently as he had needed a drink a little while before. An overwhelming fatigue had come over him, and he could surrender to it now that he had accomplished his task and there was nothing more for him to do. Nothing. He had even cleaned the knees of his trousers and washed his hands at the pool. His back and arms were almost too numb to feel the ache that had been racking them. His hands and fingers were sore and blistered. In one hand he carried the handle of the spade; in the other, the severed blade. He opened the outhouse and caught a whiff of the scent his daughter used—the bitch, the stinking harlot! He had given her one fright already that night, and he was going to give her a bigger one in the morning, when he told his story of the thief of the spade. And that would give him an alibi, if an alibi were needed; it would focus the attention of the family on the incident of the “thief,” and that would form a barrier between their thoughts and the other thing he had done that night. Not that he needed any such barrier. The woman had just disappeared, and there was nothing whatever to connect him with her. Still, it was good they should all think he was chasing a thief in the middle of the night, when talk of the woman's disappearance started. Somebody chasing a criminal would never be suspected of committing a crime himself at that very hour, would be thought of as the injured victim of lawlessness himself, defending his property, helping the police in their task.

Having dropped the spade handle and blade on the floor of the outhouse, he made his way quietly into the house and entered his room. Rosa, as he had expected, did not stir, and as he began to take his clothes off he had no suspicion that she had opened her eyes, seen him undressing, seen the light of

dawn framed palely in the window, and wondered what had kept her husband out all night.

He took his coat off first, then his shoes, and it was only when he started unbuttoning his waistcoat, and mechanically pulled at his watch chain and found it slack and weightless, that he remembered the loss of his watch. It gave him a little start. Of course he would recover it the next morning, but in the meantime nobody must know of its temporary disappearance that night. He took the chain out of the buttonhole of his waistcoat, and put it under his pillow, where he always kept his watch at night. Rosa, through the slit of her barely open eyes, saw him doing this, saw that the watch was not there, and felt slightly puzzled—not only at the absence of the watch but at the fact that her husband was putting the chain alone under his pillow. Then, with this trivial but curious fact still unexplained in her mind, she drifted off into slumber again.

Faris Deeb got into his bed with as little noise as possible and, for a moment, the luxury of rest after cruel exhaustion filled him with its sweetness. His limbs stretched in horizontal bliss between the sheets, his nerves and muscles relaxed, his fingers sank softly into the pillow and, with equal softness, his whole being was sinking into the deep, caressing embrace of sleep, down, down into its gently closing arms, when the memory of something Rosa had said stirred in his consciousness, like a fish that has been lying still and invisible on the sea-bed, then rises suddenly, causing a cloudy disturbance in the tranquil water. He became widely awake as the words echoed in his mind. She had said: “They all hate you. They all wish you dead.” She had been speaking of the children, but he knew she meant herself too. When she had spoken the words, they had not worried him, though he knew they were true. Wishing somebody dead never killed him. But if those who had the wish—though they would never dare to kill, themselves—discovered something that would do the killing for them, without making murderers of them, without putting them in any danger? All they had to do, if they discovered it, was to inform on him—a simple and easy way of seeing him dead! of getting rid of him! The vague fear he had felt once or twice when thinking of Rosa and the children since the murder became hideously concrete at this thought. The hatred in the dark house around him, impotent until now, loomed up as an enemy that might stumble upon a noose to put round his neck. The shape of Rosa, asleep beside him, became that of a potential executioner. Perhaps he should try to cultivate her goodwill, hers and that of the children—just in case; stop beating them, give her a little more money, leave Antoine and Genevieve all their earnings; tell Genevieve that she could marry her young man in a year’s time—she was sleeping with him already, anyhow, so why not

make a respectable woman of her?—and promise her a little dowry; let Mitry go to Brazil, give him the fare? He faltered for a moment, like a despot about to take the pen that was being handed to him for signing the deed of his abdication, or at least a reform law that would strip him of all his powers. Then, on a violent recoil, he refused the pen. Why sign? Why abdicate? He was in no danger; they would discover nothing. And if he began abdicating, would they not be puzzled, sense his fear and see the meaning of any little fact they might discover, which otherwise would pass unnoticed? “Faris Deeb,” he said to himself sternly, “you must not fear them. If you begin to fear them you will be lost. You must keep them afraid of you.” Still, there was no harm in being a little politic. He would not extort any more money from Antoine for his keep. He might even give Rosa some money for a new dress; she was about due for one. He . . . his thoughts dissolved finally into sleep.

When he opened his eyes again, it was broad daylight and Rosa was not in the room. He heard her talking to Genevieve and Antoine in the kitchen. His father was on the terrace, saying something to Mitry. He put his hand under his pillow, then remembered, even before he touched the chain, that the watch was not there, remembered why it was not there. He got up quickly, dressed, and put his watch chain through his waistcoat buttonhole, each of its loose ends resting invisible in a pocket. No one would know that the watch was not attached to it, and on his way to the shop he would go to the pool and recover it; it must be among the stones near the water’s edge. As he was putting on his coat, Rosa and the two younger children joined his father and Mitry on the terrace.

“You had better be going to open the shop,” said Rosa to Mitry. “Your father is having a long sleep.”

“Must have had a tiring journey to Tripoli and back; was he very late coming back?” said Abu Faris.

“I don’t know,” said Rosa. “I went to sleep before ten. I didn’t wake up when he came back.”

“There’s no hurry about opening the shop,” said Mitry, “but Antoine, you’d better make haste or some other waiter might pinch your American girlfriend from you!” He spoke in a tone of friendly teasing, and Genevieve laughed. They never spoke and laughed like that when their father was present. Faris Deeb was just about to open the bedroom door and come out, but at the mention of the American girl he stopped and remained standing rigidly behind the door.

“What American friend is that?” asked Rosa.

“Hasn’t he told you?” said Mitry. “There’s an American beauty staying at

the hotel, the daughter of a millionaire, and your son is getting on famously with her.”

“Stop talking nonsense,” said Antoine, shyly but not angrily.

“You never know,” pursued Mitry, in the same bantering tone. “These Americans take strange fancies, sometimes, and they’re democratic, not like the English. She might marry Antoine and take him to America with her. Why, her own father might have started life as a waiter. They think nothing of a thing like that in America. Will you pay me my fare to Brazil, Antoine, if she marries you?”

“I told you stop being silly,” said Antoine.

“These things happen only in cinema stories,” said Rosa. “They certainly won’t happen to us.”

“You’d better drop this idea of going to Brazil,” said Abu Faris. “Your father will never let you go.” He drew at his *argileh*, and the water in it bubbled solemnly.

“We’re jesting, Grandpa, we’re jesting,” said Mitry bitterly. “Can’t we even jest in this house?”

“How long is this American girl staying here?” asked Genevieve.

“Only a few more days,” said Antoine, trying to conceal the sadness in him.

“Well, she may give you a good-bye kiss,” said Mitry. “I’ll tell you what, take her for a moonlight walk before she leaves. The valley and the river and the mountains make women feel sentimental at night, don’t they, Genevieve?”

“Shush!” Rosa uttered the warning quietly, then, in a louder tone, she asked her father-in-law, “Is your *argileh* still drawing, Abu Faris, or would you like another ember on it?” She had an uncanny way of knowing when her husband was going to appear on the scene.

“No thank you, my daughter; it’s all right. I wonder if Faris concluded that land purchase yesterday. It seems to have kept him quite late in Tripoli. Couldn’t have had much sleep, or he’d have been up long before this.”

Faris Deeb came out of the bedroom and arrived on the terrace as his father was concluding this speech.

“How could I have had much sleep when we had a thief in the house?” he said gruffly.

“A thief?” said Abu Faris. “What are you saying? When?”

“In the middle of the night; after I got back from Tripoli and went to bed.”

“Why didn’t you wake me up?” asked Rosa.

“Wasn’t necessary. I can deal with a thief single-handed.” He sat down in a chair beside his father.

“What happened?” asked Mitry. “Did you catch him?”

“No. I chased him, but he got away, son of a dog.”

“Did he steal anything?” asked Antoine.

“Only the spade from the outhouse. When I ran after him, he threw it away and broke its handle. Didn’t you hear anything, any of you?” He looked at them in turn.

“I didn’t hear anything,” said Mitry.

“Nor I,” said Antoine.

“Where was he when you saw him?” asked Abu Faris.

“Slipping out of the gate, carrying the spade in his hand. I’d heard noises and got up to find what they were.”

“Why should he want to steal a spade?” said Rosa. “It’s not a valuable thing.”

“What’s the matter with you? Why have you turned so pale?” said Faris Deeb, speaking to Genevieve, who would have given all she possessed to any magician that could have made her disappear at the first mention of the spade.

“I’m frightened . . . I’m terrified of thieves,” she said.

“Well, I can promise you this particular one won’t come again,” said her father, “or if he does I’ll break his neck, so you needn’t fear *him* any more; and I’m going to have a new lock put on the outhouse door . . . and you, Mitry, when are you going to get that dog of yours from Anees? If we had had Antar still, no thief would have dared come near the house.”

“Ay, it’s a shame Antar died. A house should always have a dog; dogs are the best watchmen,” said Abu Faris.

“I’ll get him to-day,” said Mitry. “He’s quite a big fellow now, and Anees has trained him well. He told me yesterday I could have him any time.”

“Well, then, get him. You like dogs, don’t you, Genevieve? Give me a whiff of your smoke, Father,” said Faris Deeb.

Abu Faris passed his son the *argileh* mouthpiece, saying:

“There’s something in what Rosa said: why should a thief want to steal just a spade? You wouldn’t think it was worth his trouble.”

“He could have been trying to break into the house to steal money,” said Faris Deeb, “but when he heard me stirring, bolted, snatching the spade from the outhouse to hit me with if I caught up with him.”

“Could have been that,” said Abu Faris.

“Did you get close to him?” asked Mitry. “Would you recognize him if you saw him again?”

“No, I didn’t get close enough to him for that. But he was a youngish fellow; a little shorter than you, and slight of build.”

“What was he wearing?” asked Antoine. “Did you see his clothes?”

“I just saw a pair of running trousers; couldn’t see their colour, or what was above them.” He puffed at his father’s *argileh*, extracting the smoke with a long, sustained whiff, then blowing it out with a short, sharp exhalation.

“And which way did you say he made off?” asked Rosa.

“He turned right on getting out of the garden, and ran up the hill.”

“But there are houses there. Didn’t you shout? Neighbours might have run out and caught him,” said Rosa.

“Of course I shouted, but nobody heard.” He became awkwardly conscious that, having started with the intention of frightening his daughter and explaining the accident to the spade, he was now on the defensive, having to answer questions, to explain all sorts of things. That business about the spade, for instance—both Rosa and his father had seized upon the unlikelihood of a thief stealing such a common and worthless object. He had been clever enough to give them a prompt and plausible explanation, but it nettled him that he was called upon to give explanations. And the shouting—it was true that he had called after the young man, but it certainly was not the kind of shouting calculated to rouse the neighbours from their sleep. The last thing he had wanted was to rouse the neighbours, and his shouts had been deliberately subdued and addressed to the culprit alone. Perhaps that dog, Ramiz, had noticed that and been puzzled by it. Perhaps when he and Genevieve met afterwards and compared notes, certain discrepancies would appear to them. So what? They still wouldn’t have the remotest clue, and they would be so frightened on their own account, and so grateful that the chase had ended as it did, that they wouldn’t give a thought to anything else. Shaking his temporary awkwardness off, he said to Rosa:

“How long are you going to keep me waiting for my coffee?”

“I was only waiting to hear your story,” she said.

“Well, you’ve heard it now. I want my coffee.”

“And a smoke, I suppose?”

“No. I’ll share Abu Faris’s.” He was anxious to go down to the pool and look for his watch.

“Well, I’ll be going to open the shop,” said Mitry rising. Antoine and Genevieve rose too, and the three of them walked out of the garden together.

Rosa went into the kitchen to make the coffee. Abu Faris said:

“Where’s the spade now?”

“Where do you think? In my pocket? It’s in the outhouse, in two pieces.”

“Could it be mended?”

“No. It needs a new handle.”

“Well, that shouldn’t cost much. It’s a good thing he didn’t steal something valuable and get away with it. There’s a lot of thieving going on these days. People are not as honest or God-fearing as they used to be, and the police aren’t much good. Did you buy that property in Tripoli?”

“No. I’ve decided against it.”

“Well, you know best.”

Without speaking, Faris Deeb handed his father the *argileh* mouthpiece again. The old man put it in his mouth, saying: “You can have it back when your coffee comes,” and began to draw at it in rapid succession to make the most of his turn. The gurgling of the water came in short, merry bursts. A withered vine leaf floated down from the trellis overhead. The old man looked up and said, “The grapes are ripening.”—“Ay,” said his son without looking. The old man thought of the vineyard on the hillside, which used to be his but which he had weakly surrendered to Faris. Rosa came back with the coffee, and as she handed it to her husband, asked, “What’s the time?” Faris Deeb sipped his coffee, pretending not to have heard, and his father handed him again the mouthpiece of the *argileh*.

“What’s the time, Abu Mitry?” Rosa repeated her question, in the same casual manner.

“I don’t know,” said Faris Deeb, speaking with less than his usual aggressiveness. “My watch has stopped. Go into the house and have a look at the clock if you want to know the time.”

“All right,” said Rosa, walking back to the house, where the old pendulum clock, in its gothic architecture of wood, hung on the wall of the living-room. What, she wondered, was this little mystery about her husband’s watch? For now her suspicion that there was something curious about its disappearance became confirmed. If he had lost it, why not say so? Why put the chain so carefully under his pillow when he went to bed in the early hours of the morning? Why have the chain now across his waistcoat, pretending that the watch was in its usual place? And where had he been all the night?

After drinking his coffee, Faris Deeb went down to the pool. Again, in the frank light of the morning that made everything look its familiar, unenchanted and unforbidding self, the orchard and the pool were not the place he had

known by night. There was neither magic in them, nor terror; and it seemed incredible to him that anything out of the usual should have happened there only a few hours before. Seeing the apple trees, he remembered how the whole thing had started, how he had seen the shadowy figure behind the trees and thought it was someone who had come to steal his apples. He had come down to defend his property. And now he had killed a woman and buried her in his property. He looked for the place, and was greatly reassured when he did not spot it immediately. As he had expected, the wall and the earth around it showed scarcely any sign of having been disturbed. Perhaps two or three stones obtruded a little too much. He kicked two of them further into the wall, and manipulated a third into a more normal position. Then, he noticed that though a few apple tree leaves had fallen during the night on the earth around the reconstructed part of the wall, their density there was less than it was elsewhere. With his feet he effected a slight redistribution of them. Satisfied that nobody could notice anything now, he walked down to the water's edge and began looking for his watch. He could not find it either among the stones above the water's edge or in the shallow water below them. He walked round the pool twice without seeing anything. He moved a few stones about, but still found nothing. Then, as he looked further, towards the centre of the pool, he saw it. It was lying on its back, and the dial winked at him with its refracted, but clear, image, through the limpid, green water. It winked at him from the bottom of the pool, from a depth of six or seven feet. He stared at it with fear and impotent anger. For, as far as his ability to reach it was concerned, it might just as well be lying on the floor of the ocean. He could not swim, and he saw at once that the watch was too far out and too deep down to be reached and pushed up with a stick, a bough, a bit of wire. Well, he'd have to leave it there, and pretend that he had lost it. But not leave it exposed to view; that might be dangerous. He would try to cover it by throwing some stones into the middle of the pool. With a bit of luck, one of them might land straight on it, or several form a pile that would bury it sufficiently to make it invisible. Curse the woman, wrenching it out with such violence that it bounded off the rocks and fell into the middle of the water! A good watch too! It would cost him several pounds to replace it, with prices being what they were now. He picked up a stone and threw it into the water, aiming at the spot which he reckoned was just above the watch. He watched it sinking, but to his dismay, it fell wide of the mark, leaving the dial of the watch winking at him teasingly. He threw another and another without scoring even a near miss. Small stones were useless, and the larger ones were too heavy to be flung with any accuracy half way across the pool. He went on trying.

# 11

When Antoine arrived at the hotel, hoping again to pick out the best fruit of the day for his American friend, he found quite a commotion awaiting him round the proprietor's desk in the hall. There was the proprietor himself, Khawaja Bishara; the manager, Khawaja Rasheed; two chamber maids and the errand boy; and Khawaja Bishara was saying to one of the maids, a buxom mountain girl called Linda:

“Are you sure the bed wasn't slept in?”

“Can't I tell the difference between a bed that has been slept in and one that hasn't? I'm telling you the bed hasn't been touched.”

“Whose bed?” Antoine inquired in an aside from the other maid, Marie.

“The bed of the American lady in number five,” said Marie.

“But couldn't she have made it herself this morning, after sleeping in it?” asked the manager.

“Are you suggesting that she wasn't satisfied with the way I was making her bed?” said Linda.

“Now, don't be silly and get angry,” said the proprietor. “Khawaja Rasheed didn't mean anything of the sort. But these Americans have strange whims.”

“Making beds wasn't one of number five's whims; nor tidying her room first thing in the morning before going out. I tell you she couldn't have been in her room at all last night. Ask Marie. Come up and see the room for yourself, if you won't believe me.”

“The room was exactly as we'd left it last night,” said Marie, enjoying the general excitement over the disappearance of number five, and sensing a scandal behind the mystery—the very thing Khawaja Bishara was anxious to avoid. He said:

“Well, we needn't get all excited about it. There may be a very simple explanation. She may have gone out for a drive with some of her American friends from Tripoli, and had a breakdown in the middle of the night. Antoine was on late duty yesterday, weren't you?”

“Yes,” said Antoine, “but I didn't see her leaving the hotel.”

“When did you see her last?” asked Khawaja Bishara.

“Sitting on the terrace after dinner, reading a book.”

“Well, she could have left after that, without your seeing her, couldn’t she?” persisted the proprietor.

“Of course, she could, but I don’t remember any cars arriving after dinner.”

“But you weren’t near the door all the time.”

“No. I was in and out of the bar a good deal.”

“I didn’t see any cars, either,” corroborated the errand boy. “Not after dinner.”

“You!” said Khawaja Bishara. “You’re so fast asleep sometimes that a tank wouldn’t wake you up!”

“Anyhow, if she’d had a breakdown,” said the manager, “she’d have rung up by now.”

“And what about the missing towel?” said Linda.

“What missing towel?” asked Antoine.

“I’ve told them,” said Linda, “one of her towels isn’t there this morning. Why should she have taken a towel with her, if she was going out for a drive?”

“You’re determined to bring the American Sixth Fleet to Tripoli?” said Khawaja Bishara with some impatience, covering up the anxiety he was now beginning to feel. “The towel could have easily got mixed up with her clothing somewhere in the room. It’ll turn up. Go back and have another search for it, you and Marie. And listen, all of you, not a word of this to the other patrons! We don’t want any foolish gossip here. Patrons are free to come and go as they please, by day or night. Do you understand?”

“Me, gossip!” protested Marie. “Forceps shall not extract a word from my mouth. Let her spend the night where she likes. What business is it of mine?”

“I don’t care if the American Sixth Fleet comes to Barkita!” said Linda. “I only told you because I thought you’d like to know, and now you seem to be angry with me, as though I’d done something wrong myself.”

“Nobody has done anything wrong,” said Khawaja Bishara, “and I’m not angry with you. You did right to report it to me and Khawaja Rasheed. Only, it’ll give the hotel a bad name if the patrons think we’re spreading stories about them. Now, go and look for that towel again, but if you don’t find it, don’t say anything about it to Miss Bright when she returns, as I’m sure she will any moment now.”

As the two maids turned down the corridor to go back to room number five, Marie asked her companion: “What is the American Sixth Fleet?”

“Don’t you know?” said Linda. “It’s one of these things they keep firing at

the moon. I suppose they've fired five so far; that's why they call the next one the Sixth Fleet."

In Antoine's mind, something had begun to stir from the moment the towel was mentioned—a vague association going back to his conversation with Miss Bright two days before, like the shape of something one sees in the distance but does not recognize immediately. Then, a moment after the maids had gone out, and as he himself was leaving for the dining terrace, recognition came, vivid and frightening. He stopped for a second, then turned and came back to the reception desk.

At the desk, the proprietor and the manager were still in conference. Khawaja Bishara had just said: "We'll give her till ten o'clock; if she hasn't returned or phoned by then, we'll have to tell the police and the American Consulate; she may have had an accident, not a breakdown."

"Khawaja Bishara," said Antoine, "I've thought of something."

"What is it?" said the proprietor, turning round.

"It may be just a silly idea, but the mention of the missing towel reminded me of something Miss Bright said the morning before yesterday. She had been out for an early walk and discovered the pool in the valley, near my father's orchard; and she said she would like to bathe there one day by moonlight . . . I mean, if she took a towel with her, perhaps she went there to bathe last night and . . . and. . . ." He was too overcome by the pain of the thought to utter the word.

"And got drowned, you mean?" said Khawaja Rasheed.

Antoine nodded.

"Or slipped down the rocks around the pool and knocked her head against one of them—lost consciousness," said the manager. "It's quite possible."

"Anything is possible with these Americans; they do the maddest things," said the proprietor.

"Shall I go and see?" said Antoine, his distress at his own fearful thought somewhat relieved by the manager's alternative explanation. If she had only lost consciousness, or perhaps just broken a leg and couldn't move, he could carry her and bring her back to the hotel. The idea of such a rescue filled him with a sweet, exciting glow.

"Yes, go," said the proprietor, then turning to the manager, he added, "You'd better go with him. It would take two to carry her—if that's what's happened—and in a case like this it's safer to have witnesses. We don't want to have any trouble with the American Consulate . . . and take a blanket with you to wrap her in if you find her, and a large towel lest the blanket get wet."

It was as Antoine and Khawaja Rasheed were approaching the pool through the valley, that Faris Deeb had started throwing stones into the pool to bury his sunken watch. He heard their voices and footsteps after he had thrown, without success, the fourth or fifth stone. He recognized Antoine's voice even before he saw him and his companion, and, he was sure, before they saw him. A cluster of weeping willows, dipping their long tresses into the river, made quite a dense screen on that side of the pool. Faris Deeb, who had been just about to pick his next stone when he heard the noises, stopped with a violent fright, and moved away quickly in the direction of the orchard. His first impulse, before reflection, was to sever all connection between him and the pool, and pretend to be inspecting his apple crop. But reflection came swiftly upon the heels of this impulse. If they were coming to look for the missing woman in the vicinity of the pool—and he was certain now that they were, that they knew she had come to bathe there the night before—it might be very dangerous for him if they accidentally saw his watch at the bottom. To eliminate that danger, he must pretend that his watch had fallen into the pool just then, that he was trying to recover it when they arrived. That would put him in the clear as regards the night, and that was all that mattered. Snatching a long broken branch that lay withering beside the orchard wall, he therefore stepped back quickly to the edge of the pool and, though knowing that the branch could not reach the watch, began making a show of probing the water, stretching his arms out as far as he could, and moving from rock to rock. While he was thus engaged, Antoine and Khawaja Rasheed emerged from behind the weeping willows facing him on the other side of the pool.

"That's my father," said Antoine to his companion. "He's looking for something."

"Good morning, Khawaja Faris," said the manager. "What are you looking for?"

Faris Deeb stood from a crouching position, as though he had only then become aware of the presence of company.

"Good morning," he said. "My watch has just fallen into the pool. The chain got caught in a twig up there as I was jumping off the wall, and the next thing I knew was that the watch had been wrenched out of my pocket and was bouncing off these stones into the water. Been trying to reach it with this branch, but it isn't long enough, curse it! And what may you be doing down here at this hour? Has Antoine brought you to pick a few apples before breakfast? The crop is sold, you know!" He meant this speech to sound like a gruff pleasantry.

"No, Abu Mitry; I would not dream of touching your property without your

permission. We come upon a different errand. But I can see, thank God, that we are not going to find that for which we came. It would have been a sad discovery.” He then explained to Faris Deeb the reason of their coming to the pool, adding, “We were afraid of finding her drowned, or dead of a broken neck among these stones.”

“Well, thank God you haven’t found her,” said Faris Deeb, standing barely ten yards away from the spot where the woman lay buried.

“I was relieved the moment I saw you,” said the manager. “I knew nothing like what we feared could have happened, or you’d have been the first to find her; and there you were, sitting at the water’s edge, fishing for something with a stick. I thought to myself, ‘Well, he’s not fishing for a dead body, and anyhow dead bodies float, and Abu Mitry wouldn’t be looking like that if he’d just discovered a dead or dying woman.’ So, you see, Abu Mitry, you were a sight of good omen. I expect the woman will turn up soon. She’s probably been having a gay time with some of her friends in Tripoli. But what about your watch?”

“There it is,” said Antoine. “I can see it!”

“The problem is not to see it, but to get it,” said his father. “I’ve seen it from the beginning.”

“I’ll get it for you,” said Antoine. “I’ll dive for it.” It was the challenge of the sport that moved him to make his offer—not his father’s need, or any desire to please him. He began taking off his clothes.

“Leave it,” said Faris Deeb, afraid that the watch had stopped when it was flung into the pool in the night, and not wanting his son to notice the hour at which this had happened.

“Why?” asked Antoine.

“You might catch cold; you haven’t got anything to dry yourself with. I’ll get one of the village boys to fish it up for me later.”

“We’ve got a towel inside this blanket,” said Antoine. “We thought we might need it if we found the American lady. I’ll get you the watch in a minute.” He proceeded with his undressing.

Faris Deeb felt helpless. He could not very well forbid the operation; it would seem odd.

“You’ll be lucky if it’s still going,” said Khawaja Rasheed. “Watches are very delicate things.”

“Ay,” said Faris Deeb, as Antoine stripped off his last garment and plunged into the water. His father watched him anxiously, saw his hand reach out for the watch.

“He’s got it,” said Khawaja Rasheed. “By God, he’s a good swimmer!”

“Ay,” said Faris Deeb, as Antoine flipped his way deftly back to the surface, holding the watch in his left hand and, to his father’s relief, not looking at the dial.

“Is it still going?” asked the manager.

“Don’t know,” said Antoine with indifference. “Can’t see.”

“Accursed, interfering son of a bitch!” thought Faris Deeb. He stood close to the water and held out his hand, as his son came out, balancing himself precariously on the stones that lined the sides of the pool. In response, Antoine put forward his left hand, and the watch passed from it into his father’s, but in the brief instant of its passage, his eyes caught a glimpse of the dial, and the position of the hands registered mechanically on his mind, without at first causing him to note the significance of what he saw. Faris Deeb took out his handkerchief and rubbed the watch dry.

“Is it still going?” The manager repeated his question.

Faris Deeb looked at the dial for a moment, holding the watch half-covered in the cup of his hand, so that it was invisible to the other two, then, seeing that it had stopped at half past twelve, he put it to his ear and pretended to listen for a few seconds, after which he said, “Ay, seems to be going still all right,” and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket.

Khawaja Rasheed, who had noticed the old-fashioned look of the watch, said:

“By God, they knew how to make watches in the past. Craftsmanship, real craftsmanship, not like the flimsy things of to-day!”

“Ay, it’s a good watch; I should have been sorry to lose it,” said Faris Deeb. “My father gave it to me when I was twenty-one.”

“And your son has brought it back to you. Well, Antoine, our walk here has not been in vain, and thank God we didn’t find what we came to look for. I must say, I didn’t think it was likely she’d actually come here to bathe in the middle of the night.”

“She said she’d like to,” said Antoine, defending his theory as an intellectual proposition, but glad, very glad that it had proved wrong. He had finished drying himself and was putting on his clothes again, when the image he had seen on the face of the watch came back to his mind. With a prick of recognition, he saw its significance. The watch was not going; it had stopped at half past twelve. Why had his father lied about it? When had it fallen into the pool. Trivial points, he supposed, but they puzzled him. He paused for a moment before continuing to button his trousers.

While waiting for him to finish dressing, Khawaja Rasheed was trying to make conversation with Faris Deeb. After complimenting him on the condition of his orchard and the good crop it had given him, he went on:

“Now, take another case of the decay of craftsmanship—that wall round your orchard. Beautifully built, beautifully built! Why, you’d think that bit there was built only yesterday”—the manager took a few steps towards the part of the wall that had so aroused his admiration, and Faris Deeb’s heart missed a beat—“yet, how old is it?”

“Fifteen years,” said Faris Deeb. “I built it myself.”

“See what I mean?” said the manager. “You could build like that yourself, without being a land worker, but to-day even those born to it have lost the skill. Ah, it’s an age of machines, and shoddy work, and trashy goods! Come on, Antoine, let’s go back. Miss Bright may already be back at the hotel, clamouring for her breakfast, and you know she likes *you* to wait on her. Good-bye, Khawaja Faris.”

Faris Deeb, left to himself, felt a weakness come over his legs. He walked back slowly to the orchard wall and gazed at it. Yes, perhaps he had rebuilt it a little too well, a little too regularly. Making sure no one was near, he shifted some of the stones this way and that, particularly along the joins where the rebuilt section merged into the rest.

Gradually, his confidence returned. The hotel manager’s comment was just a casual remark that meant nothing. Even if a little difference showed in the wall, how could Rasheed or anyone else see the significance of it . . . and he had managed that business about the watch very cleverly. Of course, he would have to send the watch to Tripoli to be mended, but he could pretend that it had stopped after being recovered from the pool. The main thing was to have made those two believe that the accident had happened in the morning and not in the night.

But as he made his way through the orchard to his shop, a new fear flared up in him. The police, put on the scent by his own son, might come themselves to search in the vicinity of the pool, and they might not content themselves with a casual look around. Damn the boy, he would go on reiterating that the woman had told him she wanted to bathe in the pool by night! And he would insist on diving for the watch. Had he by any chance seen the face of the watch, noticed at what hour it had stopped? The night before, Faris Deeb had been afraid of meeting Antoine on his way to the house. Now, he feared his son for other, more deadly reasons. Now, he was in dread of him, as he had been of Genevieve and her lover when he discovered them in the outhouse, as he had been of Rosa when he crept into their bedroom at five in the morning,

when she asked him what the time was and he had pretended that his watch had stopped—pretended that his watch had stopped, that it wasn't going at seven in the morning, then half an hour later pretended to Antoine and his companion that it was going! Hell and damnation! He must be careful not to be caught out in such inconsistencies! Antoine would be sure to say something at home about his recovery of the watch, how it was still going; then Rosa would say, "If your watch was going, why did you tell me this morning that it had stopped?" Well, so what? Watches could stop and start going again, especially after receiving a blow. Or he could just say to Rosa, "Mind your own business. I told you my watch had stopped because I couldn't be bothered to tell you the time when you asked me. I'm not your timekeeper. I get tired being asked the time by everybody. There's a clock in the house. . . ."

# 12

Genevieve worked in the shop of the village haberdasher, and her young man at the grocer's not far away. Both tradesmen knew that the young couple were courting against the wishes of Faris Deeb, and as they had little love for the latter, they joined in a benevolent conspiracy with their respective assistants to facilitate their meeting in the two shops. The grocer's shop in the lunch hour was the more convenient place for this purpose, as the grocer lived above his shop and went upstairs for lunch, leaving Ramiz to have his in the little store-room behind the shop, where the stocks of olives, olive oil, cooking fat, arak, cheese and pickled cucumbers were kept. Here, Genevieve, bringing her own lunch, often joined Ramiz, and the two had their meal together and half an hour or so to themselves.

On the day after the episode in the outhouse, and after hearing her father's account of his chasing of the "thief," Genevieve was anxious to see Ramiz as soon as possible. There were certain things that puzzled her, and which she wished to discuss with her lover. On her way to the haberdasher's shop, she dropped in at the grocer's for a brief moment to tell Ramiz that she would be coming to have her lunch with him.

"Ramiz," said the genial grocer, "let her have some of the crushed olives we received yesterday, and a pickled cucumber. I know she's partial to pickles."

"Thank you, Uncle Milhem, but I shall have my own lunch," said Genevieve.

"Now, now no silly pride, Mademoiselle Genevieve! Of course I know you will have your lunch with you. Do you suppose I think your mother would send you out without anything to eat in the middle of the day? But crushed olives and pickled cucumbers go well with anything. And this is not a disinterested invitation, because, you see, I am a clever salesman, and I want to advertise my goods. You eat what Ramiz gives you, and then go and tell your mother about it. How's your father been of late?"

Genevieve shrugged her shoulders and gave a little sigh of despair.

"Never mind," said Uncle Milhem—a titular uncle by virtue of his age and village custom, and not a blood relation—"you be patient, my daughter. One day you'll be old enough to do as you please; and in the meantime," he winked slyly at the door leading into the store-room, "there are always ways and

means, and you're always welcome here."

"Thank you, Uncle Milhem. You're so good. I wish you were my father. Suppose he asks you if I come to see Ramiz here? What will you say?"

"You come to see Ramiz here?" said the grocer in mock astonishment. "This is the first I've heard of it! Now be off with you."

At half past midday Genevieve and Ramiz were alone in the store-room.

"So he chased you last night?" said Genevieve. "I was terrified when he talked about it this morning. At first I thought he'd recognized you, from the way he looked at me."

"What did he say?"

"He said he saw a thief taking the spade away, and that he ran after him shouting, and that you threw the spade away and its handle was broken."

"That I threw the spade away?"

"You know what I mean—the thief. But he gave me such a menacing look."

"I didn't *throw* it. I just dropped it, and I'm sure *that* didn't break its handle. It would take a mighty big smash to do that."

"Did he throw it after you?"

"No. He stopped chasing me the moment he got it, and he stopped calling, 'thief!' Funny, isn't it? I mean, how did he know I had not taken anything but the spade, if he thought I was a thief? How did he know I had not got into the house and stolen money or jewellery? You wouldn't think he'd have been content just to recover the spade. What's the value of a spade? I was afraid he was going to rouse the whole neighbourhood and get me caught."

"Thank God he didn't do that!"

"But it's queer, isn't it? I mean, it isn't like your father. And now, he says I broke the handle, which is a lie. *He* must have broken it. I wonder why? What could he have done with it?"

"Listen. There's something else that's queer about this business. I've been thinking about it ever since he told his story this morning. When you left the outhouse, I stood there and watched you, as I said I would, until you had walked out of the gate and disappeared. Then I walked into the house and got into my bed. But I didn't hear my father go out of the house—no opening of doors, no footsteps. If he had seen you from inside the house, as you were getting out of the garden, and rushed out to chase you, I should have heard him."

"You mean he was already outside the house, somewhere in the garden,

when I walked down to the gate?”

“Looks like it, doesn’t it? I told you when we were in the outhouse that I heard noises, and somebody coughed. That must have been him.”

“But if he was already in the garden when I left the outhouse, he’d have seen me at once. Why didn’t he start chasing me till I was out of the garden?”

“That’s what’s puzzling me. He didn’t set off after you till you were out of the garden, and I was inside the house. If he had started from the garden while you were still in it and I was watching by the outhouse, we should both have heard and seen him, shouldn’t we? And if he had started from the house after I’d got in, I should at least have heard him. I’ve been working it out in my head since the morning, and I can’t understand it.”

“Seems as though he’d specially waited until I’d got out of the garden and you’d got inside the house, but that doesn’t make sense.”

“Unless he knew it was you, and that we’d been in the outhouse together. . . . Perhaps he did. He’s going to have a new lock put on the door of the outhouse, and he wants Mitry to get his dog from Anees to-day. He looked at me in particular when he said that, and I had a feeling he knew it was us.”

“Don’t be silly. Knew it was us and did nothing about it! Said nothing! Waited until I’d gone and then pretended he thought me a thief! Not your father, he wouldn’t. There’d have been the devil of a scene.”

“Perhaps he was afraid of the scandal. The neighbours would have heard. Everybody would have known what we had done. Oh, Ramiz, are you quite sure it was safe? I don’t want to start having a baby.”

“You won’t start having a baby.”

“Are you sure? I’m afraid.”

“Of what? Doing it like that won’t give you a baby.”

“A girl the other day said it could.”

“Not if you’re careful.”

“And you’re sure you were careful?”

“Of course.” He took her in his arms and kissed her tenderly and with returning desire, forgetting the episode with her father, thinking only of the joy they had known in the outhouse. “It was wonderful, wasn’t it?”

“Yes. I didn’t know it could be so beautiful. Whenever I thought of it before, I thought of father doing it to my mother, and that always seemed horrible. Is it only because father is like that, or does it always seem nasty to children when they think of their parents doing it? What do you feel about your parents doing it?”

Ramiz giggled. “Now that you mention it,” he said, “it seems absurd to think of your parents doing it. I know they do, or did, but I just can’t imagine it, if you know what I mean. Doesn’t seem real to me.”

“It must have been real enough to give them seven children, not counting the miscarriages!” They both giggled.

“I expect they’ve stopped doing it by now,” said Ramiz.

“I hope my mother doesn’t let my father come near her that way any more. It must be awful to hate your husband and have to sleep with him.”

“But when you love each other, there’s nothing sweeter than that in the whole world, is there? Didn’t you think so last night?”

“Yes, I did, until we had that fright, and now I’m afraid to do it again. Anyhow, we can’t use the outhouse anymore, if he’s going to have a new lock put on it and shut it up in the night.”

“We’ll find somewhere else. But you aren’t eating, and it’ll soon be time for you to go back. Here, have some of these olives; and this is the best cucumber in the jar. What have you brought with you?”

“Some meat balls and fried aubergine.” She spread out her lunch, and they began to eat. After a moment she said:

“There was another queer thing about last night.”

“What?”

“I didn’t go to sleep for an hour or more after you’d gone, but I didn’t hear my father come back. If he wasn’t chasing you, what was he doing all that time? If he didn’t come back straight to the house, where did he go?” She sliced the cucumber and nibbled at a finger of it.

“How do I know? Perhaps he went to the police post.”

“If he did, why didn’t he mention it. He said nothing about that, and although I was scared stiff when he was talking, I had a funny feeling that he was scared himself about something.”

“About what?”

“Don’t know. Just had that feeling. Never known it before with him. Somehow, I felt he was lying—though it was true enough about you and the spade—and that he was afraid I might know he was lying.”

“I say, you don’t think your father has a girl-friend in the village? Perhaps he was going out to pay her a visit, eh? Or—yes, by God!—she was coming to him, and he wanted to use the outhouse himself!”

“What woman would want him for a lover?”

“Some women have a queer taste in men, just as some men have a queer

taste in women. My mother is always saying that. Besides, he's got money, and there are women who don't care what the man is like, as long as they can get something out of him. How else do you think bad women go in for that kind of trade?"

"Can you imagine father giving money to a woman?"

"Even misers lose their heads over women sometimes."

"Not father. He wouldn't. No, it doesn't make sense."

"But I say it does. Listen. Suppose he had a woman, and he brought her to the outhouse and then, just as they were about to come in, he heard a noise inside. Now, that would explain why he didn't smash his way in at once, wouldn't it? Even if he guessed it was us, heard our whispers or something, he still wouldn't have wanted to go for us, would he?"

"Because he was afraid his own secret would be discovered?" said Genevieve, beginning to see possibilities in Ramiz's ingenious explanation.

"Of course. And also, because he wanted to be able to use the outhouse himself. If he'd gone for us, there'd have been a scene, the family would have been roused, his girl-friend would have had to run away, and his little bit of fun in the outhouse would have been snatched away from him. So, what does he do? He tries to get us out of the outhouse without openly disclosing himself—by giving us a fright; coughing, making faint noises while hiding with his woman behind the outhouse and waiting until we've got the wind up and cleared out stealthily, so that they can get in without anybody knowing anything about it! Don't you see, love, that explains why you didn't hear him going back into the house!"

"I'm beginning to think you're right. It's very clever the way you've worked it out, and it seems to explain everything—what happened last night, and father's manner this morning. He wanted to frighten me, but he was afraid himself because of his own secret. But wait a minute. If you're right, why should he have bothered to chase you at all? Just for a spade, whose handle he broke afterwards?"

"No, sweetheart. To give us a real fright. He wanted to make sure we'd never again go near the outhouse, see? He wanted it not only for that night, but also for other nights, and he wanted to make certain he'd always have it when he wanted it, and that nobody would disturb him. Why, it all makes sense!"

"You're very clever, Ramiz. I couldn't have thought of all this in a hundred years."

"Mind you," said Ramiz, acknowledging his sweetheart's admiration with becoming modesty. "I'm not saying I'm right. It's just an idea that came to me, and it seems to explain things. There are much stranger things and cleverer

ideas in the mystery and police stories I read, and in the films I see in Tripoli. My, how I'd have liked to be a detective!"

"I'm sure you'd have made a wonderful one. You've got lots of brains Ramiz, and you're wasted here, with all that. . . ." She pointed indignantly at the tins of olives and olive oil, at the cheeses and jars of pickles.

"You know, it's only you that keep me here. I won't go without you. But one day, we'll go together—to Tripoli or Beirut, and maybe I could then join the police force and become a detective. How would you like to be the wife of 'Chief Detective Ramiz Mansour,' eh?"

"You're such a dear, Ramiz. I love you when you boast. You do it so sweetly."

"Who's boasting? I didn't say, 'Commissioner of Police,' or 'President of the Republic'—only 'Chief Detective.' Now, that's modest, isn't it? And then, there will be a conspiracy to assassinate the President—there's bound to be one—and Chief Detective Ramiz Mansour will unearth it, and be awarded the Order of the Cedars, Third Class—not Second, or First, only Third Class. Now, that's modest again, isn't it?"

They both chuckled, as Ramiz carefully rolled a hunk of cheese with some pickles into a piece of bread and stuffed it into his mouth, causing his right cheek to swell out with a bulge the size of a ping-pong ball. Then he began chewing it with great gusto, his eyes twinkling at Genevieve.

# 13

At the house of Faris Deeb, they did not hear of the disappearance of the American woman till the evening, when Antoine came home. It was his evening off and he came home early, having done late duty the night before. His mother and Genevieve were in the kitchen, preparing supper. Mitry was watering the flower beds round the terrace. Abu Faris was sitting on the terrace, counting the beads of his old rosary, looking up at the ripening grapes overhead (the sight of them always caused him to regret having parted with his vineyard), and exchanging an occasional remark with Mitry.

“Where’s father?” asked Antoine.

“He’s fixing the new lock on the door of the outhouse,” said Mitry.

“You’d better call him,” said Antoine. “The police are coming here shortly to make a few inquiries.”

“The police?” asked Mitry. “What, about that thief and the spade? Surely, he didn’t report a trivial thing like that? And what can the police find out about it?”

“No, it isn’t about the thief and the spade. Something else, more important.”

Rosa and Genevieve came out of the kitchen.

“What are the police coming here for?” asked Rosa. Genevieve stood close behind her.

“The young American lady staying at the hotel has disappeared,” said Antoine gravely. “And her real name is not Miss Bright; it’s Jeannette Waverley—the film star. She came here for a quiet rest, and didn’t want people to know who she was.”

“What do you mean, ‘she has disappeared?’ ” asked Rosa. “How did she disappear?”

Faris Deeb was coming back from the outhouse, having finished his job, when he heard the last sentence. He stood still behind the corner of the kitchen, invisible to the family on the terrace, and listened tensely.

“That’s what the police want to know,” said Antoine, “and the American Consulate in Beirut. The telephones have been buzzing all day between here and Tripoli and Beirut, and the police have been coming and going, and the American Vice-Consul from Beirut has just arrived with the Assistant

Commissioner of the Sûreté. They want to ask everybody in the village if anybody saw her last night.”

“Has she been missing since last night?” asked Mitry.

“Yes. She had dinner at the hotel, but nobody has seen her since then. She did not sleep in her room. And when I arrived at the hotel this morning, Khawaja Bishara and Khawaja Rasheed were making inquiries about her. Hasn’t father told you?”

“Your father? What does he know?” said Rosa.

“He saw me and Khawaja Rasheed looking for her at the pool behind the orchard this morning.”

“The pool?” asked Rosa.

“Yes. She’d said to me a few days ago that she’d like to bathe in the pool by moonlight, so I thought she might have gone there and got drowned, or hurt herself and couldn’t walk back, and Khawaja Bishara sent me and Khawaja Rasheed to look for her. We didn’t find her, but father was there. His watch had fallen into the pool, and I dived and got it back for him.”

“When did his watch fall into the pool?”

“Just then, before Khawaja Rasheed and I arrived. He said it had got caught in a branch over the orchard wall and was flung into the water. We found him trying to fish it out.”

Faris Deeb, hearing the talk about his watch, decided to make his appearance on the terrace in the middle of this conversation. “Ay,” he said, coming round the corner of the kitchen with his slow and heavy step, as though just returning from the outhouse and hearing only the last few words on his way, “he’s a good diver, Antoine. I shouldn’t have been able to get my watch back without his help.”

“God’s name be upon him,” said Abu Faris. “He’s smart in every way.”

Rosa refrained from asking any questions about the watch. Instead, she turned to Antoine, saying:

“Tell your father about the police.”

Antoine repeated what he had told the rest of the family, adding, “They’ll be arriving any moment now.”

“They’ll be welcome,” said Faris Deeb, then to Rosa. “You’d better go and make coffee, you or Genevieve.”

“What can we tell them?” said Abu Faris. “We don’t know anything about it.”

“I suppose none of you saw this missing woman in the village last night?”

said Faris Deeb.

“What would make me see her?” said Rosa. “I was here all the evening, and I’ve never set eyes upon the creature.”

“The police won’t expect all the people of the village to have seen her before. They will just give a description of her and ask if anyone looking like her was seen out late last night.”

“I didn’t see a soul after sunset,” said Mitry. “I was here too, doing up the week’s accounts.”

Genevieve remained silent, and Rosa said, speaking to her husband, “Only you and Antoine were out late last night.”

“I’ve told you, and I told the police, I didn’t see her after dinner,” said Antoine. “There was no one on the roads when I came home.”

“What time did you get home from Tripoli?” Rosa asked her husband.

“Here they come,” said Mitry, and Faris Deeb did not have to answer his wife’s question. That gave him a few minutes’ respite before he had to answer it to the police. Of course everyone knew that he had been to Tripoli and had not come home till late in the evening, but what did that matter? He advanced to meet the police officers, who had opened the garden gate and were coming towards the terrace. One of them he recognized as Elias Effendi, the officer in charge of the village police post, but the other he did not know.

“Welcome to the Effendis,” he said. “Do me the honour to come in. How’s Elias Effendi?” He still carried in his hand the hammer, chisel and screwdriver with which he had been fixing the new lock on the door of the outhouse, glad of the opening they gave him to tell the men of the law that he had been the victim of housebreaking the night before.

Elias Effendi expressed his thanks, and deferentially introduced his companion as Captain Jubara of the Sûreté Generale in Beirut. Captain Jubara conscious of his superior status, bowed a little stiffly as he shook hands with Faris Deeb.

“I am honoured,” said Faris Deeb. “You will excuse me for carrying these tools. I have just been fixing a new lock on the door of my outhouse. We had an attempted robbery here last night.”

“You don’t say!” said Elias Effendi, effusive with professional concern. “An attempted robbery? How? Why didn’t you report it?”

“It wasn’t worth reporting,” said Faris Deeb, “and there was little information I could give you to work on. But please, sit down.”

After the usual introductions and handshakes, they all sat down.

“Tell us more about this attempted robbery,” pursued Elias Effendi.

“I heard noises in the garden soon after midnight,” said Faris Deeb, “and when I got up to investigate their source, I found a man stealing out of the outhouse, carrying a spade he had found there. I chased him, and he threw the spade away and disappeared up the hill. He ran faster than me and I could not follow him. I am not as young as I used to be, or I should have caught him and brought him to you. That’s all.”

“He broke the handle of the spade in two when he threw it away,” put in Abu Faris. “A good spade it was.”

“Ah, it was an old spade; the wood must have been rotten,” said Faris Deeb.

“It wasn’t rotten; I used it only the other day,” muttered Abu Faris under his breath.

“I don’t think the condition of the spade can be of any interest to the officers,” said Faris Deeb. “It’s a very trivial matter.”

“Can you give me a description of the man?” pursued the village officer with a show of zeal and thoroughness calculated to impress his senior colleague from Beirut. “Height? Approximate age? Clothes?”

“Just an ordinary-looking young man, in ordinary clothes—nothing special about him,” said Faris Deeb. At this point Rosa and Genevieve came out of the kitchen. The former carried a tray with glasses of mulberry syrup on it, the latter followed her with the coffee. The two officers stood up as Faris Deeb introduced his wife and daughter, and the refreshments were served. Genevieve, hearing her father’s answer to the police officer, experienced a sense of complete and final certainty that Ramiz was right in thinking that her father had recognized him, that he knew they had been in the outhouse together. Her father obviously did not wish the matter of the “burglary” to be taken up by the police, did not want the identity of the “thief” or the circumstances of his presence in the garden to be discovered. Again, Genevieve had that dual feeling of being frightened of her father because he knew what she had done, and of somehow holding a threat over him which made him afraid of her, and shielded her from his usual anger.

“That’s unfortunate,” said Elias Effendi. “You’re sure he didn’t steal anything of value from the house? Have you made a careful search?”

“No, there’s nothing missing from the house,” said Rosa.

“He never got inside the house,” said Faris Deeb. “I chased him away before he had a chance to do so.”

“Antoine, fetch the cigarettes from the sitting-room,” said Rosa. “Perhaps the officers would like to smoke.” Antoine got up to do his mother’s bidding.

“Well, I’m sorry my colleague can’t help you in this little matter of the thief,” said Captain Jubara, “but perhaps you can help us in our inquiries about the missing American young woman from the hotel. Of course you’ve heard about it from your son?”

“Ay,” said Faris Deeb. “Antoine has told us.”

“It’s a very serious matter, particularly as the lady is an American,” continued the Sûreté officer.

“American or no American,” put in Elias Effendi with local concern, “it’s a very serious matter for the hotel and the village. It will give Barkita a bad name if a holiday-maker disappears like that.”

“That will be only if something happened to her in the village,” said Mitry. “Antoine was saying that she wanted a quiet rest and had come here under a borrowed name, seeing that she is so famous. Perhaps she found that someone had recognized her, and left the village in a hurry for some other place, without telling anybody about it.”

Antoine, who had come back with the cigarettes and was offering them to the officers, said:

“But she wouldn’t have gone away without her clothes and belongings.”

“Besides,” said Captain Jubara, with the importance of one who had been conducting inquiries at a high level, “we know that she was due in Beirut at midday to-day to keep an important appointment. She did not turn up for it, nor send a message cancelling it. I’m afraid we have to reckon with the possibility of foul play.”

“Holy Virgin!” said Rosa. “You mean somebody has killed her?”

“I didn’t quite say that, but we have to investigate every possibility,” said Captain Jubara.

“Naturally,” said Faris Deeb, forcing himself to speak, as he felt his lack of contribution to the conversation might become noticeable.

“Was she wearing a lot of jewellery, or carrying much money on her?” asked Abu Faris.

“Not as far as we know,” said Elias Effendi.

“But there are other motives for attacking a woman than robbery,” said Captain Jubara.

“Indeed, indeed,” said Abu Faris.

“But if anything had happened to her in the village,” said Rosa, “she would not just have disappeared. I mean, somebody would have found her by now, dead or alive.”

“Not necessarily,” said Captain Jubara. “Sometimes these things don’t come to light immediately.”

Faris Deeb was finding it impossible to join in these speculations, or indeed to say anything at all. He was not a slick hypocrite, not a good actor, and the weight of his guilt and fear lay heavily on his tongue. All that he could do was to pretend that he was thinking deeply, with the aid of a cigarette and frequent sips of coffee, while the rest of the company were talking and conjecturing, without knowing it, about what he had done the night before. Yet, there seemed to be such a chasm of time and identity between the happenings of the night before and the conversation on the terrace, that he was only half aware of the reality of his position. His mind was echoing Captain Jubara’s last sentence, and he was reassuring himself that in his own particular case the thing would never come to light (it only came to light if you were fool enough to throw the body into the sea, or a disused well, or to cover it superficially with a little earth and leaves and twigs, not if you had the sense and thoroughness to bury it a few feet deep under a wall), when Elias Effendi gave him another comfort by saying:

“Besides, it need not have happened here in the village; she might have taken a car and gone for a drive.”

“She might have gone to Tripoli after dinner,” said Mitry.

“Ah, these Americans are capable of doing anything,” said Abu Faris.

“What we’re here for,” said Captain Jubara, deciding that the time had come for him to interrupt these speculations, “is to find out if anyone saw her leaving the hotel after dinner; and if so, in what direction she was going. Were any of you in the village last evening? Did any of you go out of the house?”

“I was in Tripoli,” said Faris Deeb, feeling that that would give him an alibi for most of the evening anyhow—an alibi which the episode of the thief more or less completed at the other end.

“And Antoine was at the hotel, but all the rest of us were here the whole evening,” said Rosa.

Captain Jubara turned to Faris Deeb. “What time did you go to Tripoli?” he asked.

“Soon after lunch,” said Faris Deeb.

“And you got back?”

“Quite late. Between eleven and twelve.”

“Where did you leave the car that brought you back from Tripoli?”

“At the bottom of the hill, near the footpath that leads up here.”

“Did you see anybody on the road?”

“No, the road was empty.”

“And you came straight up the hill to your house?”

“Yes.”

“You didn’t meet anyone on the footpath, either?”

“No, not a soul.”

“And you didn’t hear any voices or footsteps? Any shouting? Any screams?”

“No. The night was very quiet.”

“When you got out of your car, did any other car pass you? Did any car overtake you before you got out of yours?”

“I remember a car overtaking the one I was in just before it stopped.”

“Did you notice how many people there were in it? One, two, more?”

“It seemed full of passengers like the one I was in.”

“Seemed? You aren’t sure?”

“I think it was full, but I wouldn’t swear to it on the gospel,” said Faris Deeb truthfully but thinking at the same time that the expression of a little doubt, suggesting a respect for veracity, would make a good impression on his questioner. Of course, they weren’t asking him these questions because they suspected him. They merely thought he might be able to give them useful information. But the mere fact that he was out at that time of night, when few villagers were not in their beds, might put ideas into the head of the detective from Beirut, and it was just as well to make a good impression on him.

“Did you recognize the car itself as being one of the village cars?” put in Elias Effendi. “Or was it a car from outside?”

“I couldn’t tell. I didn’t notice it specially.”

“You said you arrived in the village between eleven and twelve,” continued Captain Jubara. “You couldn’t put it more definitely?”

“I didn’t look at my watch, but it must have been close on midnight. I didn’t leave Tripoli till well after ten.” As he mentioned the watch, he happened to glance in the direction of Antoine, and was perturbed by a strange look that came into the boy’s eyes; then he caught sight of Rosa’s face, out of the corner of his eye, and saw her looking at Antoine. Something in her expression too frightened him.

Here Captain Jubara cleared his throat and said: “You won’t think it impertinent of us if we ask you where you went in Tripoli, and if you saw anyone there who can confirm your statement that you went there soon after lunch and did not leave till after ten?”

Elias Effendi hastened to add, with some embarrassment: "You understand, Khawaja Faris, these are routine questions we have to ask, particularly to satisfy the American Consulate that we have made all possible inquiries and checked all the information we obtained. Of course, we know that you are telling the truth, but these are the regulations. This is a small village, and most of the villagers go to bed early, so if we know of anyone who was out late last night, we must make a report of where he was. It's just a formality."

"Let me add my assurances to those of my colleague that no offence whatever is meant," said the Sûreté officer. "Elias Effendi has told me that you are one of the prominent men of the village, and as far as I am concerned the answers you have given us are more than enough. But it is our duty to ask for confirmation wherever possible."

As far as the happenings at the pool were concerned, Faris Deeb was glad that the police officers had asked this last question. He could easily satisfy them that his statements about the journey to Tripoli and the time of his return were true. But to do so he would have to tell them, before his family, that he had been to the cabaret, mention the waiter at least as witness, if not the Egyptian bitch. And from that he recoiled with an initial reaction of shame and repugnance, feeling that in mentioning his visit to the cabaret he might be revealing the motive that had taken him there—a motive that was also connected with his later visit to the pool and what had happened there. Fortunately for him, however, the lengthy apologies of the two officers had given him time to think of a respectable and satisfactory explanation of the cabaret alibi. So, when the officers had concluded their speeches, he said:

"Of course, I understand your duty in such matters, and I am glad that I can help you." He gave them the details of his visit to Tripoli and when he came to the cabaret part he said that he had gone there in the hope of finding the estate agent, who was known to patronize the establishment, and whom he was very anxious to see that night.

"And you waited there till nearly ten before leaving?" asked Captain Jubara.

"Yes, but I had no better luck there than in his office. He didn't come, so I gave it up and left."

"Ah, you should have stayed on," said Elias Effendi jocularly. "They have a very good programme this week. I've seen it myself."

"I don't care much for that sort of thing," said Faris Deeb.

"And did anyone see you there? Anyone who can confirm that you were there till ten o'clock?"

"Yes; one of the waiters, who served me with a drink or two while I

waited. If you want me to go with you any time so that he may identify me, I shall be at your service.”

“That is very kind of you, Khawaja Deeb,” said Captain Jubara, “but I don’t think it will be necessary. It is enough we know that what you have told us can be verified if required. One more point: when you got home, were all the members of your household asleep? I mean did any of them wake up and notice what the time was?”

“They were all asleep,” said Faris Deeb in a tone that settled the matter, then as though apologizing for having presumed to answer for them, he added with a gesture pointing in the direction of Rosa and the others. “But perhaps you would like them to answer for themselves? Some of them may have been awake.” He looked, as though accidentally, at Genevieve, who quickly averted her eyes.

“I’m always asleep by ten o’clock,” said Rosa, “and nothing can wake me before dawn.” She looked at her husband as she spoke the last word, and he wondered in some alarm what she could have meant. He said:

“Ay, Rosa sleeps like a log.”

“I didn’t wake up,” said Abu Faris.

“Nor I,” said Mitry. “I’m a heavy sleeper, and an early one, like my mother.”

“I didn’t get home till quite late myself,” said Antoine, “as I told Your Presence at the hotel when you were questioning me about Miss Bright—I mean Miss Waverley. It could have been before my father returned, or after; I don’t know which, as I went to sleep straightaway, and didn’t wake up till the morning.”

“And you?” said Faris Deeb, looking at Genevieve.

“I was asleep,” she said. “I didn’t wake up.”

“Well, it’s of no importance,” said Captain Jubara. “If we could have had confirmation of the time of your arrival home last night, it would have tidied up our report nicely. But we must accept your word, and go on to make inquiries elsewhere now. Forgive us for having taken up so much of your time.”

“You have honoured us,” said Faris Deeb.

“May God prosper your inquiries,” said Rosa.

“Ay, we don’t want a bad name coming to the village,” said Abu Faris. “God be with you.”

Genevieve watched the retreating figure of Captain Jubara with a look of dreamy aspiration. His appearance, his status, the authority with which he

spoke, the level on which he moved had impressed her enormously. Perhaps Ramiz, one day, would be in a similar position—Captain Ramiz Mansour!

“Well, come and have supper now,” said Rosa. “It was ready when they came.”

They went into the “hall,” where they had their meals, and sat round a table covered with an oil cloth. From the kitchen, Rosa and Genevieve fetched plates of black and green olives, curd cheese in oil, lentils and fried onions, and a stack of round, flat loaves.

“Fetch me the bottle of arak,” said Faris Deeb. He thought he had come through the interview with the police officers very well. His hard, rough exterior, his laconic manner of speech and lack of effusiveness, well-known to Elias Effendi, had been very useful in hiding his inner disquiet, in making unnoticeable his long silences in the conversation when everyone else was speculating or asking questions. People often said, “Faris Deeb’s expression never changes,” or “he has a face of granite,” or “you never know what he’s thinking.” Well, those police officers couldn’t have known what he was thinking, couldn’t have seen any change in his looks, any more than the people he dealt with in business could tell anything from his face when he was conducting a transaction. And he had given them a satisfactory account of his journey to Tripoli, which they could verify. They had accepted his statement that he came home straight from where the car had dropped him. There was nothing for him to fear, nothing except. . . . He watched Rosa as she came back with the bottle of arak. He remembered her speaking of the dawn, and the look she had given him when she mentioned the word. Could she have seen him coming into the room, undressing? Wondered why he had been so late? Could she be wondering now, after hearing the story of the missing woman? His confidence faltered, but his face remained impassive. He held out his hand to take the bottle of arak.

“What have you done to your hand to get all those blisters?” said Rosa, handing him the bottle.

He started slightly behind his walls of granite, but he was prepared with his answer, for Mitry had asked him the same question in the shop earlier in the day.

“That cursed car that brought me from Tripoli had a puncture,” he said. “I helped the driver unscrew the nuts on the wheel. They were very stiff.” He poured himself a large tot of arak, added a little water from the snout of the earthenware jug on the table, and took a gulp. Then, with a faint approach to amiability, prompted by a sudden sense of isolation and insecurity, he said to his wife, “Have a drop yourself.” He extended the invitation to his father and

Mitry, adding, "Antoine and Genevieve are too young to drink yet." Even in this exclusion, there was a touch of friendliness, a suggestion that certain severities might be relaxed as the children grew up.

"You weren't too young to drink," said Abu Faris with a smile such as rarely passed between him and his son, "when I caught you having a swig at my bottle of arak, and you not fourteen yet! Do you remember that?" Abu Faris looked across the years, scarcely able to believe that there had been a time when Faris could be afraid of him.

"Ay, I remember," said Faris Deeb. "But Rosa has brought the children up to be better behaved than I was."

"Thanks be to God and the Holy Virgin," said Rosa, "that you sometimes see something good in your wife and children. You'll be buying me a new dress next, I suppose?"

"If you need one, you shall have it. I have never denied you or the children anything necessary. But I don't believe in waste. That is all." While the substance of what he said contained this element of propitiation, his manner had returned to its usual sternness. He was not going to make, he was incapable of making, any further concessions to his fear, to the claims of diplomacy.

Abu Faris, always anxious to allay the conflicts and hatreds that poisoned the life in his son's house, hastened to make a contribution to the comparative friendliness that had come over the supper table. He said:

"Ay, Faris has provided well for you. He works hard. He is successful. One day all the fruits of his labour will come to you. Why does a man strive and sweat to amass money but for his wife and children? Glory be to God, this is the way he has ordered the world." Having delivered this homily, Abu Faris lifted his glass of arak, saying, "Your health, my son."

"Your health, Father," said Faris Deeb, taking another gulp himself.

"The health of all of you," said Abu Faris, pointing with his glass at the other members of the family. "Let Antoine and Genevieve have a drop, Faris. It won't do them any harm."

"All right," said Faris Deeb. "Just the width of a finger."

"Which finger?" asked Mitry, with a mischievous smile, sharing in the mild friendliness that had infused itself into the family, as it rarely did in the presence of his father. "The thumb, or the little one?"

"The middle one, the middle one," said Abu Faris, in the tone of a judicious arbitrator settling a controversy with a reasonable compromise.

"I don't want any," said Genevieve. "I don't like it."

“How do you know?” asked her father. “Have you tried it in secret?”

“I can tell from its smell,” said Genevieve.

“You can, can you?” said her father. “Children do things behind their fathers’ backs, thinking they can get away with it, but sooner or later they’re caught out!” At the back of his mind echoes from the little speech his father had made the moment before were still sounding. . . . “One day all the fruits of his labour will come to you”—one day! They would come immediately in certain circumstances. Mitry would have the money to pay his fare to Brazil. Genevieve would have a nice little dowry to bring to Ramiz. Rosa would become her own mistress. She too would have a nice little dowry, for a widow. Wouldn’t surprise him if she married again. She was still young enough, and not bad looking. She had no pleasure with him as a husband. She might want it with someone else. As long as he lived, she wouldn’t dare. But if he was out of the way. . . . A dark jealousy mingled with his fear, and for some time he ceased to listen to the talk round the supper table. He only came to when Mitry said:

“Just imagine that we had a celebrated film star staying in the village and didn’t know anything about it until she disappeared!”

“Holy Virgin, let no harm befall her,” said Rosa.

“I just can’t think what happened to her,” said Antoine. “One moment she was there, sitting on the terrace after dinner, and the next she was gone!”

“By God, it seems very mysterious,” said Mitry.

Faris Deeb drank his arak silently. The alcohol gave him a dreamy feeling, enhanced by his fatigue and lack of sleep the night before. He listened with a brain sufficiently dulled to keep drifting away from its memories, and from his connection with the thing they were talking about.

“I still believe she started by wanting to go and bathe in the pool,” said Antoine. “Why else did she take a towel with her? They searched all the day at the hotel for that towel, but they still couldn’t find it. She must have taken it out of her room.”

“It could have been stolen by one of the maids at the hotel,” said Faris Deeb. He had to kill that idea of the pool.

“But it was the maids themselves who reported its disappearance,” said Antoine. “Two of them.”

“Are there no other maids at the hotel but those two?” asked Faris Deeb.

“Of course there are, but——”

“Well, one of the others could have stolen it.”

“But even if she went to the pool, what could have happened to her?” said

Mitry. “She wasn’t drowned.”

“Ah, all this talk of her going to the pool is nonsense,” said Faris Deeb, with a mixture of authority and derision, and making his pronouncement during one of those moments when he felt so unconnected with the subject as to be able to speak about it.

“But she said herself she’d like to bathe in the pool by moonlight,” persisted Antoine.

“Don’t contradict me,” shouted Faris Deeb, his rage and alarm flaring up at his son’s doggedness. “Don’t be a donkey!” Then, feeling afraid that he might have betrayed himself by this outburst, he went on in a calmer tone, “People say they would like to do all sorts of crazy things, but they don’t do them.”

“When a woman vanishes like this,” said Abu Faris, “it’s nearly always the same story.” Then, addressing himself to Genevieve, he added, “Be careful, my daughter. Never walk by yourself at night, except where there are lights and a lot of people about. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” said Genevieve, “I never do it.”

“Ay,” said Faris Deeb, seeing with great relief the prospect of an avenue of thought that led thousands of miles away from the pool, “there are criminal gangs that kidnap women and take them to South America for immoral purposes. They say many a wretched girl has gone that way, and never been heard of since. White Slave Traffic, they call it. There was a case last year in Beirut. I read about it in a newspaper.”

“God protect us,” said Rosa.

“I didn’t mean only that,” said Abu Faris, but, to Faris Deeb’s relief, before his father could say what else he meant, footsteps were heard outside on the terrace, and Yusef’s voice called, “Good evening, Abu Mitry. I’m sorry to disturb you at your supper. There’s someone here who wants to see you, but we’ll wait outside till you’ve finished eating.” Yusef walked to the window and beamed at the company inside the room, adding, “Good evening Sitt Rosa, good evening to you all.”

“That won’t do,” said Faris Deeb, expansive with relief at this intrusion that put an end to the talk about the missing woman and the pool. He presumed Yusef was bringing him a client, and that a business transaction was going to follow. “Come in with the gentleman and join us in a bite and a glass of arak.”

Rosa’s blood warmed and her heart beats quickened at the sound of her lover’s voice. Any nervousness she might have felt at Yusef’s coming to the house when her husband was there—a thing he rarely did—was allayed by the tone of Faris Deeb’s welcome to the visitors. Wondering what could have brought Yusef on this visit, and who his companion might be, she hastened to

reinforce her husband's invitation:

"Of course you must have a bite," she said. "Do come in. I'll get some more chairs." She left the table and hurried into the sitting-room. She knew the children and Abu Faris liked Yusef, and, in spite of the priest's admonitions the day before, she was sure they suspected nothing.

"Thank you," said Yusef coming in, followed by the other man. "We've both eaten, but a drop of arak is always welcome. Before the meal, it stimulates the appetite; with the meal, it lubricates the throat—pardon me for using the language of the garage—and after eating it's good for the digestion, eh Fareed?"

When Faris Deeb saw the man addressed as Fareed, he felt the blood drain suddenly out of his heart, and as though never to return. It was the driver of the car that had brought him from Tripoli the night before. What had he come for? And why, in the name of all the devils, had you, Faris Deeb, not thought of some other explanation of the blisters on your hand than that lie about the punctured tyre? Some remark now, some question, and they would all know that he had lied because he didn't want them to know what had caused the blisters. He stood up with an effort to welcome the visitors. Rosa had returned with two extra chairs.

"Good evening to you," said the car driver. "Please forgive me for interrupting your supper."

"You're welcome," said Faris Deeb.

"There's no interruption at all," said Rosa. "Do us the honour to sit down." She placed the chairs as close to the table as possible, and the two men sat down. In passing Yusef, her leg had touched his knee, and he moved his knee cap slightly to give her a little clandestine caress. She responded with an instant's pressure from her leg.

"You've honoured us," said Faris Deeb, pouring out two tots of arak and picking up the water jug. He was trying to think quickly of the reason that had brought the car driver to see him.

"No water for me, if you please, Abu Mitry," said Yusef, smiling naughtily, as it were, at his reputation for hard drinking, and proud to confirm it with this jocular boast.

"Yusef wants arak, not milk!" said Mitry, referring to the whiteness of the diluted drink.

"Ah, there's a young man who understands!" said Yusef. "Eh, Mitry? They say 'don't mix your drinks.' Well, I don't like mixing my arak with water!" His ruddy face beamed with a large smile at his own joke. Mitry laughed, and Abu Faris gave a little chuckle, in which Rosa joined discreetly.

“In that case, you must have some more of the arak,” said Faris Deeb, adding a few drops to Yusef’s glass. His fear made him anxious to be propitiatory all round, and he wanted to keep the conversation away from the subject of the previous night’s journey, though obviously that was going to come up. What else had the driver come for? But what was it? What was it?

“By God, Abu Mitry, your generosity is in flood to-night!” said Yusef. “But it’s going to be richly rewarded, on my honour. Here’s to your health, and the lady’s too—everybody’s health!” He drank and smacked his lips. “Yes, by God, it’s good arak!”

“Do have something to eat with it,” said Rosa, “some olives, a slice of cucumber or tomato—and the Khawaja there.” She passed a few plates in the direction of the visitors.

“Thank you. May God increase your prosperity,” said the car driver, helping himself.

“In a moment, it will be Khawaja Faris who will be thanking you,” said Yusef. “And by God, you will have earned his thanks. Such honesty is scarce in the world to-day.”

“Don’t you remember me?” asked the car driver, looking at Faris Deeb. “I’m the driver who brought you from Tripoli last night. I was passing through Barkita on the way to my own village.”

“I thought I’d seen your face before,” said Faris Deeb. “But I wasn’t sure, because it was in the dark.”

“Yes, and that’s how you made your mistake, and also why I didn’t notice it at the time.”

“My mistake?” said Faris Deeb, trying urgently to trunk of what the man was talking about.

“Well, you see, instead of giving me a one-lira note, you gave me, when you got out of the car, a five-lira note. I only discovered the mistake when I got home. Here’s the note you gave me.”

“He didn’t know who you were,” explained Yusef, “so he came to my garage now and told me the story. He told me where he had put you down, and described you to me, and I knew you had gone to Tripoli in the afternoon, so I guessed it must be you, though by God, Abu Mitry, I found it difficult to believe that you would make such a mistake! Haven’t you counted your money since last night?” Yusef expressed his astonishment with a malicious twinkle of his large, black eyes. He knew that he could have a dig at his mistress’s husband with impunity, since Faris Deeb would be too delighted to get back the excess money he had paid to take any notice of the jibe.

“No one but God is above making a mistake,” said Faris Deeb. “I must have miscounted the money in my purse, but if our conscientious friend here is sure——”

“Yes, I am sure, Khawaja Deeb. This is the note you gave me.”

“I’m very grateful to you,” said Faris Deeb. “God will reward you for your honesty, but I thank you for the trouble you took to bring me back this note. Here is your lira.” Having taken out his purse, he extracted a one-lira note, which he gave the driver in exchange for the one returned to him. Never in his life had he made such a mistake before. It was the drink he had had at the cabaret, and the lavish mess he’d got himself into with his money, paying for the drinks and tipping the waiter, and the desire for something other than money that consumed him as he got out of the car. . . . Yusef’s jibe had not hurt his finer feelings. It had only given his self-confidence a momentary jolt. Delighted at the recovery of his four liras, he was still anxious to get rid of the car driver quickly lest the fiction of the tyre be exposed. So he went on:

“I have put you to a lot of trouble, and you must not lose any more time and fares on my account.”

“God be praised that there are still men of honour and conscience in the world,” said Rosa.

“Well, one good turn deserves another,” began Abu Faris. “Faris helped \_\_\_\_\_”

“Enough!” said Faris Deeb severely, and quick as lightning to prevent the exposure he feared. “I did nothing. Let us just be thankful to this decent man for his noble action.” He tried to sound as though magnanimously demanding that no mention should be made of the little service he had rendered the driver. Abu Faris, thus checked, left his speech unfinished. Rosa looked at her husband, slightly surprised. Such explosions from his mouth were not unusual. But delicacy of sentiment was never their cause. She would rather have expected him to say himself to the driver, “Well, I helped you with that tyre; now we’re quits.” Why had he so sharply silenced Abu Faris? . . . Why had he lied about the watch and the hour of his return to the house? Perhaps that story about the thief and the spade was a fabrication too . . . why had he invented it?

“Come, come Abu Mitry,” said Yusef, noticing that Faris Deeb was trying to get rid of him and the driver, and thinking that it was merely in order to save himself from having to offer them a second drink, “you’re not going to get off so lightly, you know. Four liras are worth the reward of at least one bottle of arak. But we shan’t insist on that. Just remove that cork and pour us out another tot. By God, Sitt Rosa, your olives are delicious. I wager their likes are not to be found in the village.”

“And this curd cheese in oil,” said Rosa, glad to have her lover for a little while longer, enjoying his baiting of her husband. “Have you tasted it?”

“I’ve tasted everything you have. It’s all delectable,” said Yusef innocently.

Rosa smiled, trying to look very natural, though her heart had jumped at the hidden meaning in her lover’s remark. To emphasize the ostensible meaning, she said:

“You men know that housewives like to have their table praised. You know how to flatter!”

“By Mar Maroun, I do not flatter,” said Yusef. “I call Abu Mitry to witness. You are eating off the same table, Abu Mitry. Isn’t everything on it delicious?”

“Ay, Rosa is a good cook and housewife,” said Faris Deeb without much enthusiasm, pouring more arak into the glasses of Yusef and the driver. Suddenly, he put the bottle down, and glowered at Yusef.

“What was that you said?” he demanded in a menacing tone.

“I?” said Yusef, taken aback, realizing to his amazement that Faris Deeb had slowly seen through his irony.

“Yes, you, what did you mean about Rosa? Rosa, what did he mean?” He rose slowly from his seat, breathing heavily. Various little things he had seen and not taken in, words he had heard without comprehending, Yusef’s mocking insolence towards him disguised as jocularly, Rosa’s physical aversion for him during the past two years, the way her leg touched Yusef’s knee a few moments before, which he had seen but paid no attention to—all clicked together now in his brain into a pattern whose significance blasted from it everything else.

“Faris, shame on you!” said Rosa. “Speaking to me like that, and to our guest! What do you mean?”

“I was only complimenting the lady on the nice things she was offering us,” said Yusef uneasily.

“Liar!” said Faris Deeb. “Swine! Get out of my house before I break your bones!”

“Faris! Faris!” pleaded his father. “Have you gone mad? What is this you are saying, my son? I heard what Yusef said. There was no offence in it.”

“I said get out!” said Faris Deeb, ignoring his father’s intervention and continuing to glare at Yusef, who had remained seated, slightly stunned by Faris Deeb’s outburst, and hoping to brave out the crisis by a show of incomprehension and injured innocence.

The driver rose and murmuring an awkward “Good night,” began to withdraw from a scene in which he felt his presence would be embarrassing to everybody.

“Very well,” said Yusef with an air of tense dignity, rising after the driver, “if this is my reward for rendering you a service, I will go. I have never stayed in a house where I wasn’t welcome, Khawaja Faris. But I don’t want the lady to be misunderstood on account of anything I said. On my honour——”

“Damn your honour, and leave the lady out. I will know how to deal with her!”

“Oh, disgrace! Oh, dishonour!” wailed Abu Faris, as Yusef’s figure began to retreat. “Follow him, my son; beg his pardon. Don’t let it be said that you kicked a guest out of your house for no reason, for a madness in your mind. What has come over you?”

“Faris Deeb, you’re a fool!” said Rosa. “You think yourself very clever, don’t you? You think you’ve discovered secret meanings in innocent words. You think you understand everything. Well, you don’t! You’re nothing but a stupid bully. And you’re attacking my honour, even before my children, because you have a secret of your own you want to cover up. Isn’t that so? Where were you last night? You did not come home till dawn. And the night before? You pretend that you go to Tripoli to see the estate agent, but God knows what you have been doing. People don’t transact business till midnight!”

“Shut up!” shouted Faris Deeb, shaking with an anger that only just masked his fear. He did not know whether Rosa was hinting at any connection between him and the story of the missing woman, or just vaguely accusing him of improper conduct. But even if only the latter, her references to the previous night were enough to make him panic. The last thing he wanted was that the Sûreté officer should come to know that he had not got home till dawn.

“I will not shut up,” retorted Rosa, feeling that her counter-attack had somehow gone home, though she was not thinking of the missing woman at all. “It wasn’t a piece of land you went to see. It was a woman! A woman! And after that, you have the face to insult me before strangers, before your father and my children!”

“Quiet, my daughter, be quiet!” said Abu Faris. “What has come over you all to-night?”

“Ask your son,” said Rosa, sensing a strange retreat of the spirit in her husband, which confirmed her suspicions. She did not mind his being unfaithful to her. In her outburst of self-defence, there had been no jealousy or anger. She hoped her suspicions were right. Perhaps, he would leave her alone

then, be always afraid, as he seemed to be at that moment.

“Maybe I spoke too hastily,” said Faris Deeb, trying to pacify his wife, and indeed thinking that perhaps he had jumped to unwarranted conclusions. “But I did go to Tripoli to see the land and the estate agent. Every word I said to the police officers was true. I did get home by midnight.”

“Why didn’t you come to bed till dawn, then? I woke up for an instant and saw you entering the room. The light of daybreak was in the window.”

Faris Deeb was in a cleft stick. To answer Rosa satisfactorily he would have to pretend that she saw him in the light of dawn when he was re-entering the room after having left it to chase the thief. But then, Genevieve would know that he was lying, for it was long before dawn that she and her lover had left the outhouse. Quickly however, and before Rosa had finished speaking, he decided to risk this latter danger, for he feared Rosa more than he feared Genevieve.

“Have you forgotten about the thief?” he said, assuming an aggrieved tone. “Didn’t I tell you I had to get up and chase him? And why didn’t you say anything if you woke up when I came back into the room?”

Antoine and Mitry looked at each other. Abu Faris looked at his son. There was general surprise and relief at the sudden calming down of Faris Deeb’s anger, at the conciliatory, almost plaintive tone of his voice. Rosa said:

“It’s true; I’d forgotten the thief. Was it so late in the night, then?”

“Ay,” said Faris Deeb.

Rosa knew that he was lying. When he had entered the room, he was fully dressed. A man did not put on all his clothes, and a watch chain to which no watch was attached, when he got up in a hurry in the middle of the night to investigate suspicious noises. His bed too had not been disturbed. She had noticed that when he lifted the pillow to put the watch chain under it. She became convinced that the whole thief story was a fabrication, that the hours of the previous night concealed a secret which her husband was trying to cover up—and that that secret could only be a woman, a woman he had gone to keep a tryst with on his return from Tripoli, perhaps in the orchard, by the pool. . . . Why, that would explain why his watch had fallen into the pool, and why he didn’t want it known that he had lost it in the night; why he pretended that it had fallen into the water the following morning, just before Antoine. . . . Her thoughts, until then fluid and moving quickly from one fact to another, suddenly froze with a shock—the shock of remembering why Antoine and the hotel manager had gone to the pool, what the American woman had said to Antoine about wanting to bathe in the pool by moonlight. In that instant Rosa, for the first time, glimpsed a possible connection between the woman’s

disappearance and her husband's movements the previous night and the lies he had told since the morning. But what could that connection be? Where was the woman? What had happened to her? The shape of the answers to these questions was still dark and confused in her mind, a shape to which she was not able to give names in so many words. She looked at her husband and found him avoiding the eyes of the whole company around the table. She knew that he was afraid, afraid of them all, afraid of something terrible which placed him in their power, particularly in her power. For the moment, however, she refrained from exposing his lie, fearing the extremes to which such exposure might drive him, and feeling in a curious way that her new power over him would be greater if he continued to fear exposure than if she actually exposed him. She was like one who has discovered a secret weapon but prefers for the time being to keep it secret.

Genevieve too knew that her father was lying, but her knowledge suggested nothing beyond the clever explanation Ramiz had thought of. That explanation was now confirmed by her mother's outburst. Her father must have brought a woman into the outhouse after she and Ramiz had left it. How clever Ramiz had been!

Abu Faris, recovering from his surprise at his son's sudden change of manner and all but complete withdrawal of the accusations he had made, pursued the advantage of the moment by saying:

"It is good, my son, that you have been quick to see the mistake you made. But it isn't enough to admit your mistake to Rosa. You must follow Yusef and ask his pardon too. He was your guest, eating bread and salt with you, and you insulted him; you turned him out of your house. Follow him, I pray you, my son, and make it up with him."

"It can wait," said Faris Deeb. "I'll see him to-morrow."

"As you please," said Abu Faris, "but they say there is no time like the present for doing what is right. Don't make an enemy gratuitously, even for one night. It doesn't do a man good to make enemies, and you already have many enemies in the village."

"All right, I will go," said Faris Deeb. Yusef could be a dangerous enemy. He had already made contact with that driver. He might hear from Mitry or Antoine the story of the tyre, and find out it was a lie, wonder why. . . . The lies Faris Deeb had told were like scorpions lying under stones all around him, and he did not want any of the stones to be upturned. Rosa's noticing of the blisters on his hands worried him. When the police failed to discover the missing woman, they might guess that she had been killed and buried. Digging caused blisters . . . and after all, he had probably wronged Yusef. Yusef was

afraid of him. He would not dare make love to his wife, even if the bitch was willing. He had been foolish to flare up as he did at Yusef's words, to see such hidden meaning in them, to imagine that the brushing of Rosa's leg against Yusef's knee was more than an accident.

He found Yusef back in his garage, preparing to lock up for the night, having already dismissed his assistants.

"What do you want, Khawaja Faris?" asked Yusef, a little haughtily. "You kick me out of your house, and then you come to my garage?"

"That is why I have come," said Faris Deeb, with the awkwardness of one not accustomed to making apologies.

"Do me the honour to sit down," said Yusef, still unbending.

"Thank you, but what I have come to say will not take long. I have misjudged you, Yusef. I . . . I misunderstood your words; and you know, I am a hot-tempered person. I am sorry for what happened."

"Praise be to God that you came to see your mistake so quickly," said Yusef, astonished at the change that had come over Faris Deeb since the scene at his table half an hour before, astonished to hear him utter an apology. "How could you imagine such a thing?"

"Everyone can make mistakes."

"Give me your hand, Abu Mitry. I am not one to bear a grudge. As you say, we all make mistakes, but it is only the generous-spirited that make amends for their mistakes."

Faris Deeb held forth his hand, and Yusef grasped it. Faris Deeb winced slightly.

"What's the matter with your hand, Abu Mitry?" asked Yusef. "It's hot and swollen. Been working as a labourer?"

"Ah, it's nothing," said Faris Deeb, frightened more than before at the mention of his blisters. But he wasn't going to repeat the story of the tyre; and to invent other explanations might be equally dangerous. He had to reckon with chance remarks being exchanged, inconsistencies discovered accidentally. It wasn't twenty-four hours since the thing had happened, but so many awkward little things had occurred and been noticed, demanding explanations from him, involving him in a web of contradictions.

"Tell you what?" said Yusef. "Let's go to the café and water the replanted flower of our friendship with another glass of arak. We may pick up some news of the missing woman. The Sûreté people have been going round the village. I suppose they came to you?"

"Yes. I have seen them," said Faris Deeb impassively, then changing from

the singular pronoun to the plural, continued, “Unfortunately we were not able to give them any assistance.”

“Nor was I. Nobody seems to have seen her out in the village last night. By God, it’s a mystery. But they say this Captain Jubara is a very clever detective and can unearth any mystery, no matter how deeply buried. What say you, shall we go to the café?”

Yusef’s fortuitous choice of metaphor in describing the abilities of the Sûreté man chilled Faris Deeb’s heart for a moment. He declined Yusef’s invitation to the café and set off for home, urgently anxious to know if Antoine and the hotel manager had mentioned to the Police their encounter with him at the pool, told them about the incident of the watch.

Meanwhile, someone else was anxious to know more about that watch incident. Ever since Rosa had glimpsed that first possible connection between the American woman's disappearance and Faris Deeb's movements and behaviour since the day before, she had been doing some very hard thinking and coming to some astonishing and fearful conclusions. The dark shape of the answers to the questions she asked herself was becoming clearer, illuminated by sudden flashes of light in her mind. It was acquiring names provided by a series of simple, inevitable inferences. If there was any connection between the two things, it meant that her husband had caused the woman's disappearance, and how could he have done that except . . . except by killing her and disposing of her body in some way—throwing it into some ditch in the valley and covering it with earth and stones. The valley was deep and rambling, and there were many caverns in its jagged sides where a body might be concealed and not found for a long time, if at all. Her husband might have carried it into some obscure spot before disposing of it. A long journey like that would explain his not coming to bed till dawn. And the terrible thing he had done would explain his lies and the fear she sensed in him. But why had he killed her? Well, there could be only one explanation, a natural enough explanation—the reason why many women were murdered in lonely places at night. Rosa was horrified at the procession of these speculations in her mind, each arising from the one before it, and leading to the next. But her horror was on account of the murder she suspected, in itself, and not because the person she suspected was her own husband. Her hatred of Faris Deeb prevented her from feeling personally involved in the horror. Nor did her conclusions shock her or seem incredible. The man who could beat his wife and children as Faris Deeb did, might easily go a step further if his victims hit back, if he was thwarted in the accomplishment of some urgent desire. . . . But, Holy Virgin, how terrible it was to have a murderer in the midst of the family, living under the same roof, sleeping next to her at night! A strange fear came upon her, a fear she had never before felt towards Faris Deeb—fear not of him, but of the thing she suspected he had become, of the thing that—if she were right—had entered him like some gruesome deformity or disease. Yet, while she experienced this dark, primitive fear on one level of her mind, on another level the awareness that it was her husband who now feared her and the rest of the family was steadily growing, and with it her sense of power over him. If she could only

satisfy herself that her suspicions were true, if she could have proof! Already he was showing an astounding meekness, withdrawing his accusations against her, following Yusef to apologize to him. Had they really succeeded in making him believe that Yusef's words had been innocent—oh, foolish, foolhardy Yusef to say a thing like that!—or was it just that he was afraid now because of the thing she suspected. But suspicion was not enough. She must find out more.

Finding herself alone with Antoine for a few moments during her husband's visit to Yusef, she said:

"So your father told you that his watch had fallen into the pool this morning?"

"Yes," said Antoine, who was still trying to work out his own puzzle about the watch. "Why do you ask?"

"Was the watch going when you fished it out for him?" asked Rosa.

The boy looked at his mother with a strange perplexity.

"No. There's a little mystery about that watch. It had stopped. The hands were pointing to half past twelve. But he pretended it was still going. Why did he do that? It's been bothering me all day."

Rosa remained silent, wondering whether to give her son any intimation of the suspicion that had come to her, and which was now startlingly confirmed by what he had told her about the hour at which the watch had stopped.

"Mother, you know something about that watch. What is it?"

"Nothing, nothing, my son."

"Yes, there is something; I want to know what it is."

The urge to have some secret communion with her son, to sow in his mind a seed of her own suspicion became irresistible. After some hesitation, she said:

"Your father did not have the watch on him when he came to bed last night, but he tried to deceive me as he tried to deceive you. He pretended to have it."

Antoine stared at his mother for a moment, then said:

"It must have fallen into the pool last night—at half past twelve, soon after his return from Tripoli! But what could have taken him to the pool at such an hour?"

"How would I know, my son."

"And why has he told all those lies?"

"Perhaps he's afraid of something."

“Of what?”

“I don’t know any more than you do. Do you still believe the American lady went to bathe in the pool last night?”

“Yes. At least, I can’t think of any other——” began Antoine, then he broke off suddenly, and a look of slow, fearful comprehension darkened his eyes. “Oh, Mother, No!” he cried in horror and anguish.

“I don’t know, my son; I don’t know what to think. It is no more than a suspicion—a dreadful suspicion. It occurred to you as it occurred to me. We will talk about it later, but no more now. Here’s your father coming back. He’s just opened the garden gate.”

“I don’t want to see him,” said Antoine, with a shudder of repugnance. “I’ll go to the café; I’ll follow Mitry.”

“As you please.”

“Have you told Mitry about the watch?”

“No. There was nothing to tell until I heard your news this evening. If you want to go to the café before your father sees you, get up at once and slip into the kitchen. You can go out by the back door.”

“I’ve changed my mind. I want to see him,” said Antoine, his repugnance overcome by a stronger emotion which he could scarcely explain to himself.

“As you please. But don’t let anything out. Do you understand? I will go into the kitchen. I have a few jobs to do.” She got up and left the terrace. Antoine remained glued to his chair, watching his father’s heavy figure coming up the garden path, hearing the sound of his footsteps on the flagstones as though he had never heard it before. They were not just the footsteps of a possible murderer, who was his father. The murderer, if he was one, had killed Miss Bright.

“Where are the others?” asked Faris Deeb, arriving on the terrace, and glad to find Antoine by himself.

“Mitry has gone to the café, and Mother’s in the kitchen.”

“And Genevieve?” Faris Deeb lowered himself into a cane chair, still panting from his climb.

“Don’t know.” Antoine gazed at his father, at his hard, impassive face, low-hanging eyelids and thick eyebrows, at his heavy lips and the deep lines in his face and forehead, like cracks in the bark of a tough tree. It seemed to Antoine that the face was not as hard as usual, the expression strangely subdued. It seemed to him that the head was carrying a heavy burden, which the eyes were trying to conceal. Faris Deeb took out his handkerchief and mopped his face.

“It’s a warm evening,” he said in a tone that seemed to invite conversation, but still without looking at his son. Antoine gazed at his father’s hands with their large, fleshy fingers. What had those hands done at the pool the night before? Had they really held Miss Bright, pawed her, strangled her? And what else? What else? Where was she now, where was her body? Oh, God, if he only could be sure!

“Yes,” he said, “it is warm.”

“It makes my temper hotter than usual,” said Faris Deeb. “You mustn’t take any notice of what I said to your mother and Yusef at supper. Your mother is a good woman.”

“I know my mother is a good woman.”

“Ay, and you’re not bad children, either, though I sometimes lose my temper with you, I’m proud of you, my son.”

Antoine’s good heart was beginning to soften, and his suspicion to falter, when his father’s next remark revived it instantly. Faris Deeb said:

“I suppose the police asked you a lot of questions at the hotel, before they came here. They must have seen you were a clever young man who could help them.”

“Yes. They asked many questions.”

“And what did you tell them?” pursued Faris Deeb trying to mask the fear in his curiosity.

“I told them what I knew. It wasn’t much.”

“You mean about the American woman telling you she would like to bathe in the pool at night, and your thinking that she might have had an accident there and coming with Khawaja Rasheed this morning to look for her?”

“Yes, I told them that.”

“Did they show much interest in it?”

“I don’t know. I think they’re going to search the whole valley.”

“I suppose you showed off before Captain Jubara,” said Faris Deeb not disapprovingly, “. . . told him how you dived into the pool and recovered my watch for me?”

“No, I did not tell them that. It had nothing to do with what they wanted to know.”

“Ah, you’re too modest; but I suppose Khawaja Rasheed told them?”

“No. He just told them what I told them.”

“And you didn’t mention my watch at all?”

“No. I didn’t think it would interest them,” said Antoine, looking at his

father steadily, into his eyes; then, on an impulse he could not resist, he added, "Is there any reason why it should have interested them?"

Faris Deeb looked away, saying casually, "No, I don't suppose it would have interested them. They were concerned about more important things. Only, I wanted to make sure that if you had told them about me and the watch, you would have also explained that the orchard above the pool is ours so that they would have understood why I was there."

"Is the watch still going?" asked Antoine.

"No. I wasn't as lucky as I thought when you first handed it to me. The spring was broken and the hands were slipping and pointing in all sorts of directions. I've had to send it to be repaired in Tripoli."

Antoine's suspicion was again checked by this explanation, which seemed to him quite plausible. The hands of the watch could have become dislocated and started going round loosely, pointing to one hour when he looked at it, and to another after he had handed it to his father, so that his father thought it was still going. And how could his mother be sure that his father didn't have the watch on him when he went to bed? She might have been mistaken. God knew, he had little love for his father, but it was difficult to believe that he was a murderer! Antoine looked at his father, unable to believe it, but equally unable to extinguish the thought that had come to him and to his mother. He got up and followed his mother into the kitchen, determined to obtain more evidence. His father remained silent and alone on the terrace.

In the kitchen, Antoine whispered to his mother, "Come with me into the room," indicating the bedroom he shared with Mitry, and where they could speak without being overheard by his father. Rosa left a saucepan she had been cleaning, dried her hands quickly on a towel, and followed him into the bedroom.

"I can't believe it," said Antoine. "I can't believe it. I may have been wrong about the watch and the hour. He said the hands had slipped and were going round loosely. It could be true. How do you know he didn't have the watch on him when he came to bed. Perhaps you're mistaken too."

"Perhaps, my son. Everybody makes mistakes," said Rosa, conceding the fact in principle, but implying by her manner that the principle didn't apply in the case they were discussing.

"But what made you think he didn't have it?"

"He took the chain off his waistcoat, but there was no watch at the end of it. He put the chain alone under the pillow."

"Could you see clearly in the dark?"

“It wasn’t very dark; the light of dawn was in the room.”

“Perhaps the watch had come off the chain in his waistcoat pocket, and he didn’t realize it. It was very late in the night and he was sleepy. Isn’t that possible?”

“Everything is possible,” said Rosa, making another concession to improbability.

“Are you sure he didn’t have the watch on him this morning, before he went down to the orchard?”

“This morning before he left the house I was sitting with him and your grandfather on the terrace; I asked him what the time was, seeing the watch chain spread across his waistcoat from pocket to pocket, but he didn’t take the watch out. He said it had stopped. He told me to come in here and see what the time was on the clock. That was before you saw him at the pool.”

“There can be other explanations . . . I can’t believe it. No, No! He couldn’t have done it, Mother, he couldn’t!”

“Perhaps he didn’t. Perhaps you’re right, my son.”

“He’s my father. I can’t believe such a thing about him! I know he doesn’t treat you well, and sometimes I hate him for it. And he’s hard on me, and on Mitry and Genevieve. But he’s my father, and this is something different. I can’t believe it!”

“You don’t have to believe it, Antoine, my boy. I may be wrong, as you may have been wrong. This may be the work of the Devil in our minds. May God forgive us for having such evil thoughts!”

“But it may be true! It may! I must know. I can’t look at him and think it one moment, and then not think it the next. I must know the truth. If he’s done it, I will tell the police! I will kill him with my own hands, I will——” He choked with the anguish of the thoughts and images that were crashing into his mind against all resistance. He shut his eyes and turned his head away, as though to obliterate every fragment of the imagined scene in which his father had committed the last outrage on the young and lovely woman who had smiled upon him, and for whom his heart had throbbed with the first stirrings of romantic love. Finally, his emotion burst out of him in sobs.

“Be quiet, now!” said Rosa. “For the Virgin’s sake, be quiet! He’ll hear you.”

“Let him hear! Why should I be afraid of him? It is for him to be afraid, the animal! the brute!”

“Yes, but only if what we think is true.”

“They will send him to prison for life! They will hang him!”

“I said be quiet, and listen to me! You’re old enough to behave like a man, instead of whimpering like a baby. We’ve got to know much more about last night before we can be sure. A minute ago you said you couldn’t believe it. Now, you want to rush out and tell the police! A fine mess you’ll get us into if you behave in this manner. Unless we have some stronger proof, he will be able to clear himself with the police. He will tell them that we hate him and want to frame him; and our name will become mud in the village.”

“But they all hate him in the village.”

“That won’t prevent them from turning against us if they think we have accused him falsely. Listen, my son, I know more about last night than you do, but I want to know still more.”

“What do you know that you haven’t told me?”

“When your father came to bed at dawn, he had not been chasing a thief. He was fully dressed, and his bed had not been slept in. Do you understand?”

“You mean he’d been out all night?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, Mother, then it is true! It is true! He killed her! He did a foul thing upon her at the pool, then killed her!” His chest began to heave again with muffled sobbing.

Faris Deeb, having been joined on the terrace by his father and engaged in a desultory conversation on the happenings of the evening, did not hear any of the words or sounds coming from the room where Rosa and Antoine were talking. But somebody else did. Genevieve, having gone into the kitchen a moment or two after her mother and Antoine had left it, became aware of subdued talk in the room to which they had gone. Her own secret pricking her with the suspicion that she might be the subject of this furtive conference, she had slipped out of the kitchen backdoor and crept noiselessly round the back of the house until she reached the window of her brothers’ room. There, standing flat against the wall, close to the edge of the open shutter, she had listened. At first, bewildered and fumbling for the meaning of the words she heard, she could make no sense of them, imagining that they referred to Ramiz, to his coming to her in the outhouse. But gradually the truth broke upon her—the truth and the horror of it. Her mind froze for a few seconds, and the words she heard struck on its congealed mass without penetrating; but they clung where they had struck, and when her thoughts began to circulate again, they picked up these clinging words and put them together, and they put the results side by side with the facts of the previous night, as she and Ramiz knew them. Oh, God, could her father really have killed that woman? It was a woman! Ramiz

had been right. No, not quite right, only that it had something to do with a woman. But Ramiz had thought her father had a woman with him and wanted to bring her into the outhouse—a village woman. The American woman wouldn't have come with him to the outhouse! If he did really kill her, he must have killed her at the pool. What did he come to the outhouse for then? What did he want from the outhouse, so that he should wait in hiding behind it until she and Ramiz left? Here, Genevieve's questions came up against a blank wall, at which she gazed and gazed without success. Perhaps Ramiz could see through it, if she told him what she had come to know. But how could she tell him that she thought her father was a murderer, that her mother and brother thought the same! Holy Virgin, how could she! And how could she not tell him? How could she keep such knowledge to herself, living under the same roof as her father? She could not share the knowledge she had with her mother and Antoine, because that would mean telling them where she was herself the night before, what she had done. And even if she could let them know what she knew without revealing her own secret—no, no! They were plotting to denounce her father, to tell the police if they had proof! She would not join in this conspiracy. Holy Virgin, how could she do that to her father, though he beat her and would not let her marry Ramiz! He seemed so lonely now, and at the mercy of them all. An appalled pity for him filled her, blurring momentarily the image of the tyrant she had always feared. Horrified and confused, she returned to the house, pretending to be coming back from the lavatory in the corner of the garden.

# 15

Mitry had gone to the café to fetch the dog which Anees, the café owner, had promised him. He arrived at the café together with Yusef, the latter having locked up his garage for the night after his interview with Faris Deeb. Mitry looked embarrassed at meeting Yusef so soon after the scene at their house and Yusef's offended exit from it. But Yusef hastened to put him at his ease.

"Your father and I have made it up," he said. "He's just been round to the garage. It was very handsome of him to do so."

"I'm glad he did it," said Mitry. "We were all very upset about it. I don't know what came over him. You've always been such a good friend of our family's."

"I was chiefly upset on account of your mother. Sitt Rosa is a lady for whom I have a great regard. I know she hasn't an easy time of it with your father."

"No, she hasn't."

"Nor have any of you, for that matter. He's a difficult person, Abu Mitry. . . . Do you still want to go to Brazil?"

"I do, but what's the use? He won't let me."

"You mean he won't give you the fare? Maybe I could help you with that—advance you part of it. You could pay me back when you went out there and started to earn."

"Thank you very much. You're a very good friend, Yusef. But it isn't only that."

"What is it then? You're a grown up man. You can do what you please."

"It's difficult to explain."

They had reached the steps leading up to the café terrace, which displayed its few tables and chairs under a large, spreading vine and the branches of several fig trees. Beside the steps stood a car.

"Ha!" said Yusef. "Here's Fareed, the driver who brought back that five-lira note to your father. By God, he's an honest man; let's give him another glass of arak."

"It's on me," said Mitry, wanting to make amends to the driver for the meagre reward he had received at their house, and the manner in which he had

been caused to leave it.

“You save your money for that fare to Brazil. Hallo, Fareed! May we join you?”

“Welcome, welcome,” said Fareed, rising and arranging two chairs on either side of his.

“I’m glad,” said Mitry awkwardly, “that I’ve seen you again. Please excuse my father for what happened just now at our house. It was not the way I would have liked you to leave, especially after the kindness you did us.”

“Ah, don’t let’s talk about that,” said Yusef. “Khawaja Faris has already expressed his regret to me, and I’m sure he’d have done the same to you if he had come here with us . . . Anees, where are you?”

The café owner came out of the small building which was both his house and the bar from which he served his customers. He was followed by a dog. Two other dogs frolicked at the door behind him, while a fourth dashed down the steps, chasing a cat.

After the customary greetings Yusef said:

“Fetch us a bottle of arak and any tasty things you may have to go with it.”

“Here are the dogs,” said Anees to Mitry. “Have a look at them and choose the one you want. But I recommend that one chasing the cat. He’s got the sharpest nose of the four, and the fastest legs.”

“Is he trying to sell you one?” asked Yusef, jocularly. “Mind he doesn’t rook you!”

“He’s giving it to me free,” said Mitry.

“Anees. I have misjudged you,” said Yusef. “By God, it’s a noble present. Kings give horses as presents; but from us, humbler folk, a dog is a precious gift.”

“By God, there’s no better friend to man than a dog,” said Fareed.

“I want it for hunting,” said Mitry. He got up to look at the dogs, and Anees went into the bar and came back a moment later with the bottle of arak and the glasses. His wife followed him, carrying a tray on which stood a number of small plates.

On these were distributed, in appetizing arrangement, slices of cucumber, tomato, fried aubergine, hard-boiled eggs and cheese, as well as black and green olives.

“Yes, I’ll have this one,” said Mitry, playing with the dog recommended by Anees. “It’s a friendly fellow. Has it got a name yet?”

“We call it Nimr,” said Anees.

Mitry ran a few yards, calling, “Nimr! Nimr!” The dog ran after him. Mitry turned round and caught it, as it leapt at him. He lifted it from the ground, holding it by the arms just under the elbows. The dog wagged its tail and licked Mitry’s ear. Mitry laughed and put it down. The dog followed him as he returned to the table to rejoin Yusef and Fareed.

“Well, give it something better to eat than your ear!” said Yusef.

Mitry took a piece of cheese from the tray, and held it in the air, above the dog’s head. The dog jumped and caught it in its mouth.

“Ah, now it’s yours; you’ve filled its belly. This is how the world goes; only, animals are more grateful for what you give them than human beings, and you can depend on their gratitude. They don’t bite the hand that feeds them,” said Yusef, then he turned to Anees. “Any news of the missing American woman?” he asked.

“No,” said the café owner. “I don’t think she’s been found yet. What do you think can have happened to her?”

“That’s what I wanted you to tell me. People come to the coffee house to learn the news. I thought you might have picked up something in the course of the day—something that might help the police. Have they been to you?”

“Yes, but we had nothing to tell them,” said Anees.

“At least, nothing about last night,” put in his wife, “nothing that was of any interest to them.”

“What do you mean?” asked Yusef. “Did you know anything about her before last night?”

“Only that she came in here in the afternoon and mid-morning the day before. She had a coffee and played with the dogs, and I gave her a bunch of grapes, and she kept saying, ‘bery nice, bery nice’ about everything. I recognized her immediately from the photograph the police brought with them. But they were not interested in my information. They only wanted to know if we’d seen her on the road late at night, but we hadn’t.”

“I think she must have left the village,” said Anees. “Can’t imagine her disappearing here. Doesn’t make sense.”

“Doesn’t make sense the other way, either. But I’m not going to lose any sleep on account of it. Have another drop of arak, Mitry? . . . Fareed?” In the absence of any serious opposition from the other two, he replenished their glasses. Mitry threw a slice of hard-boiled egg up in the air, and Nimr leapt and caught it neatly.

“That’s the boy!” said Mitry. “We two are going to do some good hunting together, eh Nimr?”

The three men went on drinking and chatting for some time, then Fareed said:

“I must be getting on my way.”

“I’ll be going too,” said Mitry. “I must settle Nimr down in his new quarters before I go to sleep.”

“Ah, you’re breaking up the party too soon,” protested Yusef. “The night is only just beginning!” He got up reluctantly, insisted on paying the bill, and walked with the other two down the steps to the road.

“God curse the Devil!” said Fareed, seeing his car. “I’ve got a puncture!”

“Come on, we’ll give you a hand,” said Yusef. “Your spare all right?”

“Yes,” said Fareed. “I can manage by myself. Don’t trouble.”

“No trouble at all,” said Yusef. “Won’t take a minute. Where’s your jack? Give me the spanner and I’ll be undoing the nuts.”

“You seem to be having bad luck with your tyres these days,” said Mitry.

“Not more than my fair share,” said Fareed. “Haven’t had one for a couple of months.”

“You must have forgotten last night,” said Mitry.

“Last night?”

“My father said you had a puncture coming up from Tripoli, and that he helped you change the wheel. Gave him quite a sore hand, he said, the nuts were so hard.”

“Did your father say that?” asked Fareed, in some astonishment, opening the boot of his car.

“Yes.”

The driver didn’t like to tell Mitry bluntly that his father was lying, nor could he understand why Faris Deeb had told this lie. So he answered in a jesting manner:

“I’m sure I don’t know what caused his hand to go sore, but he certainly was pulling your leg—or my memory isn’t as good as his!”

“Fareed!” said Yusef, with mock sternness. “You mustn’t drive the car when you’re so tight that you can’t remember what happens to you!”

“By my honour, I’d had nothing to drink,” said Fareed, jacking up his car.

“By God, these nuts are hard enough to make my hands sore!” said Yusef, trying for Mitry’s sake to cover up the awkwardness that had arisen. Of course, he was convinced that Fareed was telling the truth, and that Faris Deeb had told an elaborate and seemingly unnecessary lie. Why should he have done so? Why should he have a sore hand, and not want his family to know the real

cause of it? In such matters, Yusef had a one-track mind—a track which always led to a woman. Incredible as it seemed, Faris Deeb must have been out on some amorous adventure, climbing a wall, or sliding down a drain pipe! Yusef nearly laughed aloud at the image which thus arose in his mind, at the notion of Faris Deeb having an affair, making love, playing the tom cat by night! God of lovers, what woman could it be?

Mitry too, walking back home with Nimr, felt puzzled. He couldn't believe that the driver was telling a lie. Why should he? But then, why should his father? There seemed no reason for it. Mitry's mind, unlike Yusef's, was simple and unresourceful in such a situation. Unable to think of an explanation, he dismissed the matter from his thoughts, especially as he was too interested in the dog at that moment to think of anything else.

When he arrived home, he found his father and grandfather sitting alone on the terrace. Rosa, after her secret talk with Antoine, was back again in the kitchen with Genevieve, and Antoine was lying on his bed, putting off for as long as possible the moment when he would have to see his father again.

"I've brought him," said Mitry. "The best dog Anees had. His name is Nimr."

The dog ran up to Faris Deeb and Abu Faris, wagging its tail ingratiatingly, giving friendly greetings with its quickly-moving sniffing nose, and making tentative overtures with its tongue.

"Ay, it's a fine dog," said Faris Deeb, giving the animal an approving pat on the head.

"But not like Antar," said Abu Faris, with an old man's yearning after the past.

"Antar was a mongrel," said Mitry. "This one has breeding behind it. Where are the others? Mother, Genevieve, Antoine! Come and see the new dog. Bring it something to eat, Mother—a nice tasty bone."

Rosa and Genevieve came out of the kitchen, and Antoine, making a great effort, followed them. He tried not to look at his father. His stomach turned with the sickness that was in his mind. Genevieve looked at him, saw the anguish in his eyes. She knew how he must be feeling, knew it better than her mother, for he had told her a lot about the American girl, enough to make her know that he was sweet on her. How would she feel if she thought her father had killed Ramiz? Of course, it wasn't quite the same. She and Ramiz were real lovers of long standing. They had slept together. They were going to get married. Only, there was another sense in which it wasn't the same, because Antoine suspected that her father had not only killed the American, but. . . . She turned away from the ugly thought even before it had taken shape in her

mind. And here was that dog! Her father had wanted it just to spite her and Ramiz. Now, Ramiz couldn't come to see her even in the garden at night, let alone the outhouse with its new lock. Well, let them denounce her father! Why should she care? She would tell Ramiz what she had come to know that evening. He might be able to find out the truth. If her father had done this thing, he should be punished. Why should she want to protect him? Let him be taken to prison. They would all be well rid of him. Her thoughts went as far as the prison gates unopposed. But suddenly, she was inside the prison, looking at a scaffold, and her father was hanging from it, with a rope round his neck. She fled from the image. She turned to the dog, which was receiving attention from the other members of the family. At first she had hated the dog as an enemy in her special circumstances. But she was fond of animals. She had been devoted to Antar, and had wept bitterly when he died. And this new dog seemed so friendly, so eager for a friendly welcome. She could not find it in her heart to deny it that. And—expediency following close upon sentiment—if she made friends with it, and got it to make friends with Ramiz, they might have nothing to fear from it. She patted the dog, then went back to the kitchen and fetched it a bone. Nimr settled down to gnaw it.

“Did you hear anything about the missing woman at the café?” Abu Faris asked Mitry.

“No. At least, nothing to do with her disappearance. Apparently she had been to the café once or twice, but not last night.”

“Who was there at the café?” asked Faris Deeb.

“Yusef and that driver, Fareed, who brought you back the five-lira note.”

“Did you sit with them?” asked Faris Deeb.

“Yes,” said Mitry. “We had a drink together. Then the driver discovered that he had a puncture, so Yusef and I helped him to change the wheel.”

“Is he always having punctures, then?” said Rosa.

Faris Deeb remained silent, and Mitry said nothing more. But Abu Faris, reverting to what he had tried to say earlier in the evening when the driver was there, but which his son had stopped him from saying, remarked with a stronger reason now to utter his moralizing thought:

“Well, your father helped him with one yesterday, and you helped him with one to-day. He's been well rewarded for his honesty.”

Mitry still said nothing, but his father broke out sharply:

“Can't we finish with the blasted story of that driver and the five liras!” He suspected that Mitry had found out that he had been lying, had said something to the driver when helping him with his puncture and elicited a denial. But

Mitry would not dare say anything about it, especially if his father made it clear to him that he wished the matter closed. What did a little lie like that matter, anyhow? Let Mitry think anything he liked about it, about the sore hand. What was it going to tell him? Nothing. He took a long pull at his *argileh*, then he passed the mouthpiece to his father, saying, "I think I'll go to bed. I'm tired after my trip to Tripoli yesterday, and being disturbed by the thief as well."

"Ay, go and rest," said Abu Faris. "You've had a lot to do." The old man could now have the *argileh* entirely to himself, which was not a disagreeable prospect.

Faris Deeb got up, his back and limbs still extremely sore and stiff, and went into the bedroom. As soon as he was gone, Genevieve turned to her mother.

"I'm going to Selma's," she said. "It's still quite early." At Selma's she could see Ramiz, who lived close to her cousin's house.

"All right," said her mother, knowing the attraction Selma's house had for Genevieve, "but don't be late coming back."

Genevieve was off in a moment. Mitry turned to Antoine. "Come and help me fix up some sleeping quarters for Nimr," he said.

"I don't feel well," said Antoine. "I've got a bad head. I think I'll go to bed."

"Come, I'll help you," said Rosa. "We'll fetch the box Antar used to sleep in, and find some rags to put in it."

When Mitry was alone with his mother, he said:

"What's the matter with Antoine?"

"He told you; he has a bad head," said Rosa, preparing to communicate her suspicion to her elder son. A throbbing need urged her to do so: the pressure of a fearful secret on the mind that contained it, and the desire to assert against her husband the power which she thought had fallen into her hands—to surround him with the suspicion which had come to her by sharing it with her sons. But Mitry was a simple soul, and though he had no more love for his father than Antoine, he required to be handled with greater care.

"He was all right when I went to the café," said Mitry, "and now he looks quite ill. Has anything happened to upset him? Did my father beat him?"

"No, I wish it was that, my son."

"What do you mean? What has happened?"

"There are some things into which perhaps it is better not to look. Your brother and I may have made a dreadful mistake."

“About what?”

“About your father. . . . Your father and the missing woman. May God and the Holy Virgin forgive us if we are wrong.”

“My father and the missing woman?” said Mitry, speaking from a mind into which no gleam of light had yet penetrated. “What do you mean?”

“I don’t know, my son. I don’t know. Only your father has said some things about last night and this morning that are not true. I’m sure I don’t know what the explanation is. But he seems to be afraid of something and is trying to cover it up with lies.”

“You mean his sore hand and the puncture?” said Mitry, still groping in the dark. “Did you know about that?”

Rosa stopped collecting rags for the dog’s box and looked with a sharp flash of new interest at Mitry.

“What about his sore hand and the puncture?” she said.

“Only that there was no puncture. What he told us about helping that driver to change the wheel of his car last night wasn’t true.”

“Who told you that?”

“The driver himself. Made me feel quite awkward.”

“You see what I mean? He didn’t want us to know what had given him a sore hand.”

“And what do you think it was, then?”

“I don’t know.”

“But you said something about the missing woman?”

“Yes. What do you think happened to her, Mitry?”

“How would I know?” said Mitry, though the shadow of the suspicion in his mother’s mind was beginning to fall on his own. “What other lies has my father told?”

“My son, my son, I told you there were things into which it was perhaps better not to look too closely. God help me, I am full of dark thoughts. I will tell you later.”

“No, tell me now. What were the other lies?”

Rosa told him about the watch and the pool, about his father’s coming into the bedroom at dawn, fully dressed, about the bed that had not been slept in till then. Mitry listened with a look that became more and more sombre every minute. When his mother had finished he said:

“Then you don’t believe in the story of the thief?”

“It wasn’t a thief that kept him out all night. What was it, my son? What was it? I dare not think of the answer.”

“Perhaps it is better not to think of it. Perhaps you were right when you said there were some things one should not look into.”

“Well, don’t look into them. Let’s all turn away from them. Shut the thought out of your mind. But God help me; I have to sleep next to him! Here, this will keep the dog warm at night.”

“Does Antoine think the same as you?”

“Yes. I wish I hadn’t told him what I knew. He wanted to rush out and tell the police. I told him we had no proof at all. I said perhaps the Devil was putting this idea into our heads. Perhaps he is, my son. Don’t let’s talk about it any more.”

“You don’t shut out a terrible thought just by not talking about it. There’s no lock and key to the mind. Or if there is, only God has it. Perhaps God, and not the Devil, made you and Antoine think of this thing.”

“Only if it is true. Do you think it can be true?”

“How would I know? Perhaps it is true. Perhaps God wants to punish my father.”

“No one can understand the ways of God, but maybe you are right, my son.”

“Would you inform the police if we became certain . . . if we had proof?”

“Not if you don’t wish me to, my son. I know you are his flesh and blood, however bad he may be. I said that to your brother. I told you I had to hold him back. But for me, he’d have gone to the police already.”

“But you said you stopped him because you had no proof.”

“I had to say that to him in order to stop him. I said he’d make a fool of himself and disgrace us. I wanted time to think, and to consult you. You are my eldest born. Your brother was beside himself with anguish and rage.”

“That’s because of the woman. He was beginning to fall in love with her. But it’s a dreadful thing for a man to denounce his own father, even if he doesn’t love him. It’s against nature. People would revile us, as they do traitors . . . and there’s my grandfather to think of. I don’t love my father, but I love *him*, and my father is his only son. We couldn’t do that to him. It would kill the old man.”

“All right, all right, my son. I said we wouldn’t do it—even if we had the proof—unless you wished it. But God help me. Even the suspicion is bad enough. Worse for me than for any of you.”

“It’s terrible for all of us.”

“You don’t understand. But you ought to; you’re not a child,” said Rosa angrily.

“Understand what?”

“What goes on between husband and wife. He makes demands on me which he doesn’t make on you. I have to share his bed, to let him come to me. When his hands touch me in the dark, I shall have a horror of them, because of what I think they have done . . . and not only his hands.”

“Please, Mother!”

“You see! You can’t bear even to hear of it. I shall have to let it happen to me. If he did kill that woman, I suppose you can guess why he did it, how he did it?”

“I’m *not* a child . . . I guessed,” said Mitry, his face dark as a thunder cloud.

“And your mother has to go on sharing the bed of a man who did that to another woman!”

After a pause, during which his chest heaved heavily with his breathing, Mitry said:

“Let’s tell the police.”

“Don’t be as foolish as your brother. You may change your mind again, or we may all prove to be wrong. It is an awful thing to have anybody’s blood on your hands. Perhaps the police will discover the truth without our help, and then our conscience will not be troubled. Until then, God will help me to bear my burden. If he did it, his burden will be heavier even than mine. He will be living in great fear.”

“Does Genevieve know anything about this?”

“No. Not about what we suspect; not about the watch and the pool.”

“Are you going to tell her?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps I shall have to. I must find out if she knows anything that we don’t know, or if she comes to notice anything in the days to come. If your father did that thing, he may do more things that will betray him, like the lies about the watch and the puncture. We must all look out for them, and tell each other if we notice anything.”

“I don’t like spying.”

“You’d rather inform the police?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“Well, then, this the only other way. We must get the proof ourselves, and

keep it to ourselves—just let your father know that we have it, you understand. It will be better for all of us this way, including him. There will be no scandal, no disgrace to our family. Abu Faris need know nothing about it. We'll spare him that. And your father's only punishment will be his fear of us. It will not be a hard punishment, will it? Only a correction of his evil ways, and a chance for him to repent of what he has done. That is between him and God."

"If we have the proof, Antoine will want to tell the police. He will want to see him hanged for what he did."

"I will not let him. Antoine will listen to me. You listen to me too, Mitry. God help us all, my son."

Ramiz called by Selma—always a willing intermediary between him and Genevieve—came out quickly into the road.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

“Genevieve is in the house,” said Selma. “She wants to see you, but we’ve got some visitors; if you go into the garden, she will meet you there.”

“Had any trouble with her father?”

“No, but she’s worried about something. She wouldn’t tell me what it was.”

Ramiz and Selma walked back across the road, and Ramiz slipped into the garden. A moment later Genevieve was with him. She was tense and would not abandon herself to his embrace when he kissed her, disengaging herself in a hurry.

“What the trouble?” he asked. “What’s worrying you?”

“It’s about that missing woman. Haven’t you heard about it?”

“Yes. Have the police been to your house?”

“Yes. They wanted to know if any of us had seen her in the village at night; if anyone had been out on the roads at a late hour.”

“They’ve been to us too. They asked me where I was in the evening. I told them I’d gone to bed early and seen nobody. What did your father tell them?”

“He told them about the ‘thief.’ ”

“Did they show any interest in that? I mean, did they seem to think that the man might have had something to do with the disappearance of the woman?”

“No, I don’t think so. Elias Effendi, of course, wanted to show off before the officer from Beirut; he started asking my father about the description of the man, and in what direction he had fled. Ramiz, you’re not worried about yourself? You don’t think they may suspect you of . . . of whatever happened?”

“Well, I was out in the middle of the night, carrying a spade, and that woman may have been murdered and buried. That’s what often happens to women who disappear. If anyone saw me and recognized me, if your father put them on to me, I’d find it mighty difficult to explain where I was, and what I was doing with the spade, without dragging you in and telling our secret to the

world.”

“I never thought of that.”

“It’s possible, isn’t it? They’re looking out for someone who was out late at night and who either saw the woman and can give them some information about her, or who was behaving in a suspicious manner. I shouldn’t want to give you away, Genevieve. I shouldn’t want to tell them about us and the outhouse. Was your father’s description of the thief anything like me?”

“No. It was very vague—same as it had been in the morning when he told the story to the family.”

“Even then, somebody else from the houses around might have seen me running and recognized me. Then, his evidence and your father’s story would sort of come together, don’t you see?”

“Yes, I see, but there’s something which doesn’t seem to have occurred to you.”

“What’s that?”

“Oh, Ramiz, it’s dreadful! It’s what I’ve come to tell you. It’s nothing to do with you, with your being out in the middle of the night. Someone else was also out at the same hour. You haven’t thought of him?”

“Your father?”

Genevieve nodded.

“But I thought he wanted to get into the outhouse because he had a woman with him; and that couldn’t have been the American!”

“No, it couldn’t. My father was at the pool in the middle of the night, and did not go to bed till dawn.”

“Who told you that?”

She told him about the conversation between her mother and Antoine, and as she reached the conclusion of her narrative, she began to weep, saying, “It’s horrible! It’s horrible!” Ramiz put his arm around her, where they sat on a low wall under a fig tree, and for some time they were both silent. Then Genevieve, drying her eyes, said haltingly:

“Do you think it can be true?”

Ramiz remained silent.

“Why don’t you answer me?” she insisted.

“I don’t know what to say. There could be some other explanation.”

“But you think my mother and Antoine may be right?”

“Don’t you?”

“One moment I think they are, and the next I can’t believe it.”

“You are a good, kind-hearted girl, Genevieve.”

“No, I’m not. Not all the time. I told you. God forgive me, I have wicked, wicked thoughts. They come and go, and I can’t stop them coming. Does everybody have wicked thoughts, even when they’re trying not to have them?”

“You’re not wicked sweetheart. You couldn’t be wicked even if you tried to.”

“Isn’t it wicked to want your father to go to prison because you want to get rid of him?” she said, setting the limits of her guilt firmly at the prison gate, and shutting out the further image that had come to her a short while before. “When I first heard my mother and Antoine talk of telling the police, it made me feel ill. My mother spoke as though she would like to get rid of my father that way. I said to myself, ‘No, No! I will not help in this!’ Then on my way here, God forgive me, I thought . . . I thought if my father was out of the way, you and I would have nothing to fear; we could get married straight away. Then, I was afraid and miserable. I thought if it was all true and it came out, perhaps you wouldn’t want to marry me.”

“Not want to marry you?”

“I mean, because of the scandal and the bad name our family would get. It wouldn’t be very nice for you to marry the daughter of a . . . a . . .”

“My darling! It wouldn’t make any difference to me. What your father is or does isn’t your fault.”

“You wouldn’t think my blood was tainted. You wouldn’t be afraid that other people might think it was? That our children . . . ?”

“Rubbish! I should want to marry you more than ever. Put these silly thoughts out of your mind.” He pressed her closer to him and kissed her again.

“If they’re going to suspect you, I will tell them everything. Let everybody know you were with me in the outhouse. I don’t care, if it’s to protect you from trouble.”

“Wait a minute,” said Ramiz, his thought going off suddenly in another direction. “If your father didn’t have a woman with him, why was he so anxious to get into the outhouse? What did he want from the outhouse? Why should he have hidden behind the wall, and waited for us to get out, then chased me when I was already on the road?”

“Yes, why should he? It did look as though he was desperately anxious to get us out of the outhouse.”

“And without letting us know that he knew we were there, without making a scene. What did he want? And why did he stop chasing me the moment I

dropped the spade . . . the spade! By God, I've got it! It was the spade he wanted!"

There was a moment of silence, then Genevieve said quietly and comprehendingly:

"Yes, the spade."

"That explains everything," said Ramiz. "Everything, including the broken handle of the spade when he brought it back home in the morning. I told you, it wasn't I who broke that handle, but he had to explain it away."

"Then, he must have done it," said Genevieve after another pause. "He killed her and buried her!"

"It seems to fit in with what you heard from your mother and brother about the watch and the pool . . . and his being out all night. He probably carried the body away some distance from the pool and spent the rest of the night digging."

"So that's why he had all those blisters on his hands to-day."

"He had blisters on his hands?"

"Yes, my mother noticed them, but when she asked how he had got them he looked uncomfortable, and said he had had to help the driver who brought him from Tripoli last night change a tyre and that the nuts had been very difficult to loosen. He must have been lying!"

"Looks like it."

"I wish I could tell my mother, Ramiz."

"You can't tell her without giving us away."

"She knows we often meet in the evening. She knew I was coming to Selma's to see you."

"But midnight in the outhouse is different. Your mother is no fool."

"I could tell her you just came to see me in the garden, and that we hid in the outhouse when we saw my father coming back—and then about the spade."

"Why do you want to tell her?"

"I don't know. I just feel I want to. I want her to know. When you discover something like this, you feel you must tell it. It hurts your heart to keep it shut in. It's like a boil that wants to burst."

"She might inform the police, then. Do you want her to do that?"

"I don't know. Let her tell them if she wants to. Why should I be sorry for him if he did such an evil thing? It isn't . . . it isn't as if he had been a good father to me. Or, don't you think that makes any difference, that just because

he is my father, I should not want anything bad to happen to him? Would they hang him, Ramiz?"

"It all depends on what actually happened, on what his defence is, on whether they believe it, on what the doctors say."

"It's pretty clear what happened. Only a beast would do that. I don't want to think of him as my father any more. I want to tell my mother."

"Well, tell her then. Let her decide what to do."

"Come and see me back home."

"Is it safe?"

"Yes. He's gone to sleep already. He said he was very tired after last night."

"No wonder!"

Rosa was in the kitchen when Genevieve got back. Everybody else had gone to bed. Genevieve walked quietly into the kitchen, and sat on a chair beside her mother, who was sifting rice for next day's cooking.

"What's the matter?" asked Rosa. "You look glum. Didn't you find Ramiz?"

"Yes, I found him."

"Don't you think you're seeing too much of him? You know, I don't mind. I'm fond of Ramiz and I want you to marry him. But if your father gets to know, he'll be furious. You must be very careful, my daughter."

"I am being very careful; that's what I want to talk to you about."

"What do you mean?"

"Ramiz comes to see me here in the garden sometimes in the night, when my father's asleep. You don't mind, Mother, do you? It's our only chance of meeting some days."

"You're not doing anything foolish, are you? You know what I mean?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well, you'd better not! If you started having a baby, your father would kill you. No, no, my daughter, you'd better stop Ramiz coming here at night. Your father might get up and surprise you; and then God, help us all even if you're behaving quite properly."

"He nearly surprised us yesterday when he came back from Tripoli. We had to hide in the outhouse."

"Oh! . . . and what happened then? Did he go into the house?"

“No. Oh, Mother, I know about the watch and the pool. I overheard you and Antoine talking about it. I know something too.”

“What do you know?” Rosa had stopped sifting the rice, and was looking at Genevieve intently.

“I know about the spade. The handle wasn’t broken when my father took it. And there was no thief. It was Ramiz. I made him take the spade with him when he slipped out of the outhouse because I was afraid my father might attack him. I think my father knew who it was, and Ramiz thinks he wanted the spade for . . . for digging. That’s how the handle got broken, Ramiz thinks. Oh, Mother, it’s awful!”

Rosa put her arm round Genevieve, saying:

“Don’t cry, my daughter. God help us! God deliver us from evil! So you told Ramiz about the watch and the pool and what your brother and I thought?”

“Yes. You’re not angry with me? I had to tell him. I was so troubled and unhappy. I didn’t know what to think. I thought Ramiz would help me to sort it out. He’s clever at these things. He wants to become a police officer. And I was right. As soon as I told him, he thought about the spade. I shouldn’t have thought of that in a hundred years. But then, I did think of something. I thought of the blisters on my father’s hands. I wondered if the story of the puncture was true. Do you think it was?”

“No, my daughter, it isn’t true. When God wants the truth to be known, he has his ways of letting us know it.” She told her daughter what Mitry had learned from the driver.

“What are you going to do, Mother? Ramiz said you would know what to decide.”

“May God help me to do so. Are you sure Ramiz will keep his mouth shut? He won’t go and tell the police just to show them how clever he is, so that they may send him to the police school and make him an officer?”

“Oh, no, Mother, he won’t do that.”

“Or to get rid of your father so that you may be able to get married?”

“No. He said I was to tell you about the spade, and let you decide what to do. You don’t want to tell the police, then?”

“I don’t know, my daughter. Do you want me to tell them?”

Genevieve remained silent.

“Why don’t you answer?” said Rosa.

“Don’t know what to say. One moment I want you to, and the next I

don't. . . . Only, Ramiz said they might suspect *him*. If they did, then I would tell them everything, and so would you, Mother, wouldn't you? You wouldn't let any harm happen to Ramiz?"

"No, my daughter, I wouldn't. Nor would God let the innocent suffer. He knows how to punish the guilty. He has made us know so many things to-day, secret and terrible things—things it is awful to have to live with, and also awful to tell the world. Let us wait and see what he wants us to do."

Faris Deeb slept very soundly that night. The anxiety in his mind had succumbed to the exhaustion of his body. The darkness of his fear was swallowed up by the darkness of sleep. He did not stir when Rosa came to bed, and she took great care not to awaken him. The repugnance she had felt for the touch of his body for several years now acquired a new and horrific quality from the suspicion and imaginings that filled her mind. The suspicion had become almost a certainty since Genevieve had told her about the spade. What else, what else could explain all the little things they had found out that day? Little things, but oh, so full of dreadful meaning! She lay rigidly beside him, and looked fixedly at his sleeping shape, just discernible in the faint light that came in through the window. He had both his hands tucked well in under the bedclothes, though the night was not cold. "The blisters!" she thought. "He's afraid of my seeing them again in the morning. He's told his lie about them, and thinks by to-morrow I will have forgotten them; doesn't want me to be reminded of them, lest I might think again, lest the idea of digging might come to me, the digging that had broken the handle of the spade . . . digging somewhere in the valley in the middle of the night. Why did one dig in the valley in the middle of the night? Why, Faris Deeb? Wake up and tell me that! Yes, what would you say, if I woke you up now and asked you about it, and about the watch and the pool, and the driver's puncture? If I told you I knew they were all lies? If I told you all the children knew it too, and guessed what you'd done? If I asked you where you'd buried her body? Kill me? That wouldn't help you, Faris Deeb. Oh, no, it wouldn't. You'd hang then for one murder if not for two! Beg for mercy? Ask me to shield you? What have you done to deserve mercy from me? Why should I shield you? Even your children are willing that I should tell the police. They've left it to me to decide. But God help me, I don't know what to decide. I don't want to bring dishonour on my children, even in return for freeing them and myself from your tyranny. I don't know what to do. . . ." And so, struggling with the problem of how to use the knowledge and power that had come to her since she went to bed the night before, Rosa eventually fell asleep.

Faris Deeb woke up before her. He had had a long night's rest, and woke up with his strength restored and the aches in his body almost completely gone. Even the blisters on his hands were subsiding and gave little pain now.

The traces of his deed were departing from his body, and also from his mind. The darkness and sleep of two nights now separated him from the thing he had done. And as the thing itself had happened in the night, in a world of shadow and fantastic visions far removed from the routine of his ordinary life, its reality made little impact on him now. It was more like a dream than something that had actually happened. And as no trace of his crime had been left on the face of the earth, its reality seemed to him to have been altogether abolished. Even the few moments of alarm he had experienced the day before had lost most of their sting when they came back to his memory. Antoine had not told the police about the watch and the pool, nor had the hotel manager. Rosa was not likely to remember the blisters on his hands, to attach any significance to them. How could she? Even if Mitry had discovered from the driver that there had been no puncture the day before, he was not likely to give the matter a second thought. He might even think that the driver himself was lying, that he didn't want to be thought that his tyres were so bad that he was having punctures every day.

"Wake up, Rosa," he said in a voice which he intended to sound reasonably friendly. "It's you who are oversleeping to-day. Abu Faris and I want our morning coffee and smoke. Get a move on."

Rosa, who had been awake a few moments without stirring, opened her eyes casually.

"The day before yesterday it was you who had a bad night," she said, watching him as she spoke. "Last night it was my turn. I didn't go to sleep till quite late."

"Why so?"

"All sorts of things. There was to-day's food to prepare; my work had been held up by the visit of those police officers . . . and I had a bad dream."

"What about?" he asked uneasily.

"I'm afraid to tell you," she said, testing his defences.

"I'm not afraid of dreams. Dreams are just nonsense. I don't believe in them."

"I do. I've had many dreams in my life that have come true. And my father once had a dream, and it all happened—everything he saw in the dream."

"What was it you dreamt?"

"You won't be angry if I tell you?"

"I told you I don't believe in dreams. I've never believed in them, and never will. Only foolish people believe in them."

"Why do you want to know, then? There's no point in telling you."

“Well, keep your stupid dream to yourself then. I don’t care if you tell me or not.”

“All right, I will tell you. I dreamt that my father came to me, just as he looked before he died, and said, ‘Tell Faris to let Genevieve marry her young man. If he doesn’t, a great calamity will befall your house.’ God save us from calamities! We never know what may be in store for us.”

“And that’s how you think you’ll get round me now?” said Faris Deeb, sensing a vague threat in Rosa’s words, wondering whether she was hinting at anything—but how? What could she know?

“You asked me to tell you what I dreamt, and I’ve told you . . . Faris, let the girl marry and go her way.”

For a moment he weakened, he was afraid. The incipient hostility of his family encircled him with danger, and the temptation to propitiate Rosa and Genevieve by making the concession that was being pressed upon him assaulted his tyrant’s obstinacy, as it had done once before, immediately after the murder, when panic had caused the idea to come to him spontaneously, and he had repelled it. He repelled it again, now coming from Rosa—repelled it all the more vehemently to prove to himself that he was not afraid.

“No,” he said. “That subject is closed. I’ve told you so a hundred times. No dreams of yours are going to make me change my mind. Get up now and get me my coffee and smoke.”

“Very well,” she said coldly, with just a menacing edge in her voice.

“What did you mean by that ‘very well’?” he asked angrily.

“Nothing. Only, I don’t wish you to regret it, Faris Deeb.”

“I never regret anything I do. Why should I regret it? What are you trying to tell me? That daughter of yours hasn’t become pregnant by any chance? Has she? Has she?” Carrying the war thus into the enemy’s camp by this counter-attack, he felt himself master of the situation again, and his fears were dispelled. After all, this could be Rosa’s meaning. Perhaps his daughter and her lover had been meeting in the outhouse for some time. Perhaps Rosa knew something. And if she didn’t, he did anyhow; he had real ammunition for his attack, even if he did not reveal it.

“No, she hasn’t!” said Rosa, alarmed at his outburst after what Genevieve had told her about the meetings in the garden, and feeling the initiative slipping out of her grasp. “Yesterday you attacked my honour, and now you attack you daughter’s!”

“You put the idea in my head.”

“I had no such thought.”

“What else did you mean, then?”

“I don’t know. Ask yourself,” she said, and walked out of the room.

Faris Deeb stared after her with a slow but steady return of fear. What had she meant? Did she suspect him? But of what? She didn’t know what had happened, would never know; nobody would ever know. A woman had just disappeared. Rosa could only guess. The police could only guess. They weren’t going to find anything, not if they searched the whole of Lebanon. The only danger to him lay in himself. If he didn’t give himself away, if his fear didn’t cause him to falter, to fall into traps, his secret was safe. Only, he must not show fear, he must not weaken, he must show them all that his authority could not be challenged. Rosa had tried to challenge him just now, to frighten him—or, had she? Perhaps he was imagining things. Perhaps when she had said, “Ask yourself,” she had not meant anything special. People often said things like that without meaning anything special. The fear ebbed out of him as steadily as it had flowed in, and he joined his father on the terrace where Rosa, a moment later, brought them their coffee and *argilehs*.

“I wonder,” she said, “if those police officers can have found anything yet?”

“What can they find in the night?” said Abu Faris. “You can’t find a hidden body in the dark. Perhaps they will find something to-day if they search in the valley.”

“They will find nothing,” said Faris Deeb, drawing at his *argileh*.

“How do you know?” said Rosa.

“If there’s a body, it will be found sooner or later,” said Abu Faris. “It always is.”

“It won’t be found in this village,” said Faris Deeb. “They’ll have to search somewhere else. It didn’t happen here.”

“How do you know what happened?” said Rosa.

“We’re all guessing,” said Faris Deeb. “My guess is as good as yours, isn’t it?”

“Ay, we’re all guessing,” said Abu Faris. “Nobody knows what happened.”

“Except the person who did it,” said Rosa. “Holy Virgin, protect us! How awful it must be for him now! Even if he has no conscience or remorse, just the fear of being found out must be like a poisonous snake under his pillow!”

Faris Deeb sipped his coffee without speaking, his face expressionless, impervious. Abu Faris said:

“Ay, it is terrible to be afraid of the hangman’s noose. A man who has killed is like a hunted animal.”

“He must be terrified of giving himself away,” said Rosa, “of suspicion falling upon him without his knowing it, of any traces he may have left of his deed. They always leave some trace, don’t they?”

“Only the stupid ones,” said Faris Deeb. He continued to alternate between thinking that Rosa suspected him, and rejecting the thought as a baseless fear. But he kept his feelings well concealed behind the hard mask of his face, while he drank his coffee and inhaled his smoke.

Half an hour later he arrived at his shop, which as usual had been already opened by Mitry.

“Anyone been yet?” he asked.

“No,” said Mitry in a toneless, subdued voice. His eyes deliberately avoided his father’s. Faris Deeb was itching to know if his son had picked up any news in the village about the results of the police inquiries, but he could not bring himself to ask the question, especially as he gradually noticed a strangeness of manner in Mitry, which worried him.

“Aren’t you feeling well to-day?” he asked at last.

“No, I’m all right,” said Mitry curtly. He continued to busy himself with various things in the shop, largely in order to avoid any intercourse with his father. His feelings towards him were now so troubled and confused that he didn’t know how to speak to him, how to look when his father looked at him. Faris Deeb sat at his desk and started going through some accounts. But, like his son’s, his action was mainly a pretence. A few villagers passed in the street and called out a greeting. Sometimes Mitry answered, sometimes his father. Nearly half an hour passed in this manner, then the sound of several footsteps and voices were heard approaching the shop. Faris Deeb looked up from his accounts and saw Captain Jubara and Elias Effendi with a number of villagers, including his son, Antoine, and the hotel manager, Khawaja Rasheed, standing at the door. For a moment he was tongue-tied, as he looked at the visitors.

“Good morning to you, Khawaja Faris,” said Elias Effendi, not—Faris Deeb noted with great relief—in the tone of an officer coming to make an arrest. Captain Jubara and the others added their greetings.

“Good morning,” said Faris Deeb, rising. “What can I do for you?”

“Captain Jubara wants the valley searched,” said Elias Effendi, “and we are appealing for a few volunteers to help the police. We’ve got your son, Antoine, already, so your family has made its contribution, but if you or Mitry could join us too, we should be very grateful.”

“The larger the search party,” said Captain Jubara, “the more the chance of

success, and I understand you know the valley well.”

“Yes, I do,” said Faris Deeb.

“If you’re too busy to come yourself, perhaps you could spare us Mitry,” said Elias Effendi.

“No, I will come myself. Mitry will look after the shop.” He could not endure the fear of their going near the pool and the orchard wall in his absence. Something might happen, something might be said, especially as Antoine was going to be there.

“That is very good of you, Khawaja Deeb,” said Captain Jubara. “Elias Effendi tells me that you have an orchard in the valley.”

“And what an orchard!” put in Elias Effendi. “Its apples are famous in the whole district.”

“Ay, they are good apples,” said Faris Deeb.

“Well, you can kill two birds with one stone—help us in the search and visit your apple trees,” said Captain Jubara. “But I suppose you visit them often enough.”

“Ay, I go there every day.”

“We found him there yesterday morning,” said the hotel manager, “when Antoine and I went out on our first search. By the way, how is your watch, Khawaja Faris?”

“It’s all right,” said Faris Deeb, and to put an end to any further talk about the watch he turned to Captain Jubara, saying:

“Is it your wish that we start at once? I am at your disposal.”

“Thank you. Yes. We will start right away.”

“And did you discover nothing from your inquiries last night?” asked Faris Deeb, as they began to move away.

“Not a thing,” said Elias Effendi. “Very few people were out on the road at night, and nobody saw her. Somebody apparently saw your thief though, the wife of Baheej Antoun. Your shouting woke her up, and she looked out of the window and saw a young man running past in the direction you indicated. She woke up her husband, and they came out onto the road, but by then there was nobody to be seen, neither the thief nor you, so they went back to bed.”

“Did she give you any description of the thief?” asked Faris Deeb.

“Nothing very helpful,” said Elias Effendi. “Just as vague as your description. She was only half awake, and all that she saw was the man’s back.”

“Which is rather unfortunate,” said Captain Jubara, “because it is just

possible that this young man who was running away with your spade might have had something to do with the disappearance of the American lady. Perhaps he wanted a spade for a special purpose, and knew that you had one accessible in your outhouse. That would explain why he wanted to steal such a comparatively valueless object as a spade. You follow me, Khawaja Deeb?"

"Ay, it could be that," said Faris Deeb, uncertain whether Captain Jubara's theory offered him more comfort or terror. The comfort was in the fact that the police had someone to suspect who was not himself. The terror came from the detective's intuition that the spade might be connected with the disappearance of the woman.

"You must pursue your inquiries about that thief, Elias Effendi," went on the Sûreté man. "We may still find out who he was. We must."

"But of course I shall pursue my inquiries," affirmed Elias Effendi. "Do you think I would let go of a scent so easily? Ask the brothers here what they think of the efficiency of the Barkita police. Why, only last month we made a sensational arrest, didn't we, Abu Mitry?"

"Ay, you did."

"Of course," pursued Elias Effendi with the modesty which he thought was necessary on the occasion, "we do not pretend to have the knowledge or skill of the Beirut Sûreté, which is run by world-famous detectives like Captain Jubara—how could we?—but we manage in our little way . . . we manage."

"I am sure you do," said Captain Jubara, speaking from the peaks of world fame to which he had been elevated. His idea of collecting volunteers for a search party had been dictated by more than one motive. While as many of the villagers as possible helped in the search, he would have an opportunity of observing them and studying their reactions to anything he chose to say, to any situation he chose to put them into. His talk of the thief and the spade had not been an act of indiscretion, but a trial kite; and as he flew it, he had watched the expressions of the various members of the party, now leaving the main road and entering the valley. Yusef was there, and Anees, the café owner, and Ramiz, together with Antoine and the hotel manager and some ten or twelve others.

Ramiz had heard all the talk about the thief and the spade. The news that the wife of Baheej Antoun had seen him running past her window had given him a shock; but he was reassured by Elias Effendi's affirmation that she had not recognized him, and when the great detective from Beirut went on to propound his theory about the connection of the spade with the disappearance of the woman, Ramiz was too elated to think of any other aspect of the matter. He had thought of that himself! That just showed what a good detective he

would make—he, without any training, thinking of the same thing as the man from the Sûreté! But he knew what the man from the Sûreté didn't know—that if the spade had been used to bury the body, it was Faris Deeb that had used it for this purpose—Faris Deeb who was now walking with the police officers, making a member of this party that was going out to search for the body! Where could he have buried it? Where? What would he do if they found it? Well, there still was nothing to connect him with it, as far as the police knew. But Antoine knew. Antoine had not wanted to come on this search. Ramiz was there when the police officers went to the hotel and asked for volunteers. Antoine did not volunteer. He shrank visibly and made all sorts of excuses, but the hotel manager dragged him along. And now, he was walking silent and tense, looking at the ground with dread, as though he feared a snake might dart out of it. God, thought Ramiz, if he goes on looking like that, the detective might start suspecting him!

Captain Jubara had indeed been watching Antoine for some time, noticing the things Ramiz had noticed, wondering whether Faris Deeb could, in the night and at some distance, have failed to recognize his son, chased him thinking he was a thief?

“Where is the spade now?” he asked Faris Deeb after a while.

“In the outhouse.”

“You put it there after you recovered it from the thief?”

“Yes.”

“I suppose all the members of your family use it from time to time?”

“Ay, they do, as occasions demand.”

“But no one has used it since you recovered it from the thief, as the handle was broken?”

“No, it hasn't been used since then. It needs a new handle.”

Turning to Elias Effendi, Captain Jubara said:

“We shall want it for an examination of finger-prints when we return from this search. It may lead us to the thief.”

Ramiz heard this conversation and became alarmed. If his finger-prints were found on the spade, and the police started taking the finger-prints of all the men in the village, he would come under suspicion, and to clear himself he and Genevieve would have to tell their story. It might not implicate Faris Deeb, but would it really be enough to clear *him*? While he was pondering this question, Captain Jubara spoke to Faris Deeb again. He said:

“Your son seems to be very upset about this business. I suppose it's because he knew the missing woman personally?”

“I suppose that would be so,” said Faris Deeb.

“I learn from the hotel that he used to serve her, and that they were on friendly terms?”

“I would not know. He has not told me anything.”

“But you know that it was he who suggested that she might have come to bathe in the pool near your orchard?”

“Yes. I know that.”

“I think he is afraid now that he may have been right, that we may find her body roundabout here; it will be a very unpleasant experience for him.”

“Ay, it will.”

“Your son was doing late duty at the hotel the night before last. Which of you got home first?”

“I think he did.”

“You only think; you don’t know.”

“I’m not sure.” Slowly, very slowly, it occurred to Faris Deeb that the detective might be suspecting Antoine. The thought startled him, but it did not alarm or displease him. No harm, surely, would come to his son from such a suspicion, but the more false scents the police pursued, the safer he himself would be.

Antoine heard the detective’s questions and, like his father, saw the drift of his thought. His expression became darker and more tortured than before. He was not afraid for himself. But the thought that anyone should be so unaware of his feelings for Miss Bright as to suspect him of having murdered her—there was a pain in that he could not endure.

Captain Jubara, watching him, was trying to sort out a little puzzle which his suspicion involved. The motive was not difficult to establish. The young waiter had fallen in love with the film star in an inexperienced, adolescent way. She had been friendly with him in her natural, American way. He had mistaken this friendliness for something else, and when she told him she was going out for a bathe in the pool at night, he had seen in that an opportunity—perhaps an invitation. He had followed her, tried to make love to her, only to discover his mistake when she snubbed him. Frustrated and humiliated, his love had turned into a murderous anger—all that made sense. But, if he had killed her and buried her body somewhere, why should he volunteer the statement that she had told him she wanted to bathe in the pool? Captain Jubara could think of two reasons. Either the story of the pool was a fabrication, and the meeting and murder had taken place in some quite different locality, from which the young man wanted to keep the search away.

Or, he wanted to throw suspicion on someone else. The detective, in the course of his inquiries in the village, had picked up enough gossip to know that Faris Deeb was a thorn in the flesh of his family. The pool was near Faris Deeb's orchard. The waiter knew that his father would be coming back from Tripoli late that night, and getting out of the car at a spot not far from the orchard and the pool. Could he be trying to frame his father . . . or . . . Captain Jubara's nimble mind darted off in another direction—could the waiter's story be genuine, and his father be the murderer, assuming that a murder had been committed? But why? How? The father did not know the American woman, and a chance meeting between him and her on the night of her disappearance—a meeting likely to cause him to assault and murder her seemed too far-fetched a notion to deserve serious consideration. Besides, the man's story about the thief had been corroborated, and it was extremely improbable that roughly about the same time he would have been chasing a thief outside his house and killing a woman, presumably somewhere in the valley. Captain Jubara looked at Faris Deeb walking beside him, impassive, unconcerned, and dismissed him from his mind as a possible suspect. The son was a much more likely customer.

"I suggest we start searching from here," said Elias Effendi, as the party reached the floor of the valley. "The river is just there, and we're about half a kilometre from the pool. How do you wish us to set about it? There's a wooden bridge under that tree, and we could either split into two parties, each searching on one side of the river, or we could search all together first on this side and then on the other."

"Could we cross the river further down?" asked Captain Jubara.

"Yes," said Yusef. "There's a ford on the other side of the pool."

"In that case," said Captain Jubara, "we will all stay together. We will spread ourselves in a line between here and the river, and move forward like the teeth of a comb. We will concentrate on the vicinity of the pool and then, if we have found nothing, we will go beyond it, cross by the ford and come down the other side." He wanted to keep the whole party under observation during the search.

"Very well. Brothers, spread out," said Elias Effendi, who had two gendarmes with him carrying spades. "If any one of you sees anything suspicious on the surface of the ground and can't discover what it is by sweeping away the earth and leaves with his hands, or kicking a few stones with his feet, let him call for one of these."

"The body may be buried at some depth," said Captain Jubara, "especially if the man who stole Khawaja Deeb's spade wanted it for this purpose. Don't

be satisfied with just scratching the surface. Let me know if you notice anything abnormal. I shall be moving up and down the line to help you.”

Thus organized and briefed, the search party began its slow advance in the direction of the pool. Faris Deeb felt safe. The body was not only buried at a good depth; it had a stone wall, shoulder-high, built on top of it. Not all the detectives in Beirut could guess that it was lying among the foundations of that wall. Not as long as the wall itself did not attract attention. He remembered with a stab of fear that it had attracted the attention of the hotel manager the morning before, that he had commented on how newly-built it looked. Faris Deeb had not dared go near the orchard and the pool since then to look at the wall again, to make sure that he had introduced enough irregularities into the rebuilt section to give it the same look as the rest. Would that clever detective from Beirut notice anything peculiar about it? Bah, he was not so clever! He was suspecting Antoine. Yet, he had been clever enough to guess what the spade had been used for that night. Faris Deeb’s sense of security ebbed and flowed as they approached the pool. For a while he forgot that he was supposed to be searching for something in the ground under his feet, and his eyes gazed ahead. Then, startled at this lapse, he bent his head down quickly and pretended to be scanning the ground in which he knew nothing was going to be found.

Antoine, thinking that a gruesome discovery might be made anywhere, felt his horror at the thought increasing with every step he took. He prayed that at least he would not be the one to make the discovery, that he could avoid seeing the sight. He would stand back and let the others crowd in round the spot. He would rush upon his father! He would. . . . Suddenly, he became aware that Captain Jubara was moving in his direction.

“You think we’re going to find anything?” asked the detective.

“How would I know?” said Antoine.

“You still think your friend came down this way the night she disappeared?”

“She was not my friend. She was a visitor staying at the hotel, and I’m just a waiter there.”

“But you liked her?”

“Yes. I liked her.”

“And she was nice to you?”

“Yes.”

“Was she nice to you all the time? Till the end?”

“I don’t know what you mean. Yes, she was nice to me always. Why do

you ask?”

“Because the way these Americans behave is different from ours. We may sometimes misunderstand them.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You were a little in love with Miss Bright, weren’t you?”

“I don’t wish to discuss my sentiments for Miss Bright with you. That is my private affair.”

“Very well. I’m sorry if I’ve hurt your feelings. Only, you seemed to me much more upset about this business than any other member of the party. I just wondered why.”

“I told you that is my business. Can’t you leave me alone?”

“It happens to be my business to find out what happened to Miss Bright. I thought you might help me.”

“Well, I am helping you, aren’t I? Isn’t that enough for you?”

“You didn’t want to come on this search, did you?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Why? Just because you were fond of Miss Bright?”

“Yes, if you want to know. Are you satisfied now?”

“I shall not be satisfied until I know how Miss Bright came to disappear. Do you bathe in that pool yourself?”

“No. I told her it would be very cold.”

“Were you thinking of coming with her?”

“Of course not. I told you I know my place as a waiter.”

“But you still think she came to the pool?”

“I don’t know. She said she wanted to.”

“Did anyone else know that she wanted to, apart from yourself?”

“How do I know? I’ve told you all I know. Is there anything else you wish to ask me?”

“Not for the present. But I may want to see you later. Is that your father’s orchard ahead?”

“Yes.”

In a moment, the search party, following Captain Jubara’s instructions, had converged on the pool. Faris Deeb, walking faster than the rest, was the first to arrive. He cast a rapid look at the wall, and was reassured. There was nothing

conspicuous now about it. The few alterations he had made in it the morning before, after hearing the hotel manager's disturbing remark, had been enough to make it look all the same. And though in space he stood so close to the body he had buried, in time a hundred years seemed to intervene between the events of two nights before and the scene in which he was taking part now.

"You have a very fine orchard and an excellent crop, I see," said Captain Jubara.

"Ay, it is not a bad crop," said Faris Deeb.

"Abu Mitry's orchard is the best tended and most famous in the district," said Elias Effendi. "The roots of the trees drink abundantly from the pool and the river."

"Come on, Abu Mitry," said Yusef, "although we have come here on a solemn business, there is no harm in having a little refreshment. You must let the officers and the other brothers taste your apples."

"The crop's been sold," said Faris Deeb. "It's due for delivery on Sunday."

"So what?" said Yusef, baiting the miser jocularly. ". . . You sell what you deliver. A few pounds more or less are not going to make much difference to your profit. You got a very good price for it!"

"No, no, we mustn't interfere with a crop that's been sold," said Captain Jubara.

"Abu Mitry!" appealed Yusef. "Will your generosity permit that the officers and the brothers come to your orchard and leave it without moistening their throats?"

"They're welcome," said Faris Deeb, deciding that a gesture must be made. "They may help themselves."

"May God increase your prosperity," said Captain Jubara, "but really, it isn't necessary."

"Nay, I will pick you some apples," said Faris Deeb.

"I'll pick one for myself," said Yusef. "I've got an eye on that bough up there; there are some beauties on it." So saying, he advanced towards the rebuilt section of the wall and started to climb it, inserting his foot into an opening between two stones a couple of feet above the ground.

"Not that way!" shouted Faris Deeb, unable to control his fear. "There's a footpath to the orchard gate."

"This is quicker," said Yusef.

"I told you stop!" commanded Faris Deeb; but it was too late. Yusef was feeling for the next foothold in the wall, when the newly reassembled stones

parted, and a dozen or so of them avalanched to the bottom, bringing Yusef down with them, and leaving a long V shaped gap in the wall. It all happened in a second, but it was the longest second in the life of Faris Deeb, and the terror of it petrified him. He saw the stones part and collapse; he saw the gap in the wall opening almost as far as the ground, and he waited to see if the ground was going to show any subsidence, any cracks. In his panic, he wondered if the splitting of the wall was going to continue until it caused the earth itself to open and lay bare its secret.

“You see,” said Elias Effendi, reprimanding Yusef, who had slipped down with the stones and was struggling to his feet among the piled-up debris. “Abu Mitry told you not to climb up the wall, but your greed for that apple could not wait!”

“Well, it isn’t my fault if the wall collapsed,” said Yusef.

“There must be something wrong with the foundations; they can’t go deep enough into the ground. I’m sorry, Abu Mitry. I’ll rebuild it for you.”

“There’s nothing wrong with the foundations,” said Faris Deeb decisively. “I built this wall myself, and it has stood for fifteen years. And you needn’t trouble to rebuild it now. I will deal with that later.”

“No, no,” said Elias Effendi. “We will all help. If the brothers here will lend a hand, it won’t take ten minutes. But I think Yusef is right; we should remove the bottom rows and get down to the earth to see if the stones beneath the surface are holding well together. Come on, lads!”

“That is not necessary,” said Faris Deeb, as the men came forward and started picking up stones from the fallen heap. It was imperative for him not to let them reach the foundations, or they might notice how newly-laid the stones there looked, how fresh the earth. “Please, do not remove any more stones, or more of the wall may collapse. Be so good just to replace the ones that have fallen.” He spoke appealingly, meekly.

“Have it your own way,” said Yusef, “but don’t blame us if it collapses again.”

“I shall not blame you,” said Faris Deeb with unuttered and unutterable relief. “Thank you for your help.” Once again he saw the stone wall rising intact above the earth that held his secret. Only, this time it was being rebuilt by others, in broad daylight, not by himself in the darkness of the night; and the director of the operation was the local police officer himself—an irony which made no impact on the mind of Faris Deeb.

When the wall had been rebuilt, and the members of the search party had refreshed themselves with apples from Faris Deeb’s orchard, the exploration of the floor of the valley was resumed, first around the pool and then beyond it. It

was not till three hours later that the party returned to the village.

“Will you be wanting to search anywhere else?” asked Faris Deeb, as they debouched from the valley.

“Yes,” said Captain Jubara. “I want to search the side of the hill in the direction in which you saw your thief escaping. Elias Effendi and I will go there this afternoon, and if any of you can spare us any more time, I shall be very grateful.”

“I will come,” said Faris Deeb, glad that the police had apparently finished with the valley. On the hill he could help them without fear, and it was good policy to show himself willing to help the police.

“And now, can we go to your house and get that spade?”

“The spade? Oh, yes, of course.”

“Shall we start taking finger-prints in the village?” asked Elias Effendi.

“You may as well,” said Captain Jubara. “Then if our experts in Beirut find any marks on the spade apart from those of Khawaja Deeb and his family, they may lead us somewhere.”

“Come on, brothers,” said Elias Effendi. “We will start with the present company. No offence meant, of course, you understand. Every finger-print must be taken, including mine. I will begin with myself, and respectable folk like you will not mind following my example, will you?” Then he added with a laugh, “You’ve already lent us a hand in this search; now come and lend a thumb!”

After the taking of the finger-prints and the fetching of the spade and its handle, which Captain Jubara wrapped carefully in a large sheet of paper, Faris Deeb went back to his shop.

“Anybody been?” he asked Mitry.

“Yes, two or three customers.” He gave his father the details but did not ask him anything about the search. There was an awkward pause, during which Faris Deeb wondered why his son was not showing any curiosity. At last, feeling that he must mention the matter himself, he said:

“It was a long search, but they . . . we found nothing.”

Again Mitry said nothing.

“This afternoon,” went on Faris Deeb, “they want to search the hillside, and I’m going with them again, so you’ll have to stay here by yourself.”

“All right.”

“You seem to have handled the morning’s business quite well.”

“Wasn’t difficult.”

Faris Deeb noticed, with some apprehension, Mitry’s reluctance to talk to him, to look at him. He had noticed the same thing in Antoine that morning during the search. Of course, his children had never been on easy, friendly terms with him. He himself had not encouraged that kind of intercourse. But this was more than their usual reserve. It was as if they were avoiding him for a new and special reason, as if they were troubled by some secret thoughts about him. Could some suspicion have crossed their minds, he wondered? His fear, a small cloud at first, grew until it darkened his whole sky. As usual, he had his lunch with Mitry in the shop, but the few conversational advances he made during the meal elicited little response from his son. At last he said:

“What is the matter with you? Not feeling well to-day?”

“No, I’m all right,” said Mitry.

“Is it Brazil you’re thinking of then?”

“No, I’m not thinking of that.”

“Well, let us go through these accounts quickly. I have to rejoin the search party soon.” His son’s withdrawal from him had never been so complete as this, and the boy’s refusal to admit to any of the explanations offered by his father only intensified Faris Deeb’s fear.

They were still working on the accounts when Elias Effendi came into the shop.

“Ah, good! You’re still here; I wanted to save you the trouble of coming out for the search planned for this afternoon. It’s off. A message came from the Sûreté in Beirut half an hour ago saying that the missing woman was seen there late last night. A woman swears she saw her getting out of a car at Bourj a little before midnight, and a young man is equally emphatic that he saw her outside a night club at about two in the morning. So apparently we were wasting our time here this morning, and the search is going to start in Beirut now. Captain Jubara has just gone back there. Just my luck! I thought I was going to be in on a big case here and show the Sûreté chiefs in Beirut how efficient the Barkita police were—yes, by God, a sensational international case that would be reported in the newspapers of the whole world! But now, it seems we’re out of it. The big chance of my career has slipped out of my hands. Still, I mustn’t think of myself; it’s better so for the good name of the village and the holiday season, and such public considerations must come before my personal interest.”

“Ay,” said Faris Deeb. “Every one knows you’re a public-spirited man. You’ll have other chances of showing your capacity.”

Expressing a despondent doubt over this point, but reaffirming his

unselfish satisfaction that the name of Barkita was not going to be sullied by the discovery in it of the American woman's body, the police officer took his leave.

"Let's get on with our work," said Faris Deeb, feeling a return of security and authority he had not known since the arrival of the Sûreté officer from Beirut the evening before. Even though the police were not going to find anything in Beirut, they had at least been drawn off the scent; and as they had not found and were not going to find anything in Barkita, he was quite safe.

Mitry's manner too changed after hearing Elias Effendi's news. His frigid reserve towards his father thawed. His mother and brother had made a terrible mistake. Their suspicions had been disproved. He was ashamed of himself for having shared them.

In the evening when they went home, Faris Deeb casually announced the news given him by Elias Effendi, and asked Rosa to bring him an *argileh* to the terrace, where his father was sitting.

"Thank God for this news," said Abu Faris. "From the beginning my opinion has been that nothing could have happened to that woman in this village. Didn't I say so?"

"Ay," said Faris Deeb, who did not remember any such pronouncement by his father.

Rosa stared at her husband for a moment, then walked into the kitchen without saying anything. Mitry followed her. As she was preparing the smoke, he said:

"It's good we didn't tell the police anything. We should have brought disgrace upon ourselves and done my father a dreadful wrong."

"I never wanted to tell the police. I told you that," said Rosa. "I only wanted proof. It was you and your brother who wanted to rush out and tell the police without having any proof. And now without any proof, you think we were all wrong."

"What do you mean, 'without any proof?' The woman was seen in Beirut. The police have stopped searching in the village and gone there."

"The police don't know what we know, Mitry. Maybe if they did, they wouldn't have believed this story from Beirut. How do we know it was really the same woman that was seen there? The people who say they saw her could have been mistaken, couldn't they? Let us wait and see if the search in Beirut brings any results."

"You still think my father killed her?"

"I don't know what to think, my son. But I can't forget that he was at the

pool that night, that he didn't come home till dawn, that he had a broken spade with him and blisters on his hands, and that he told lies about all these things. Go out now. Don't let him know that we have been talking. May God protect us from evil, and punish those that do it."

It wasn't only Rosa that appealed to God. That night, Faris Deeb prayed for the first time in many, many years. He said: "God, I did not mean to kill her; You know that. I only wanted her as men want women. I know that also is against Your law except the man be married to the woman. But the Devil tempted me, God, and his power was stronger than I could resist. Forgive me, God, and let my secret remain known only to You, and I will do penance. I will give Father Boulos money for the Church, twice as much money as I spent at the cabaret in Tripoli. I will give You, God, double what I gave the Devil, for the cabaret is as surely his house as the Church is Yours. Only, give me time, oh, God—a few months until this matter is forgotten and I cannot be suspected. For if I gave Father Boulos such a sum to-morrow, there would be so much wonder and speculation that perchance someone might guess why I had done it, seeing that in the past I have been neglectful of my duty to You and to Your church. Amen." Thus did Faris Deeb's remorse—felt for the first time since the murder—express itself and, for the time being, was appeased.

Two more days passed and nothing more was heard at Barkita of the police inquiries into the disappearance of Jeannette Waverley, save that Faris Deeb was informed by Elias Effendi that the examination of the spade handle in Beirut had not yielded any results, the surface being in parts so smooth with rubbing, and in others so smudgy, that no identifiable finger-prints could be found on it.

The third day was a Sunday. It was the day on which the apple crop from the orchard was to be picked and delivered to the buyer. As was his custom, Faris Deeb, in order to avoid paying unnecessary wages, commandeered his whole family for this purpose. They went down to the orchard at daybreak, so that even Antoine could help before going to his work at the hotel. They carried large baskets in which to put the apples. Mitry took the dog, Nimr, with him; and as they started picking the fruit, the dog frisked and ran about the orchard, first to one then to another member of the party.

They had been working for nearly an hour when Faris Deeb had his first shock. Happening to lean over the orchard wall on the side of the pool, as he was stripping the boughs of one tree, he saw the dog sniffing and digging at the base of the wall just above where the body lay buried. His first impulse was to call sharply to the animal, even throw a stone at it. But he checked himself from fear of drawing attention to what the dog was doing, to where it was doing it. Instead, he lowered himself over the wall as swiftly and unobtrusively as he could, and shooed the dog off quietly, smoothing over the disturbed earth with his feet. While doing so, he sniffed hard several times to see if *he* could smell anything, wondering with increasing alarm whether he had buried the body deep enough. And it was then he had his second shock. At first his nose told him nothing. But with the third or fourth sniff he caught a faint odour which chilled his heart—a faint odour which barely disengaged itself from the scent of apples that filled the air in the orchard. It was not persistent. It only lasted a second. When he sniffed again he could not smell it. He could smell only the apple scent.

Rosa had been watching her husband furtively ever since they reached the orchard, in the belief that if her suspicions were true he might betray himself in some way or other when he was in the neighbourhood of the pool. She had seen him slipping down the orchard wall and, being herself engaged in

stripping a tree close to the wall further along the orchard, had leaned over, masked by a few branches, to see where he was going, what he was doing. And she had seen everything—the dog’s digging, her husband’s shooing it off, his smoothing over the disturbed earth with his feet, the stealthy manner in which he did it.

“What are you doing down there?” she called out to test the startling thought that had come to her.

Faris Deeb looked up with a shock, then quickly regaining possession of himself, he said:

“I came for a drink from the pool; I was thirsty.”

He started to walk back to the orchard by the footpath, wondering how long Rosa had been looking at him, how much she had seen; thinking of that smell. If it became stronger, he would deal with it later in the manner he had already thought of—some animal manure in the neighbourhood, or a bottle of carbolic acid, broken as by accident on one of the stones near by. If it didn’t become stronger, no one would notice it, know where it came from. Only that accursed dog! He must get rid of it; and in the meantime, for that morning, he must make sure it did not go near the spot again. He must do it without drawing attention to his anxiety. The dog was running about the orchard again, frisking, sniffing, jumping up at Mitry and the other members of the family.

“That dog is making a nuisance of itself,” said Faris Deeb, coming back into the orchard. “You’d better tie it up, Mitry.”

“Let the poor thing enjoy itself,” said Mitry. “It isn’t doing any harm.”

“No, better tie it up; it might run out onto the road and be killed by a car,” said Faris Deeb.

“There are no cars at this hour,” said Rosa. “I’ll keep my eye on it.”

“I said tie it up!” said Faris Deeb, with an emphasis he had not intended to betray.

Mitry tied the dog to a tree, and the picking continued, basket after basket being filled with the fruit. Soon afterwards, the buyer came with a lorry and scales to have the crop weighed and taken away. Faris Deeb, Mitry and Antoine carried the baskets to the edge of the road, where each was weighed before being put into the lorry. Faris Deeb and the buyer recorded the figures separately after each weighing.

While this operation was going on, keeping Faris Deeb occupied outside the orchard, Rosa went to the tree which her husband had been stripping when he saw the dog burrowing on the other side of the wall. She stood for a moment, looking at the stones of the wall, at the earth on the floor of the

orchard, eager to investigate the suspicion that had been aroused in her, but too horrified by it to make any move. Then, she took a step closer to the wall and was about to lean over it, when her nose caught a whiff of the odour which her husband had smelt—the faint but unmistakable odour of corruption. She stiffened where she stood, and sniffed again and again, but the smell had gone. She looked around the pool as far as her eyes could reach, to see if the corpse of some animal could have been the source of that smell. There was nothing. With a growing sickness in her mind, she became convinced that her suspicion had hit the mark. Then, she thought of a way to test it further. She went to the tree where Nimr was tied, and loosened its strap. Genevieve saw her from a few yards away and said, “What are you doing that for? Didn’t you hear my father shouting at Mitry to tie it up?”

“Be quiet!” ordered Rosa quietly. “I know what I’m doing.” The men were all with the buyer outside the orchard, standing by the lorry, weighing the baskets. Nimr freed himself from his strap, ran this way and that, then jumped over the orchard wall. Genevieve came close to her mother, sensing something mysterious in her voice and manner. “Why did you let Nimr go?” she asked.

“Go to that tree there, and maybe you’ll know,” said Rosa.

Genevieve walked across to the tree and looked over the wall. Then she came back to her mother. Faris Deeb, still on the road by the lorry, was engaged in an argument with the buyer over the weight of one of the baskets.

“Well?” asked Rosa.

“Nimr is sniffing along the bottom of the wall on the other side,” said Genevieve, “and . . . and there is a funny smell that comes and goes. What is it, Mother?”

“Your Ramiz thought he knew how that spade was broken the other night,” said Rosa. “Maybe Nimr has found out where it was broken. But don’t say anything more. Your father is coming.”

Faris Deeb, followed by Mitry and Antoine, had just opened the orchard gate and was coming in for the last three baskets. His eyes went straight to the tree where Nimr had been tied, and saw that the dog was no longer there—nor anywhere in the orchard.

“Where’s the dog?” he asked with a wild anger which burst out of him before his fear could check it.

“How would I know?” said Rosa. “He broke away from his strap and jumped over the wall.”

“You fool, I told you to tie it securely!” said Faris Deeb to Mitry. “Do you want it to run onto the road and be killed. There’s a car coming now.” Seizing upon this as an excuse for the hurry he needed, he slipped out of the orchard

gate and rushed down to the spot where he had seen the dog digging before. If the accursed animal was there again, it was imperative that he should reach and chase it away before the rest of his family saw where it had gone. And he must make sure it never came near the orchard again . . . never!

As he had suspected, Nimr had reached the site of his former activities, and was again sniffing and scratching the soil. Faris Deeb picked up a stone and threw it at the animal from a distance of several yards away, before Rosa or any of the children had had time to follow him and see what he was doing.

“What’s the matter with my father?” said Mitry. “Why is he so concerned about Nimr?”

“It’s nowhere near the road, anyhow,” said Antoine.

“Don’t say anything!” said Rosa peremptorily, as her husband’s footsteps were heard, returning to the gate, and Nimr, guilty with the consciousness of a misdeed he could not comprehend, ran into the orchard again, wagging a lowered tail between its legs.

“Give me that strap there,” said Faris Deeb to Mitry, “and I’ll make sure he doesn’t break away again before we’ve finished.”

Mitry handed his father the strap without speaking, remembering his conversation with his mother two days before, when she had said, “Maybe if the police knew what we know, they would not have believed this report from Beirut.” Anyhow, there had been no news of an arrest in Beirut, no discovery of the missing woman there. And now, his father was afraid of something. His charging after the dog had not been on account of the dog itself, nor his insistence on tying it up. Why didn’t his father want the dog to be loose? Two days before, they had been searching in the valley for the woman’s body. . . .

“I’m not feeling well,” said Genevieve. “I think I’m going to be sick.” She turned towards the wall and began to retch.

“What’s the matter with the girl?” said Faris Deeb, stopping in the act of tying up the dog.

“You’d better go home,” said Abu Faris. “Rosa, take the girl home.”

“You can all go home now,” said Faris Deeb, anxious to get the whole family away from the orchard, and keep them away from it until he had taken the precautions upon which he had decided. “I can do the rest by myself. And, here, take the dog with you on the strap. I’ll be following you in a moment.”

“I’ll just be in time for church when I’ve changed my clothes,” said Abu Faris. “Will you be coming too?”

“I’ll follow you,” said Faris Deeb. “I can catch you up. But if Genevieve isn’t feeling well, Rosa had better stay at home with her.”

Among the counter measures Faris Deeb had decided to take was the killing of the dog. For as long as it was alive, it was bound to come to the orchard again. It might come with Rosa, it might come with Mitry, when Faris Deeb himself was not there to keep it away from the source of the smell it had discovered. Even when he had poured carbolic acid over the spot, the dog's sharp nose might penetrate through the smell of the chemical to that other odour that came from below. Faris Deeb's mind could not rest now as long as that danger lurked behind him. The dog had to be eliminated, and eliminated quickly. And Mitry must not be allowed to acquire another dog from Anees. Faris Deeb paused for a moment to reflect on the irony of his having himself urged Mitry to get the dog. He was frightened at the thought that his own devices were turning against him in ways he could not foresee. He must be very careful how he killed the dog. No one must suspect that he had anything to do with its death. It must look natural, like the accidental eating of poisoned food, or a venomous bite. And it must be done at night, so that the dog would just be found dead in the morning. There was some rat poison in the outhouse. . . .

That night, therefore, Faris Deeb, having made sure that the rest of the family were asleep, crept out of his bed and committed his second murder. A feeling of pity such as he rarely experienced came over him as he gave Nimr the piece of poisoned meat he had prepared for it. The dog was so grateful, so innocent and unsuspecting. He did not know that he was going to die, or why he had been condemned to death. He was not hitting and kicking Faris Deeb, as the woman had done before he killed her. He followed him into the garden like a friend, and Faris Deeb had had few friends in his life. He felt sorrier to have to kill the dog than he did, even now, to have killed the American woman. She had provoked him, shameless woman! And he had not intended her death, as he now intended the death of the dumb creature that was trusting, not provoking him.

It was Abu Faris, always an early riser, who discovered the dog's body the next morning. Going out into the garden before any of the others, he saw the animal lying outside the kitchen door. At first, he thought it asleep, and called jocularly, "Nimr, wake up you lazy dog!" But he had barely finished his sentence when he realized that Nimr would never wake again. Startled, he came close to the body and bent down over it to investigate any visible cause of death. "What happened to you, poor fellow?" he said, lifting one of the dog's forepaws, then turning the body from side to side. At last he stood up and cried, "Mitry! . . . Rosa! Faris! Come out here! Nimr is dead."

Rosa was the first to come out.

“What did you say?” she asked, stepping out of the kitchen. “What has happened to Nimr?”

“He’s dead, poor fellow. I’ve just found him lying here,” said Abu Faris.

“Dead?! What killed it?” said Rosa, hurrying to where Abu Faris stood over the dog’s body. “Are there any wounds on the body? Any injuries?”

“No,” said Abu Faris. “Looks like something internal, a sickness or something. Pretty swift too. He was frisking like a lamb yesterday evening. Didn’t look as if there was anything the matter with it.”

“There isn’t a mark on the body,” said Rosa. “Must have eaten something poisonous.”

“Some bad meat, perhaps,” said Abu Faris.

“There’s no bad meat in this house,” said Rosa, thinking in a flash of the incidents of the previous day in the orchard; and a swift, certain intuition told her what had happened to the dog. She turned round as Faris Deeb arrived on the scene, followed by Mitry, Antoine and Genevieve. They had all heard Abu Faris’s shouting, and come out from various parts of the house. Things had worked out exactly as Faris Deeb had planned. Nobody had heard anything in the night; and now the dead dog had been discovered in the garden. There was nothing for him to worry about. But he must act in a natural way, showing the surprise and regret that would be expected of him.

“What’s happened?” he said. “What’s all this about Nimr being dead?”

“Only that he is dead,” said Rosa, looking into her husband’s eyes steadily for a second. “As dead as a stone.”

“But he was all right yesterday evening,” said Mitry with distress, “perfectly well. What could have happened to him in the night?” He bent down and began feeling the dog’s body. “A dog doesn’t die from an illness so suddenly—a young, healthy dog. I settled him in his box outside the kitchen door myself before I went to bed.”

“Might have been bitten by a snake or a scorpion,” said Faris Deeb.

“But there’s no swelling on his body,” said Mitry. “The venom of a bite causes the body to swell.”

“Ay,” said Abu Faris, “and he would have cried and whimpered. We should have heard him. No, it isn’t a bite.”

Rosa remained silent, looking fixedly at the dog, but thinking of other things, many other things.

“Must have eaten something,” said Antoine. “Yes, the poor thing was sick. Look there!” They all looked.

“Ah, that’s what I was thinking,” said Abu Faris.

“But I gave him his supper myself,” said Mitry, “same as usual—some bread and milk, and a bone with a bit of meat on it.”

“There’s no bad food in this house,” said Rosa.

“Nobody is saying it was from the house,” said Faris Deeb. “It could have been some garbage from the road.”

“Yes, it could have been that,” said Antoine.

“Poor Nimr,” said Genevieve tearfully. “We don’t seem to have much luck with dogs. First, Antar dies when he’s only a few years old, and now Nimr just as we . . . we were beginning to get fond of him. We don’t want any more dogs.”

“No,” said Faris Deeb, “we don’t want another. One gets used to them, and then they die. You’ll have to do your shooting without a dog, Mitry . . . and now we’ll have to bury poor Nimr.”

“Come, my daughter, dry your tears,” said Abu Faris to Genevieve, patting her shoulder sympathetically. “We all have to die, sooner or later—the progeny of Adam and dumb creatures; all. Save a few tears for me when my time comes.”

“May you live to be a hundred, Grandpa,” said Genevieve, walking back with Abu Faris to the house.

“Where shall we bury him?” asked Mitry. “Here in the garden?”

“No,” said Faris Deeb, in whose mind a cunning thought had just arisen. “Leave him to me. You go and open the shop. I’ll take the dog and bury him in the orchard.” He had not yet sprinkled any carbolic acid near the orchard wall to mask the odour he had sniffed the day before. It had been a Sunday, and the village pharmacy had been closed. He had intended to do it that morning, if the smell had become stronger. But he had not felt too happy about this device, lest it should itself attract attention and arouse suspicion. Much, much safer would it be to bury the dog near the spot. Then, if anyone smelt that odour, they would naturally think it was the dog.

With his insensitiveness to association, therefore, Faris Deeb put the dog’s body and the new spade he had bought two days earlier into his wheelbarrow and went down to the orchard half an hour later to dig another grave. And, having accomplished his purpose, he felt safe once more. There was no indication that the police would reopen their investigations in Barkita. The dog, who had suddenly sprung on the scene as his mortal enemy the day before, had been disposed of successfully; and his body in death could, in certain circumstances, be as useful to him as the living creature had proved

dangerous. He had a smug feeling that God had listened to his prayer and accepted his offer of penance. As soon as it became safe for him to do so, he would pay the price to Father Boulos.

Mitry's mind was not as quick and perceptive as his mother's, nor did he know all that she knew about the incidents of the day before at the orchard. He had not been aware of the strange smell and had not seen Nimr burrowing at the base of the wall, and his father stealthily shooing it off. But he had sensed that his father was afraid of the dog, afraid of its running loose around the orchard. Slowly, as he made his way to the shop and sat in it awaiting his father's arrival after the burial of the dog, his thoughts began to follow a groping suspicion, and his mind darkened with its shadow. That rat poison in the outhouse! He would find out!

Genevieve met Ramiz for lunch in the backroom of the grocer's shop.

"Why didn't you come to church yesterday?" asked her lover. "I went only in the hope of seeing you."

"I couldn't come," she said. "I was sick."

"What was it? Did you have fever?"

"No. Only my stomach turned. Ramiz? . . ."

"Yes, my love?"

"You don't think I'm having a baby, Ramiz, do you? You're sure what we did the other night in the outhouse was all right? I mean, sickness is an early symptom, isn't it?"

"Don't be silly. Of course it was all right. Anyhow, you don't start being sick the moment you've done it, even if you are going to have a baby. It isn't like swallowing castor oil! You must have eaten something that disagreed with you, or caught a chill on your stomach."

"Perhaps." She could not bring herself to tell him of the other explanation of her sickness. Even as she remembered that odour, and what her mother had implied by what she had said and done in the orchard, her stomach began to heave again. As long as she was sure that her sickness had been caused by that, she wouldn't talk about that business again. Let that horrible secret remain buried where it was, unmentioned for ever.

"Are you feeling all right now?" asked Ramiz, noticing the change in her colour.

She nodded. She could not even bear to mention the death of the dog, since, like her mother and Mitry, she had come to connect that with the business in the orchard.

"I know what it is that has upset you," said Ramiz comfortingly. "It's what

we've been thinking and saying about your father and the disappearance of the American woman. Well, we've probably all been mistaken. The Sûreté people ought to know, and they now think she disappeared from Beirut. Don't brood on this matter any more. Here, have some of these stuffed vine leaves; they're very good . . . and this apple. I know it doesn't come from your orchard, but it's as good as any in Barkita. Just smell its perfume. . . ." He held the apple close to her nose, and its smell instantly brought back that other odour she had smelt in the orchard. She turned away with a jerk of repugnance.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Don't you like it?"

"Please don't be angry," she said. "It's nothing to do with it. I just don't feel like food."

"I know what will settle your stomach—a cup of coffee. I'll go up to Uncle Milhem's kitchen and make you one; it won't take a minute." He left the room and ran upstairs.

That night in the house of Faris Deeb there was a heavy silence as the family sat down to supper. Except for a casual remark from Abu Faris, no one spoke. Antoine had heard from the hotel proprietor that though the police were still pursuing their inquiries in Beirut, they had not discovered any clue as to what had happened to Miss Bright, and that Captain Jubara was thinking of coming back to conduct another investigation in Barkita. He had conveyed this information to his mother, who had made no comment except to say, "God keep evil away from us, my son." In Rosa's mind now, since the happenings in the orchard and the dog's death, there was no doubt at all as to what had happened to the American woman, or where her body lay. She had enough evidence to put before the police. She could denounce her husband and get rid of him—rid her whole family of him. And the temptation to do so was very great. God had delivered the man she hated into her hands, and all she had to do was to lift her little finger, to whisper one word in Elias Effendi's ear . . . to send an anonymous letter. And then, she would be free to marry Yusef, Genevieve to marry Ramiz, Mitry to go to Brazil. But she still could not bring herself to do it, especially after she had sounded the children and seen the anguish of the conflict she had plunged them into. They were his flesh and blood. They hated and feared him, but they were not willing, not altogether willing, to buy their freedom at the cost of sending him to the gallows. It would be terrible for them to have to give evidence against him, to see her giving evidence against him. They might hate her for it, never forgive her. And without their evidence, the evidence of all of them, about the watch and the outhouse and the spade and the dog and the blisters on his hands, it would be useless to accuse him, to tell the police that the body of the missing woman was buried under the orchard wall and that Faris Deeb had put it there. Without the evidence, there would be nothing to prove that it was he who had done it. Anyone might have done it. Even if she sent an anonymous letter, the children might guess who had sent it. She looked at them sitting round the supper table, and noticed their dark looks and heavy silence. Even if they had no love for their father at all, even if they didn't mind his being hanged, would they thank her for stigmatizing them as the children of a murderer? Could she do that to them? Bring shame and disgrace on her family?

Faris Deeb too noticed the absence of conversation at supper, and the strained manner of the children. He sensed in Mitry the same complete

withdrawal from him as he had felt in the shop two days before, the morning after the news of the American woman's disappearance had become known. Antoine, too, and Genevieve gave him the same impression. Never exactly forthcoming or chatty with him, they seemed now to be behind thick walls, hostile and forbidding. He felt ill at ease. The growing silence began to oppress him. It didn't just encircle him like a wall; the wall seemed to be advancing on him, closing in. He was finding it difficult to breathe.

"Rosa, fetch me the bottle of arak," he said, then turning to his father, added, "You'll have a drop too, Abu Faris, won't you?" His father was not part of the advancing wall of silence he felt around him.

"Ay, just a little drop," said Abu Faris, "the thickness of the middle finger." No one laughed at the joke. Rosa got up and fetched the bottle.

"I want a drop too," she said.

"No one's preventing you," said Faris Deeb. He thought of inviting Mitry to join them, but the look on his son's face inhibited him.

Rosa poured out three tots, giving herself a much larger measure than she was wont to have.

"I didn't say you could have half the bottle," said Faris Deeb in a tone which bordered on the jesting. He desperately felt the need to break the tension around him.

"I feel like it," she said. "I have a headache; it'll do me good."

"Have you all got headaches?" said Faris Deeb, looking at the children, determined to make a breach in that dreadful wall of silence. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," said Mitry.

"I haven't felt well since yesterday," said Genevieve.

"I'm all right," said Antoine in a tone which belied his looks.

After he had been drinking for a while, Faris Deeb felt better, his fears receded, other explanations of the children's silence suggested themselves—Mitry was obviously upset about Nimr's death, Antoine was unhappy because he was no longer seeing the American girl, and Genevieve was probably afraid of the consequences of what she and her lover had been doing in the outhouse . . . yes, by God, that vomiting of hers in the orchard the day before! The fool might be already pregnant; they might have been doing it for some time! Her belly might begin to swell before long! No wonder she was looking so worried! He would deal with that later. Just now, the alcohol, like a solvent, was melting the menacing, creeping wall by which he had felt himself encircled. Turning to his father, he said, relaxing, "Coming with me to Tripoli

to-morrow?" Faris Deeb went to Tripoli every Tuesday to transact business with his clients there, and usually he took his father with him, since Abu Faris had a brother in the town and could spend the day with him while Faris did his business.

"Yes," said Abu Faris. "I did not come last week. My brother will be wondering how I'm keeping. Will you be going to see that property you were thinking of buying?"

"No; I'm not buying it," said Faris Deeb revengefully. It was the previous Tuesday, when he had gone to see the estate agent, that the chain of events had started which led him to the pool at midnight and caused him to do the thing he did. "I've told you I'm not buying it; I changed my mind."

"What time will you be going?" asked Rosa, knowing that as soon as Yusef saw her husband leaving the village on his weekly excursion to Tripoli, he would come to visit her, this being their safest and most regular opportunity for intimate meetings.

"Between nine and ten o'clock," said Faris Deeb.

Soon after nine o'clock the next morning, therefore, Rosa, having prepared herself and the house for the reception of her lover, began to look out for him. She had not seen him since the evening when he had called with the car driver and been turned out of the house by Faris Deeb. He knew nothing of the things she had discovered about her husband since that evening, and she was not going to tell him, because if she told him she might as well tell the whole village, she might as well go to the police. Yusef would let it out either in one of his moments of indiscretion, or deliberately, to get rid of Faris Deeb so that they might get married. Had he not often said to her, "If only the beast would die!" Even if he swore by the bones of his father and mother, he might find the temptation to use his knowledge too great, especially if he had another quarrel with Faris. He might prevail on her to let him use it; she could not trust herself to hold out against his persuasion. And she had decided that the children must be spared the terrible exposure of their father. Even sleeping next to him the night before, knowing him now to be a murderer, she had steeled herself to face many, many years of similar nights for the sake of her children and their good name. And, if the Virgin helped her, she would hold on to her resolution. She was not sure that she wanted to marry Yusef. He was not the marrying type. She preferred to have him as a lover. And now that she had her husband in her power, she need not worry about her own conduct. She had a weapon against Faris Deeb, a mere glimpse of which would cow him.

Yusef arrived shortly before ten, carrying the paraffin tin he always

brought with him on these visits. This was Rosa's idea. If anyone saw him arriving or leaving, he was to say that she had asked him to bring her some paraffin from his garage for some domestic purpose and that he had just come to deliver it.

"Have you seen him leave the village?" she asked, as Yusef came into the kitchen.

He put the paraffin tin down and took her into his arms, smiling.

"What do you want the paraffin for to-day?" he asked, brushing his lips against hers. "Must I go on bringing this damned thing every time? I've been doing that for two years now and have never needed the protection of its presence!"

"Never mind my love; there's no harm in taking precautions. One day it may come in useful. But you haven't answered me. Did you see him leave?"

"I put him into a car myself and said, 'Count your money well this time, Abu Mitry; don't give the driver another fiver by mistake!' By god, I still can't understand how the old miser's eyes tricked him that night!"

"I haven't seen you since the evening of the quarrel. You were very, very foolish, Yusef, to say what you said."

"Queen of my heart, forgive me. I couldn't resist the temptation."

"That's what I'm afraid of; that's why people are talking in the village."

"I never dreamed he would suspect my meaning. Now, what did I say? I was just paying you a compliment on the delicacies of your table, to thank you for the tasty things you were giving me to eat—the olives and the curd cheese and the cucumbers. How was I to know he would guess I also meant this . . . and this. . . ." He touched her lips with an indicative kiss, while his right hand stroked her thighs and buttocks under the skirt.

"You were very naughty," she said, her rebuke softened by growing desire. "You put me in a terrible position before the children and my father-in-law."

"Surely, they didn't suspect anything?"

"No, thank God for that."

"Well, what's there to worry about? Abu Mitry himself came to see the shocking error he had made, the grave injustice he had been guilty of to you and me"—he unbuttoned her blouse, took her breast in his hand, and began caressing the nipple with his lips—"and followed me to the garage to make a very handsome apology. So now we are the best of friends, and I am welcome to his table again!"

"Thanks to me and Abu Faris. But I can tell you it took a lot of doing. Faris Deeb doesn't like making apologies!"

“By God, I know! How did you do it? When I saw him coming into the garage, I thought he wanted to fight me. Not that I was afraid; I could have knocked him down if it came to that. But when he said he had come to express regret for what had happened, I couldn’t believe my ears. I said to myself, ‘That’s not like Abu Mitry; something strange must have come over him, something very strange—just like his giving the driver a five-lira note by mistake!’ And do you know, something else happened the next day when we went out with the police to search for the missing American woman. I thought he was going to be furious with me, but he was as meek as a lamb!”

“What was it?” asked Rosa casually but with quickened interest.

Yusef told her about his climbing up the orchard wall and causing it to collapse.

“What part of the wall was it?” she asked.

“Just under the big Italian apple tree, close to the pool.”

“Did all the stones fall down?”

“Like a house of cards; and Abu Mitry didn’t utter a word. It wasn’t like him at all.”

“Well, he didn’t want to make a scene before the police officers and the other people present, especially as he’d quarrelled with you the night before and made it up. Did he have to rebuild the wall himself?”

“No, we did that for him; all those present lent a hand. He didn’t want us to at first—fancy Abu Mitry declining a favour!—said he would rebuild it himself after the search, but Elias Effendi insisted, and there were so many of us, it didn’t take us more than a few minutes. Why did you ask?”

“Just like that.”

“No, there was a reason.”

“I tell you there wasn’t. Why should there be?” she said, finding it strange that she should be lying to her lover in defence of her husband—strange, but necessary for the sake of her children, for her own sake if she didn’t want to risk losing their love. . . . Obviously there had been no smell yet when the wall collapsed; that was two days before she had seen the dog sniffing, and noticed the smell herself. But she knew why the wall had collapsed.

Yusef, caressing her breast, lost interest in Faris Deeb and the incident of the wall, as a more urgent interest began to claim him.

“Well, my lovely paraffin customer,” he said, “how long are you going to keep me in the kitchen? Let’s go into the bedroom. I can’t savour all the delicacies of your table except in bed!”

“You’re savouring quite enough of them here,” she said. “How long will

you be staying?”

“The sale of paraffin is quite a lengthy business,” he said, chuckling and pulling her by the hand, not unwilling, out of the kitchen.

They had scarcely been in bed for five minutes when Rosa, disengaging herself abruptly from her lover’s embrace, jumped up, saying, “Someone’s coming! I’ve just heard the garden gate open. Quick!”

Yusef followed her, and they hurriedly put on the clothes they had removed. Rosa had drilled herself and her lover in this emergency operation so thoroughly that it did not take them more than a few seconds.

“Who can it be?” said Yusef, buttoning up his shirt and slipping on his shoes simultaneously.

“It’s Faris!” said Rosa. “He’s come back! You just carry the paraffin can and walk out of the kitchen. Be quite natural.”

Yusef obeyed, while she rapidly tidied the bed and smoothed her hair. Then she walked into the kitchen. Yusef had already left it.

A minute later Faris Deeb came in. Rosa was rinsing a saucepan over the sink.

“What’s brought you back?” she said, feigning surprise, and refusing to take notice of the stern and suspicious look on his face.

“I left behind some papers I should have taken with me. What was Yusef doing here?”

“Didn’t he tell you? He’s only just walked out. You must have met him on the path. He came to deliver some paraffin I’d asked him for.”

“Funny time to come, in the middle of the morning, and just after I’d left for Tripoli! What did you want the paraffin for?”

“To scour out that old bath tub; it’s stinking.” She picked up a cloth and began drying the saucepan.

“Does Yusef have to come all this way from his garage to bring you some paraffin? Couldn’t he have sent it with one of his boys?”

“In the name of the Blessed Virgin, are you going to start being suspicious again? Isn’t it enough you made a fool of yourself the other night, insulting me and your guests, so that you had to go after Yusef and apologize to him? Beware of suspicion, Faris Deeb. It is a terrible thing!”

“What do you mean?” he asked, taken aback by her warning.

“Why, what should I mean except that suspicion comes from the Devil. If husband and wife start suspecting each other of this and that, their lives will

become poisoned, and they may do each other a wicked injury. Yusef came himself to give me the paraffin because he had another call to make in this neighbourhood. What's the harm in that?" She put the saucepan away and turned the tap onto some plates in the sink. Faris Deeb remained silent, wavering in his suspicion and jealousy, and inhibited by his own fear from saying anything more. Rosa, perceiving this, went on, as though the matter had been disposed of:

"Where did you leave your father?"

"I let him go to Tripoli by himself; I will follow him when I have taken my papers."

"Where are they?"

"In the pocket of the coat I was wearing yesterday. I'll go and get them."

Faris Deeb went into the bedroom, and as he was looking for his papers, his eye caught sight of a green button on the floor under Rosa's bed. He walked to the bed and picked up the button. It was a man's, the kind that was worn on men's trousers, but it wasn't his; he had no buttons like that on any of his clothes. After examining the button for a moment, his eyes strayed to Rosa's bed, and a flame of jealousy, confirmed now beyond doubt, leapt up inside him.

"Rosa!" He called. "Come here."

Rosa came into the room, saying, "What do you want?"

"You bitch! You whore!" he exploded. "What was Yusef doing in here?"

"He wasn't in here! What do you mean?"

"Whose button is this?" He held up the object for her inspection.

"Yours, I suppose. Just an ordinary man's button like any other."

"You know it isn't mine, I've never had a button of that colour all my life. What was Yusef doing in the bedroom, I'm asking you?" He bellowed the question out at her, and before she could speak he raised his hand and struck her on the cheek with such force that she lost her balance and reeled against the wall. He was about to strike her again, when she shouted back at him:

"And what were you doing at the pool the night the American woman disappeared? You beast, you murderer!"

His hand dropped without delivering the blow, and he stared at her for a moment, stunned into speechlessness. Then, recovering himself, he said:

"That's a lie; I wasn't at the pool."

"No? And how did your watch drop into the pool? And who killed the woman and buried her under the orchard wall, and came home at dawn with

blistered hands because he had been digging all night, and killed the dog yesterday because it had smelt the odour of putrefaction in the orchard and was beginning to scratch under the wall, the wall you had built so hastily that it collapsed when the police were searching for the body?”

“Lies! All lies! Shut your accursed mouth! I had nothing to do with the disappearance of the American woman. The police have questioned me. I have satisfied them.”

“Only because they don’t know what I know.”

“You know nothing, you vicious woman. You think you can frighten me with your lies because I have detected you in your adultery. It is I who will expose you before your children and all the world, and no one will believe your calumnies then, you fool!”

“Very well, I will tell the police to dig under the orchard wall. We’ll see then if they will believe me or not.”

“You dare, you foolish woman! Do you know what you may be doing if you blurt out any of these lies against me? You may be sending your son Antoine to the scaffold. If they find anything under the orchard wall your son will be in greater danger than me. They already suspect him. They know he was sweet on the woman, and they think she snubbed him. He was out late that night. He could have followed her from the hotel. How do you know he didn’t do it?”

“Because my boy wouldn’t hurt a fly, and because I know you did it, Faris Deeb. How dare you, how dare you accuse your own son, you monster? But thank God, he will not be in danger. It wasn’t he who came home with sore hands and a broken spade! It wasn’t he who chased Ramiz for the spade. Oh, yes, I know it was Ramiz. He and Genevieve will give evidence against you. And the car driver who didn’t have a puncture. And I—I will tell them you came home without your watch, and lied about it; I will tell them how I saw the dog sniffing and scratching at the wall, and how you chased it away in stealth and fear. I’ll see you hanged all right, Faris Deeb!”

“You won’t live to see me hanged,” he said, advancing on her with murder in his heart and eyes and hands, “because I am going to strangle you here and now; yes, by God, I am! If I am to die, I want it to be worth while. It’s all your doing. You took a lover and starved my desire. You gave me your body like a piece of dough, and like dough it will be in a moment when I have choked the life out of you—like dough, and then like wood, and then just dust!”

“Help! Help! Come to me!” cried Rosa in terror, sudden and real, as she realized that her husband meant what he said; and she began to hit back at his face, at his chest. “He’s killing me! Help! Help!”

Faris Deeb clutched her by the throat and began to shake her, saying:

“You made me want women so much that I killed one because she wouldn’t let me have her willingly. I killed her just like this, while she screamed and hit me. Only, I did not mean to kill her, before God I didn’t. But you, I mean to kill, I want to, I——”

Before he had finished his sentence, there was the sound of rushing feet in the hall and, an instant later, Mitry was in the bedroom. He flung himself upon his father from behind, seizing him by the shoulders, and the next moment Faris Deeb was on the floor, thrown down by the superior physical strength of his son. Mitry stood above him, panting and speechless, glowering at the prostrate figure. He was too stunned to move, to rush to the relief of his mother, who had collapsed against the wall behind her—too stunned by what he had seen, and still more by the miracle that had, in a flash, destroyed the tyranny of years and given him the courage to do what he had done. Faris Deeb, too, was in a daze as he staggered to his feet. The significance of what his son had done to him made him almost forget what he had been in the act of doing to his wife. He could not believe that Mitry had actually struck him and thrown him down, that such an audacious and successful revolt against his authority had taken place. He rose slowly to his feet, stripped of his power, limp with humiliation.

Rosa, recovering her breath, panted:

“My son, my son, God sent you to save me. He wanted . . . he wanted to kill me. You saw it with your own eyes; he was strangling me!”

“Your mother is an adulteress. I caught her with Yusef. One of his trouser buttons was under her bed,” said Faris Deeb, speaking mechanically, without anger, without emotion, still in a daze and making what he knew was now a feeble and useless defence to his son.

“It’s a lie!” said Rosa. “Yusef came to give me some paraffin for which I had asked him. Your father met him going out. The button wasn’t his.”

“How dare you insult my mother!” said Mitry. “I will strangle *you* if you say that word again!” The victorious rebel, after years of fear, was savouring his new-found courage, fiercely asserting it in defence of his mother.

“He wanted to kill me,” said Rosa, “because I knew who killed the American woman!”

“Just as you killed Nimr,” said Mitry, accusing his father with a look of hate. “That’s what brought me here now; I wanted to see if the rat poison was still in the outhouse. It isn’t.”

“Thank God you came, my son. He would have killed me if you hadn’t been near the house to hear my screams. God and the Holy Virgin sent you.”

“Why did you kill Nimr?” said Mitry. “Because he smelt the body? Where did you bury it?”

“Under the orchard wall,” said Rosa. “Under the big Italian apple tree. He’s confessed everything. He’s told me he killed her.”

“I have confessed nothing,” said Faris Deeb, coldly. “You’ve filled your minds with these fancies because you hate me, both of you.”

“You deny you told me you killed her and were going to kill me too?” said Rosa.

“Yes, I deny it. You were beside yourself and started shouting all sorts of stupid things. I put my hands round your throat to stop the neighbours hearing you.”

“Very well, I will tell the police, and let them find out for themselves.”

“Tell them. Make a fool of yourself. Let the villagers say, ‘Faris Deeb’s wife wanted to get rid of her husband in order to marry her . . . someone else.’ Let them say, ‘She made his own children conspire against him, give false evidence against him’ . . . Fine name you’ll get yourself and your family!”

“Someone’s coming up the path,” said Mitry.

They all listened. There was a knock on the door, and a voice called out inquiringly, “Sitt Rosa? . . . Abu Mitry? . . . Are you there?” It was the voice of Elias Effendi, the police officer. For a few breathless seconds Rosa, Faris Deeb and Mitry remained silent, looking at each other—Faris Deeb impassively, Rosa menacingly, Mitry with a troubled, bewildered expression. Then Faris Deeb answered:

“Yes, Elias Effendi, I am here. Please come in.” He walked out of the bedroom to receive the visitor in the hall. Rosa and Mitry remained behind.

“Good morning, Khawaja Faris,” said Elias Effendi. “I’m sorry to trouble you, but there’s a little matter I had to see you about. I went to your shop, but you were not there, then I saw Yusef going to his garage and he told me I should find you here.”

“You’re welcome,” said Faris Deeb. “Please sit down.”

“What I have to say won’t take a minute,” said the police officer. “It’s about the case of the missing American woman. I’ve just had a call from Captain Jubara in Beirut. He would like you to come to Tripoli so that the waiter at the cabaret may identify you and confirm that you were there till ten o’clock on the evening the woman disappeared. It’s just a matter of routine, you understand, which we have to go through in the course of our inquiries. You said you’d be willing to, didn’t you?”

“Ay, I’m willing. I shall be in Tripoli this afternoon. When do you want me

to come?”

“We can’t be sure of finding the waiter till the cabaret opens. I’ll meet you there at eight o’clock. Will that be convenient to you?”

“Very well.”

“And then, maybe, we could stay for a while and have a look at the show. You’ll be my guest. What say you to that? The Sûreté will pay for it. Expense account!”

“Thank you; it’s very kind of you.”

“Well, I needn’t detain you any longer now. I’ll be going.”

For the first few minutes of this interview Faris Deeb had felt sick with the fear that Rosa might come out and denounce him. But as the time passed and she made no move, his fear was allayed; and he felt the need to reassert himself in a normal way. So he said:

“You must not go before having a cup of coffee,” then he called, “Rosa! come and make coffee for Elias Effendi.” He looked intently at the bedroom door to see her as she came out. No, she would not dare!

“Very well; just five minutes,” said Elias Effendi, “if it’s no trouble.”

“No trouble at all,” said Faris Deeb, keeping his eyes fixed on the door. Rosa came out, without Mitry. She greeted the police officer perfunctorily and went into the kitchen. Faris Deeb and his guest went on exchanging small talk. Rosa made the coffee, and all the time she was thinking, thinking. . . . A plan was forming in her head; it was the only way, the best way. Mitry remained in the bedroom, stunned, not thinking.

When Elias Effendi had drunk his coffee and departed, Faris Deeb and Rosa faced each other, silent for a moment, then Rosa spoke:

“You see that you haven’t satisfied the police. They suspect you.”

“Don’t be a fool. It’s a matter of routine. You heard him say so. The waiter will confirm what I told them.”

“The waiter doesn’t know what happened at the pool at midnight. I know.”

“You will keep your mouth shut, just as you kept it shut when Elias Effendi was here now. You had your chance to tell him, but you didn’t. Why didn’t you?”

“Because I don’t want to disgrace my children; I don’t want to cause them pain if I can help it. But you’re mistaken, Faris Deeb if you think I’m going to live with you another day, or sleep beside you another night, after your trying to kill me.”

“Don’t be foolish, woman, I said! I wasn’t trying to kill you. You made me

angry with your false accusations, and I had to stop you shouting them out to the whole village.”

“They weren’t false accusations. You confessed it yourself.”

“What I said wasn’t true. I was speaking in anger, and I don’t know what I said. You made me say all sorts of things that weren’t true, because you’d put me into a rage. You said, ‘You killed the woman,’ so I said, ‘Very well, I killed her, and now I’m going to kill you!’ That was my temper. Don’t you know it?”

“You think you’re cunning, Faris Deeb, don’t you? You think you can fool me and make me disbelieve all the evidence I have against you, but you can’t! No, you meant to kill me all right, and if God and the Holy Virgin hadn’t sent my son to my rescue when your hands were wringing my neck, I should have been now as dead as the woman under the orchard wall. And if you don’t want to have your own neck broken on the scaffold, you’ll have to leave this house and go away, Faris Deeb.”

“Go where? What nonsense are you talking?”

“I’m not talking nonsense; I’m giving you a chance to save your life and save us all from you; and your son shall hear what I have to say . . . Mitry, come out here!”

Mitry came out of the bedroom, flushed and sombre-looking.

“Yes, Mother?” he said.

“My son,” said Rosa, “you have seen how I spared your father when the police officer was here a moment ago. I spared him for your sake and the sake of your brother and sister. I spared him, but I don’t want to see him again in my life. I have thought of a way in which he can save his neck and protect your good name, if he has any consideration for that. But if he will not take that way, I shall tell the police all I know about the disappearance of the American woman, and I shall accuse him of having tried to murder me too. He can choose. I want him to choose before you now. I cannot live with him another moment, my son.”

“What do you want me to do?” asked Faris Deeb, after a short silence during which he became aware that he had no choice, that refusals and denials were now useless. Rosa spoke with a cold determination from which there was no escape.

“Go to Tripoli,” said Rosa, “and transfer the title deed of the vineyard to your father, and those of the house, the shop and the orchard to me and the children in equal shares. I know you have one thousand, seven hundred pounds in the bank; I have looked at your accounts. You will draw this money out. Take two hundred pounds for yourself, and bring me the rest here—one

thousand and five hundred pounds.”

“Go to hell!” said Faris Deeb. “I will do no such thing.”

“I won’t go to hell; I’ll go to the police, this very instant, and Mitry will come with me. And you’ll go to the scaffold, Faris Deeb.”

“Are you conspiring with your mother against me?” Faris Deeb appealed to his son. “You’re my flesh and blood.”

“Mitry doesn’t want his mother to be murdered,” said Rosa. “He was here in time to save me to-day; he may not be another time. Come, Mitry, let’s go to the police post. Come, my son, protect me!”

“It’s better you listen to my mother,” said Mitry. “She’s trying to save you from something worse than the loss of your property and money. You may have only a short time in which to make your escape, even if we say nothing.”

There was another heavy pause, then Faris Deeb said:

“How do you want me to hand you the money and the title deeds? I thought you didn’t want to see my face again.”

“I will see it for just this one time, but not here; I’m not going to stay in this house alone to be strangled. I shall go and stay with my niece, Selma. You will bring me the title deeds and the money there.”

“What do you want all this money for?” asked Faris Deeb. “All my life’s savings, all that I have in the world!”

“I said you could keep two hundred pounds for yourself.”

“And what would I do with only two hundred pounds?”

“Buy yourself a ticket to West Africa. Go to your brother there; he will keep you. He wanted you to join him at one time. Well, go and join him now; he’ll employ you.”

“Let me take some capital with me; I will give you five hundred pounds. Isn’t that enough for you?”

“No, it isn’t. I want to give Genevieve a dowry, and Mitry his fare to Brazil, and I want to keep some money for myself and for running the shop.”

“If Mitry is going to Brazil, you won’t be able to look after the shop. You’ll ruin yourself and your children.”

“Genevieve and Ramiz will help me look after it.”

“It will take some time to get the ticket and the passport,” said Faris Deeb, striking a last, feeble blow in his rearguard action. “What shall I do till then? Where shall I stay?”

“Stay with your uncle in Tripoli,” said Rosa. “Tell him you’ve got business there.”

“If the police know that I have taken all my money out of the bank and bought a ticket for West Africa, they will suspect me.”

“And is that my fault?” said Rosa. “You’ve got to take your chance—the best chance you have. They will suspect you all right if you stay here until the smell in the orchard reaches high heaven. Why didn’t you think of the danger before you did the deed?”

“I didn’t mean to do it,” he said, looking at his son. “The Devil took me to a precipice, and my foot slipped.”

“But it wasn’t the slip of a foot just now when you wanted to kill me,” said Rosa. “You were quite prepared to have the blood of two murders on your hands. Go! I’m shutting up the house and going to Selma’s. Bring me the money and the papers there.”

Faris Deeb went to Tripoli, floundering in a sea of choppy, broken thoughts, drifting on the surface of emotions which he scarcely felt. Everything around him seemed unreal—the people in the car with him, the scenery on the way, which he had seen week after week all his life, the streets of Tripoli, when he reached it. He was a man without a will, without purpose, going mechanically to perform certain actions, the thought of which seemed so unreal itself as scarcely to affect him. The whole of life seemed suddenly to have become a dream, and in that dream he walked, going to do Rosa's bidding.

First he went to the government department where real property was registered, and there, in the presence of an attorney, he transferred the title deeds of the house and the shop, the vineyard and the orchard to the names of his father and Rosa and the children. He signed the necessary documents as though he were writing someone else's name. Then he went to the bank and drew out his money—seventeen notes of one hundred pounds each; and he put them into his pocket as though they were a few liras for domestic shopping. Lastly, he went to the passport office to fill the necessary forms for his journey to West Africa—West Africa, the journey, the future; all, all unreal. He stood in a gloomy, smelly corridor, where several other people were filling forms, dipping broken nibs into dusty inkpots which had scarcely any ink in them; where other people were crowding at a few small windows in a wooden wall, getting visas or exit permits, collecting the passports for which they had applied some time before, as he was now applying for his. He waited until there was a vacancy at the counter where the forms were being filled, then moved into the gap and began filling in his form. As he was answering the last few questions, he became aware of a heavy perfume he had smelt once before. He looked up, startled, and saw the Egyptian belly dancer smiling coolly at him.

“How's Your Presence?” she said. “It's a pleasure to see you again.”

“I'm well, thank you,” he said quietly, as though speaking to another character in his universal dream.

“You did not honour the cabaret with another visit, as you promised to,” she said, lifting her eyebrows as though in mild reproach.

“No. I've been kept very busy.”

“I'm going back to Egypt to-day; I've come to collect my permit. Is Your

Presence by any chance coming to Egypt too?" The smile become more seductive, as the lips parted and the eyes half-closed.

"No."

"It is my misfortune; we might have met in Cairo."

"The donkey from the mountains," he said remotely, "saw the carrot here; he has no wish to follow it to Egypt. Your Presence will excuse me. . . ."

Leaving the passport office, after his encounter with the dancer, Faris Deeb found his sense of reality returning—returning only to overwhelm him with the purport of what he had done, what Rosa had forced him to do. In his pocket he had the seventeen hundred pounds and the title deeds of all he possessed. In another few hours they would be in Rosa's possession—all but two hundred pounds for the ticket to West Africa; and when he had bought the ticket he would have only a few pounds left—only a few pounds in the whole world! Penniless in West Africa, he would be no better than a servant in his brother's house.

With this thought swelling in his mind, swelling until the pain of it could be endured no longer, Faris Deeb went to the nearest café and ordered a flagon of arak. He sat at a corner table and began to drink. The cool insolence of the Egyptian prostitute seemed a small thing beside the complete shattering of his life, but it stung him with a sharp point of venom. It was there the Devil had taken him first. But for her, his foot would not have slipped down that terrible precipice at the pool. And she was still mocking him! But he had stung her back, he had made her know that she had not been clever enough to fool him, to make him buy her the ring in return for a carrot!

He continued to drink, deriving a little comfort from his little verbal revenge on the Egyptian whore. He was due to meet Elias Effendi at the cabaret at eight o'clock, to have his alibi confirmed. But what was the use of that now? Yet, if he did not want the police to suspect him, if he wanted to be able to go to West Africa . . . West Africa without a penny! Slaves were taken from West Africa in the past. Did he want to go there now, as a slave himself? A fugitive without money and without power, stripped of all he had? How could he live without his property, without the orchard and the vineyard and his profitable business, banished from the village and the home where his power had been feared, leaving that harlot Rosa to sport unafraid in her lover's arms? How could he live like that? Yet, if he wanted to live at all now, these were the terms he must accept. He turned and turned again, in impotent rage, from one alternative to the other, like a caged tiger pacing between its iron walls. There was no escape on either side. If only he had strangled Rosa that morning before her son arrived to throw him down and save her, he would

have eased his heart, and they could have taken and hanged him then; he would not have minded. A man had to die some time or other. But now it was too late. He could not do it now. She would be accompanied, protected; and even if he found her alone, he knew he could not attempt it again. The will in him to kill her had died.

Slowly, the idea of a different revenge began to form in his head—not a revenge of rage and violence, but a cold, calculating revenge like Rosa’s own, a revenge that would hurt her more than death. . . . He drank another glass of arak with the excitement of a celebration. Yes, a man had to die some time. Some died young and some died old, but in the end it was the same for everybody. The important thing was that a man should make his peace with God before dying. He had promised God to do penance, and he would do it, though God had not answered his prayer. “God,” he said, “I promised to do penance for my crime if You saved me from discovery. You did not save me, and if this was a deal on earth, I should not have to keep my side of the bargain; but You are the God of Heaven and Earth, and I cannot argue with You. So, I will keep my promise, and perhaps You will forgive me in the next world, though You have not forgiven me in this.”

Having finished his short prayer and his flagon of arak, he got up and left the café. Instead of waiting to meet Elias Effendi at the cabaret, he hired a car all to himself—a thing he had done only once before in his life—and went back to Barkita. It was nine o’clock when he arrived, and the village was dark save for the little patches of light in the windows and under a few street lamps. Leaving the car, he went to the house of Father Boulos and, as he expected, found the priest at home.

“Welcome, welcome, Abu Mityr. Please come in,” said Father Boulos with concern, imagining that only the need for the last sacrament to be administered to someone in his house would have brought Faris Deeb to him at such a late hour. Perhaps Abu Faris. . . . That would bring him a few pounds for the funeral.

“Thank you, Abuna,” said Faris Deeb, following Father Boulos into his parlour.

“I hope everybody in your house is well,” said Father Boulos. “I was just about to go to bed, but of course, if you need me. . . .”

“No, Abuna, you don’t have to come to the house. Everybody is well; and I shan’t detain you long.”

“Oh, it’s a pleasure to see you, Abu Mityr; you don’t often do me this honour. Please sit down. I will make you a cup of coffee.”

“No, no, please don’t trouble. Coffee at night keeps me awake. I will only

stay a minute, Abuna. I have come to make you a small donation for the Church, and I don't want anyone to know about it except you and God."

"This is the only true charity—the deed done in the dark; what the right hand gives without letting the left hand know about it," said Father Boulos, masking with his pontification the astonishment he felt. "You are not like the Pharisees, Abu Mitry. Your gift will be truly acceptable to God."

Faris Deeb took out his wallet and, making sure that the priest did not see all its contents, extracted a hundred-pound note out of it. That was five times as much as he had promised God. For he needed now to do penance for more than one crime, and he reckoned the extra amount would cover everything.

Father Boulos stared in amazement and, despite his greed and not very strict conscience, was unable to prevent himself from saying:

"Are you sure you haven't made a mistake, Abu Mitry. This is a hundred-pound note!"

"No, I have not made a mistake. It's . . . it's in discharge of a vow I made. Five pounds are for you personally, and the rest for the Church." He was not sure that he could trust Father Boulos not to take more than five pounds for himself. But that was between the priest and God. He himself had done his duty, and God would have heard him.

"This is so generous, I don't know what to say!" said Father Boulos. "But God will requite your beneficence and multiply your possessions. May His peace be upon you, Abu Mitry. May you continue to prosper in all your endeavours."

"Amen!" said Faris Deeb. "Pray for me, Abuna."

"But of course I will. I will say a mass for you to-morrow."

"That will be very kind of you. And now, I must be going. Good night."

"Good night, Abu Mitry. God go with you."

Out in the street again, Faris Deeb walked with firm but unhurried steps toward his orchard. There was no moon, and it was quite dark when he arrived at his destination. The apple trees stood still and shadowy above the inky pool, and the rocks around the water leaned against each other like strange creatures asleep. The whole valley was asleep except for the river. The river never slept, and it would never die. Children played along its banks, then they grew to be men and died. But the river went on. It saw saplings rise from the ground it watered and become trees. But even the trees would die, and still the river would flow, by day and night, making its gurgling noises against the stones.

Faris Deeb reached the edge of the pool and sat on a rock, looking at the

water. . . . No, he would not go to West Africa. He would not let himself be stripped of all he had and live to watch his nakedness. And if Rosa thought she could get his money by threatening him with exposure, by God, he would show her she was mistaken! He could do nothing about the house and the shop, the orchard and the vineyard. Even if he destroyed the altered title deeds, the property would go to his wife and children according to the law of inheritance. But the money, that was different! He would cheat Rosa of it; he would take it with him!

He got up and took out of his pocket the sixteen hundred pounds that were left after he had made his offering to God. He held them, fiercely crumpled in his hand for a moment, thinking of all the years it had taken him to amass that little fortune—all the buying and selling, the hard bargaining, the clever deals, the things he had deprived himself of. It was all there, still in his hand, still his own till the end. And now the end had come for both. Slowly he loosened his fingers, then bent down and put the crumpled banknotes on the ground in a little heap, after which he struck a match and inserted it into the heart of the pyre. He saw the paper catch the flame, and in the light of the brief blaze he watched the words and figures on the notes—watched them glow for an instant, then char and crackle and crumble into ash, sending up tongues of flame that turned into smoke.

He watched the burning till the end, then, with a bitter triumph in his heart, he walked into the pool. He had paddled in the pool as a boy, but he had never gone into deep water in his life. He had heard that death by drowning was not painful, but his mind was so numb now that he was not afraid of pain, did not care what sensation his last moments were going to bring him. His mind was cold and dark like the pool—dark with the memories of what he had done, of what had been done to him; and dark with anticipation of the darkness he was going into. He stepped into the water, as though he was going down a dark staircase, treading carefully to find the steps, to avoid stumbling and falling before he was out of his depth, feeling for footholds among the irregular stones that formed the wall of the pool. He felt the water rising, and his clothes sucking it and becoming heavier around his wetted body with every step he took. He saw the reflection of a star just ahead of him, then his movement sent ripples along the surface, and the reflection danced upon them and was broken. He took another step, then another, and suddenly his feet lost touch with the ground and the water swirled above his head. An instinct, stronger than his will, made him struggle for a moment. He struck at the water wildly with his arms, trying to lift his head above it for another breath, another moment of life. His eyes rose above the surface for a second and, before they went down again, they saw a final spurt of flame go up from the cruel fire he had lit.

# THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Cruel Fire* by Edward Atiyah]