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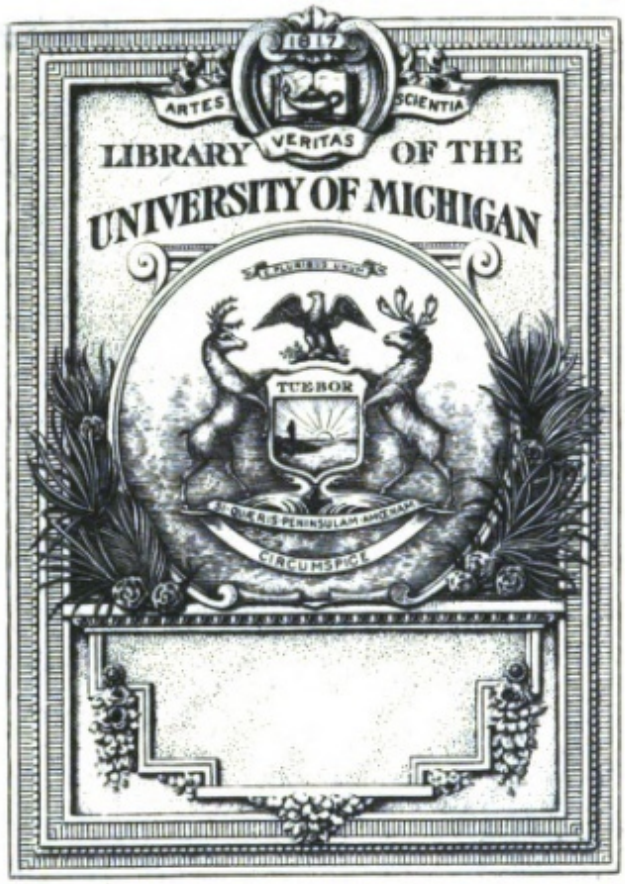

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PROFESSOR OF LATIN

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THE UPFOLD FARM MYSTERY

THE WEDDING CHEST MYSTERY

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Scarecrow

Archibald
A. E. FIELDING

H. C. KINSEY & COMPANY, INC.
NEW YORK, 1937

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CHAPTER I

THE FARM OF THE GOLDEN GOAT

"JACK you're infernally lazy." Florence Rackstraw, hands on narrow hips, looked at Inskipp with an air of impatience. "Come along. The walk back will do you good."

It was now nearly five o'clock.

"I don't need to be done good to," murmured Inskipp, his felt hat tilted over his eyes. "I'm perfect."

"Same here," said Elsie Cameron drowsily. She was seated on the rocks beside him. "Don't let us keep you, Florence."

Florence shot Inskipp an angry look. He caught it and closed his eyes promptly. Her brother joined the little group of three on the Menton promenade.

"Well, haven't we dallied long enough in Babylon?" he asked, shifting a handful of stones to another pocket.

"In Bosio, you mean," chaffed Elsie. Honoré Bosio keeps the best cake shop in Menton, and the Rackstraws loved a good feed.

"Shake a leg, Inskipp," adjured Rackstraw. "I want to discuss an episode in Haroun with you."

Inskipp yawned. The two were writing a scenario. They were to share the profits of the film between them, and each talked as though they had a gold mine under their hats.

"Haroun is tired," announced Inskipp firmly. "Very tired. He won't be at home to visitors

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until to-morrow. Besides, Elsie and I are going to drive up to the farm with Norbury."

"You are an idler," said Florence with a nip-in of her thin lips, as, with a wave of the hand that looked angry instead of friendly, she led the way at a good pace along the *Promenade du Midi* to where the road started that would bring them after a three hours' ramble to Norbury's farm, La Chèvre d'Or, high up in the hills behind Menton. The four were his paying guests.

Elsie and Inskipp watched them disappear.

"There, but for the grace of God——" murmured Inskipp unctuously.

"I don't think any one should be as ugly as those two are," said Elsie. She spoke meditatively, objectively. She was an artist, and, incidentally, a very pretty girl.

And as though to give her another look at them, the brother and sister suddenly reappeared, walking briskly towards them. As usual, Florence Rackstraw was in the lead. She was very tall. Her head was too large for her bony body, and seemed to be all face, a face the colour of mottled mahogany. Her hair, straight as that of a mouse, was looped in two curtains over her ears and gathered into a tight little bun on her long, scraggy neck. Her eyes protruded. Her chin retreated. Her nose was hooked. Her mouth consisted of two thin, pale lines that slanted up to one side.

Her brother resembled her closely, with rougher features, and a still harsher voice. He, too, had her air of absolute self-satisfaction.

"As you're driving with Norbury, take these up for us, will you?" The coats were tossed at the two before they could reply. Then the Rackstraws wheeled and strode off once more.

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"You're treading on dangerous ground when you talk of ugliness to me," said Inskipp meaningly. And he certainly could not be considered handsome.

"But you're honest," objected Elsie at once. "You're straight. You can't be ugly when you look that. That's what I'm trying to get at, I think, that it doesn't matter if you *look* ugly, as long as you don't look as though you really *were* ugly—you yourself—in yourself."

"That's a bit difficult to grasp," said Inskipp with a grin that showed his strong teeth. "That's too much in Laroche's line for me." Laroche was a Frenchman, a writer of psychological studies, who was also staying at the Golden Goat.

"What I mean is that I think only ugly thoughts can make faces so plain. The Rackstraws look mean and malicious—and I think they are both those things."

She spoke with her eyes on the incredible blue of the sea in front of her. Inskipp altered his position to face her more directly. He was a young man, and Florence Rackstraw had made a dead set at him when he had first come to the farm two months ago. He had drifted into a quasi intimacy with her before he saw his danger and struck out for safety.

"They're very intelligent," said Inskipp a trifle awkwardly. "Very clever."

"They are," agreed Elsie in a tone that said that that quality counted for little. "But they could be very dangerous, both of them."

"In what way?" he asked.

"I haven't the faintest idea," was the prompt reply. "I don't reason about people. I feel them."

"And never, never make a mistake," he finished with mock solemnity.

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"Never when I dislike people. It sounds cynical, but it's true. It's only when I like people that I may be all wrong."

They were lounging on the *Promenade du Midi*, that broad walk that runs along the sea at Menton, sometimes with neither parapet nor railing to protect it from the water. A grand walk when the sea is rough, and the green waves come roaring in over the foundations of the wall. White wings were wheeling and circling over their heads. One gull, more adventurous than his mates, nipped the bread from Inskipp's fingers in his swift glide past, banked—a lovely flash of silver—and came back for more. The hot sun flooded everything. The air was cool and fresh. The sea ran in broad washes of deep blue and bright green. The sky was the true sky of Menton, high, and blue, and soft, and deep. The donkey and ponies, kept at a corner of the casino for children to ride, stamped a little. They were as bored as Inskipp felt. A few notes from the orchestra playing outside the casino reached them. It was all like a scene at a theatre, Inskipp thought, something which he watched, but in which he had no part. As for Elsie, she was at grips with a curious, a quite contrary feeling to his. It was as though something were trying to rouse her to a sense of the moment's importance. She got up, ostensibly the better to watch the gulls whirl overhead, in reality to give herself room. What was this sudden impulse which was sweeping through her as the gulls swept through the air around her—an impulse to fight and win the man beside her, a sudden awareness of powers within her which, if used—of qualities which, if shown—would draw John Inskipp to her side and keep him there. He was a

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lonely man. She knew herself to be his complement. Should she make him realise this? She could. She knew that she could. What she did not know was that the fate of Inskipp depended on that moment—that Atropos with her shears paused for a second to wait for her. Had she obeyed her innermost craving Inskipp would have been saved. But, unfortunately, Elsie came of a race of women who were won, not who did the winning. She told herself the truth, that she cared for him much more than he did for her. She flung off the odd feeling that the moment held some opportunity which would never come again—and turned to see a man hurrying towards them along the promenade.

"Here's Du-Métri," she said in a welcoming voice.

"Two-Yards" was the nickname of the Norburys' factotum. A tall wiry figure, he came swinging along the Promenade from the nearby *Halles*. "Ohé!" he hailed, and waved a long, lean arm. Elsie liked the man. Two-Yards was a character. She sat smiling as he strode up and made a jerky little bow. "Il padrone sends this message," he said, drawing himself erect. "Not to wait for him here, as he must go to Gorbio. He will have to pick you up at the old Carnolès Olive Mill."

Two-Yards looked as though carved from pliable teak, his features were so salient, his colouring so uniform and dark a brown. His lean, clean-shaven face was good looking, with regular features, and dark eyes that were at once keen and veiled. He knew every star that hung in the Menton heavens, and he knew their courses, the hour of their rising and the time of their setting. He knew all the flowers of the fields, and the birds in the woods, as he knew his own herds. Born in the hills behind Hyères, Two-Yards was steeped in Provençal

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legends and folk-lore. It was from him that Inskipp had first heard the legend of Haroun, the Moslem Corsair who had turned Christian for love of a captive maid.

"Are you coming up to the Mill, too?" Inskipp asked.

Two-Yards threw up his chin in sign of negation. He had still some purchases to make for the farm, and would follow later in the day in the farm cart. His eyes on the horizon, he stood a minute looking out to sea.

Leaning far out of a boat painted green and yellow, a fisherman was beating the waves with all his strength, and at the full stretch of his long arms.

"To drive the fish into the net," Two-Yards said in reply to Elsie's inquiring look.

"Is there anything you don't know, Du-Métri?" she asked him.

"Yes. I don't know who gives my Sabé her silk handkerchiefs," he said suddenly.

Sabé—short for Isabella—was his daughter. She was a flirt, and Du-Métri was a Spartan parent.

"Well, I must be off." And he took his cap off again, while Elsie laughed silently.

The two caught the next Gorbio bus and were whirled along to the old mill at its opening.

Green and cool and very lovely, the road wound past gardens where geraniums hung in thick mounds the size of cartwheels on the stone walls, or climbed half-way up the trunks of the palms, where roses and carnations filled the air with fragrance, where the bougainvillea covered walls and roofs with its magnificent purple. They got out at the Old Mill and sat down to wait for Norbury on the rocks which dot the entrance to the little hamlet. The

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ruined Maulesséna Castle was to one side, the great new sanatorium was hidden by a group of olive trees fifty feet high. Where they were sitting, they had pines on one side and palms on the other. It was typical of this corner of the world. The rustle of the palm fronds sounded like heavy rain in the breeze. Below them lay Menton looking what architecturally, as well as historically, it was—pure Italian, as it curved around the Gulf of Peace, a horseshoe of emerald and cobalt. Eastward, two lines of lavender and violet mountains carried the eye to Bordighera, whose houses glittered like dice on the farthermost spur of land. Up here, one even caught a glimpse of the Gulf of Genoa on the other side of the first line of purple hills, like a stroke of sapphire. To the west, the green ridge of Cap Martin ran an arm into the sea with one white hotel catching the light.

Elsie drew a deep breath. Things must surely come right between her and Inskipp in such a world. And if that was not to be, then beauty such as this can fill the heart like love. The sunshine flooded all her being, luminous and strong and vital.

She crumbled some of the earth between her fingers. "It's wonderful soil. You've heard, of course, of the man who, by an oversight, left his umbrella sticking in the ground hereabouts. When he went to look for it a week later, he found it a small tree in full bloom."

Inskipp laughed outright.

"Did Two-Yards tell you that one?"

"No. Mr. Norbury." Getting to her feet, she looked about her, her felt hat in her hand.

"I don't think there's anything in the world more beautiful, in its own way, than is this region." Her eyes were shining, her whole little face alight

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and glowing. It was a whimsical, irregular face under a mop of tawny hair that had streaks of red, like flames, in it.

"I suppose not." After a pause Inskipp added: "But it doesn't mean anything to me. Does it to you?"

"Mean?" She was puzzled, and her transparent, candid face showed it.

He made a vague gesture. "It's lovely—as a set scene at a theatre is lovely. But it's not real—to me. Palms—they can't take the place of beeches. I'd rather look at an oak than an olive, any day——"

"And you'd rather watch rain than sunshine—is that it?" she laughed. "Nothing like patriotism!"

But he was not laughing.

Inskipp's sallow face was a melancholy one. Something about it suggested the seeker who had never yet even caught sight of anything worthy of his search, the visionary who had never yet had a vision. In age, he was under thirty.

His brow was narrow and low, not the brow of a clever, or even of a well-read, man. His dark, deep-set eyes were his best feature; they were unsatisfied looking, but well cut and well opened. His nose was thin, with generous nostrils, his mouth also suggested generosity as well as firmness, his chin was dogged and masterful. Elsie's quick eyes had put it down correctly as the face of a dreamer; but Inskipp did not look at all like a dreamer who could not be wakened. You might fool him without any great difficulty, possibly, but most assuredly you would have to pay for it afterwards if he learnt the truth. He was under medium height and slenderly built, with a narrow chest which was the reason for his being out of England. A bad attack

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of pneumonia had sent him to Menton, and a chance stroll up among the hills had suddenly brought him, some eight weeks ago, to a low Provençal farmhouse. Twin cedars stood at the gateway—one standing for *Prosperity*, one for *Peace*. Its roof was of the red, fluted Provençal tiles, its garden hedges were of rosemary and juniper and lavender.

Inskipp had spelled out the farm's name on the gate, and wondered at it : *La Domaine de la Chèvre d'Or*. Two-Yards had seen him, and promptly asked him to hold the gate open for a pig which was intent on double-crossing him. In the pig-hunt which followed, Inskipp, Two-Yards, the pig, and a tall, rangy man of middle age who swore heartily in English, all got thoroughly well mixed up. When the pig was back where he belonged, instead of where he wanted to be, the Englishman introduced himself as the owner of the farm, and asked Inskipp in to taste some of his new wine. Inskipp met the other guests who were staying at the place, and had promptly arranged with Two-Yards to fetch his things from below. He had not regretted it. The farm was simple, but it was cheap, and the scenery was magnificent.

Inskipp liked Mrs. Norbury, too. So did Elsie Cameron, who had been at the farm since early spring. She, also, had to spend the winter in warm and sheltered nooks, and the farm was securely tucked away alike from Bise or Mistral.

Norbury's yodel came ringing down the green valley above them. Inskipp answered with one of Two-Yards' strange shouts. Such a shout as the Provençal herdsmen give at dawn and at nightfall. A shout which has come down from the Phœnicians, said Laroche. It stirs the hearer strangely. Some

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old tumult of the blood beyond our present-day reason or understanding answers it. Elsie never listened to it without a feeling that the enemy tribes were at the stockade, that javelins were flying around her.

Norbury drew up his Ford close to them.

He was a big, sunburnt man in the early forties, with a pleasant enough but very non-committal face, out of which would come at times a glance, chill and keen as a north-easter.

They clambered in over bags of flour, sugar and salt. Then they were off.

"How's the marketing been?" asked Inskipp as they had to slow down for a herd of cows.

"So-so," was the reply. "They say the weather is going to break. Hope it won't, or it'll be a bad look-out for my oranges."

Norbury had not many oranges on his farm, but he overlooked no source of profit, and an orange-tree bears easily three thousand oranges in twelve months, and choice ones yield four times that.

It did not take long to reach his *Domaine*, or farm, and for a moment the three of them looked down at a sea of grey-green olives which hid the lemons and vines planted below them.

Norbury's chief source of income was from his lemon-trees. The Mentonais claim that Eve's last act when leaving Paradise was to pick a lemon to carry with her. She decided to give it to the most beautiful country which she and Adam should find on their wanderings. When she came to Menton, she flung it on a terrace, telling it to grow and multiply and turn the land into another Garden of Eden, which—according to the legend—it promptly proceeded to do.

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Norbury called for a couple of the farm hands to help him unload the car, while Elsie and Inskipp walked round a corner to the house. As they did so, a good-looking young couple came sauntering up to the open door. The woman in front, with something very graceful, though weary, in her gait. Edna Blythe always walked like that, though she never seemed to go farther than the nearest sunny corner. She was a tall, slender woman, not pretty, exactly, but with something about her rather sad, very bored-looking face that suggested that she could be pretty if she chose. She was fair, with fine brown eyes, and a low forehead. Her features were well cut. A straight nose, a small, curiously tight mouth which yet looked as though when relaxed it could be very sweet, an obstinate little chin, and a firm jaw. Her hands were nervous and suggested illness.

Her brother, who followed her in, was tall and fair, too. Otherwise there was no resemblance between them.

Mrs. Norbury joined them with one of her ginger cakes which she wanted to put out of doors to dry off. She rated Norbury sharply for letting the car cut across the grass. Inskipp sometimes fancied that her big burly husband was a little afraid of his dot of a wife, and indeed Mrs. Norbury could be very forthright and unbending at times. There had been that affair of the Italian count and the lady he called his wife just after Inskipp's own arrival. Mrs. Norbury had learnt from the young man himself that he and his companion were not yet married, though they intended to have this done soon. The car took the two down to Menton the same day, Mrs. Norbury driving, and looking calm and unflustered, in spite of the fact that the count and

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future countess on the back seat seemed to have turned into two geysers.

"If you tolerate a thing, you aid it," was her only comment on the matter, in answer to a chaffing remark of Rackstraw's, who thought her attitude distinctly comic.

She asked Inskipp and Elsie about Menton as she carefully set the cake level.

"It was very close," said Inskipp, "and very enervating."

"As always——" threw in Elsie.

"And as always," he went on, "full of Voronoff's patients, or would-be patients."

"We women score when it comes to old age," said Mrs. Norbury meditatively. "We accept it more placidly."

"Not while there's a paint-pot to be had!" retorted Elsie, laughing.

"A woman has to accept so much," Mrs. Norbury maintained, "that old age seems a trifle." She spoke bitterly. Her voice was bitter, too. But, then, Mrs. Norbury did not have a pleasant voice at any time. Over the telephone, that tester of tone, it sounded very hard always, and could sound distinctly grating.

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CHAPTER II

INSKIPP HEARS OF MIREILLE, AND LEARNS WHAT THE GOLDEN GOAT STANDS FOR

FOR Inskipp, the next fortnight was one of outward peace and inward battle. He won. At the end of the time Florence Rackstraw treated him as a very unpleasant insect, and Inskipp was glad. He had found it harder than he thought to get out of the atmosphere of the suitor in which Florence had very subtly wrapped him and all his words. He had had to be really rude at the last to cut the cord which, she insisted, linked them. Elsie had watched his struggles with approval, but with no overt help. She told herself that, as he had got himself into the false position, he must get out of it by himself, too. But when he was out, he was no nearer to Elsie.

One night, when the other men were off helping to drive some young bulls to Castellar, whence they were going to be sent to Arles and Nimes for the bull fights, he and Mrs. Rackstraw had sat talking on the verandah. Oddly enough, Mrs. Rackstraw had been Inskipp's secret ally in the struggle with her daughter. Inskipp had thought more than once that she had no love for either of her children. Had he known the story of her life with their father, and how much these two resembled that unpleasant gentleman, now dead and buried, he would not have been astonished. As it was, after Inskipp, beguiled by the singing of the nightjar in a nearby tree, and by Mrs.

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Rackstraw's words on companionship had drifted into what was practically a description of his ideal woman, Mrs. Rackstraw had said significantly :

" I know a girl who fits that description of yours, Mr. Inskipp. All but the loveliness, which you think means a beautiful soul—and that's Elsie Cameron."

Florence Rackstraw, who had slipped unnoticed into a chair in the corner, sat very still.

Inskipp was amused. How little people understood, he thought. Here had he been indiscreet enough to give a glimpse of his heart's ideal, and what he showed had been identified with Elsie Cameron ! Elsie was a nice girl, a very nice girl. He would be a lucky chap who would win her one day for his wife ; but as to her resembling the dream creature he had described—— Inskipp gave a suppressed smile, then he made for his own room. He wanted to jot down his impressions of the herd of bulls this evening as they had gone roaring, stamping, snorting down the valley. Just such an incident could have happened at the castle of Anna's father—Anna was the Christian maid who had converted Haroun to Christianity, said the tale. Inskipp had never up till now written anything, but he was bored at the farm, and boredom is the best incentive to writing.

He had worked for about an hour, when a knock came at his door.

In answer to his curt " *Entrez,*" Florence Rackstraw came in.

" I've got something that would fit wonderfully into your film," said Florence. " It's in a book on Provence castles—an old French book that I picked up in Menton last time we were there. I've been reading it."

A week ago Inskipp would have made an excuse

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but she had altered—she had retired defeated, and he followed her without another thought to the large room which the Rackstraws used as a sitting-room.

"Light your pipe, and I'll get it," said Florence as she stepped on to her own bedroom. "Matches are on the mantel——" she called back. Her tone was friendly, though detached.

Inskipp strolled to the fireplace, where some logs of olive wood were still smouldering.

He suddenly picked up a photograph standing by the clock. He had never seen it there before. He had never seen it anywhere before. This lovely oval. This beautiful small head set so proudly on its slender shoulders.

He still had it in his hand when Florence came back.

"Isn't she beautiful? She's my greatest pal! And she wants to go into a convent when she has secured her divorce!"

"It's the loveliest face I have ever seen," he said slowly.

"And as good as she is beautiful," Florence said warmly. "I want her to come here. It would do Mireille good to have to interest herself in the affairs of this life for a while. She is too unworldly."

"Mireille?" Inskipp repeated questioningly. What a charming name, he thought.

"Yes. Mireille de Pra is her name. Madame de Pra. She was married some three years ago, but she never lived with her husband. He had a fit as they were walking down the aisle after the wedding; he rolled right off the steps, they say—I wasn't there—and for a while they thought he was dead. But unfortunately he wasn't. For when he came round finally he was raving mad, and has remained mad ever since. Isn't it terrible!"

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"It's a crime—marriage such as that!" Inskipp was fairly stuttering.

"I have another photograph of her. Would you like to see it?"

Florence felt in a drawer and handed him a portrait as lovely as the other, if not more so, for it showed a figure as beautiful as was the face. It showed the same girl—she looked barely nineteen—in what seemed to be a convent garden bending over a great spread of Madonna lilies. Inskipp's heart contracted, and expanded, and did all sorts of queer things inside him.

He said nothing, only looked at the two photographs.

"She has to stay in the convent in Brittany for the present," Florence went on. "But, then, frankly I'm not keen on Harry meeting her. He isn't her sort at all, and it might spoil our friendship. I usually keep these photographs safely tucked away for that reason. He doesn't know about her, and—well, I don't see why he should. He may have left here before she comes."

She put the photographs carefully into a drawer. Then she showed him the book with the descriptions of the old castle that had interested her. Inskipp barely understood what she was saying, but he thanked her effusively, and, taking the book, went out of the room, his head in a whirl. He felt like a man who has most unexpectedly stumbled on a treasure. A sense of excitement filled him, an impatience for the weeks to pass till that wonderful creature should stand before him in the flesh as she stood in the photograph. He felt as though the world were a marvellous place, as though to each of us had been offered a ticket in a wonderful lottery. The feeling stayed with him next morning

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when he woke up. But as he dressed, and when he sat down to his writing, doubts began to rise. He told himself not to be a fool. Girls such as that one in the photographs would not give him a second glance. Or even one. He laughed aloud in scorn at his ugly, dull self.

"Glad you're in such a cheerful mood, Inskipp," said a voice behind him. "The fact is, I was wondering whether you would help me out again—just for the next few days. I don't like to keep the Norburys waiting."

Rackstraw had come in through a side door.

Inskipp took out his pocket-book. A bit over two hundred francs should settle Rackstraw's debt to the Norburys. Inskipp was anything but a wealthy man, but he had set aside a thousand pounds for odds and ends when he had invested the remainder of his money. So far, he had spent very little of it. Money could not buy happiness—could not prevent acute loneliness, for bought companionship is no companionship. Inskipp had tried that out thoroughly already.

"I'd ask the Norburys to let it run on for a bit," Rackstraw said, "but they're having a hard time to make ends meet, let alone lap."

Inskipp said that this was news to him.

Rackstraw made a little face.

"It wouldn't be if you slept in my room. Mrs. Norbury wants the money back that she put into the farm, and Norbury can't run to it."

Inskipp handed over the notes now, but he had an uncomfortable feeling that Rackstraw was meditating a further request for a loan. Something biggish. He fancied that Rackstraw had been trying to get up his courage for it for some days.

He slipped away out of doors. The orange trees

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were too compact and tidy for his taste. Inskipp preferred lemon trees. By the back door was a charming specimen. A sudden desire to paint it came over him. He could sketch in an amateurish way in water-colours, and he went indoors now for his sketching-block, and box of colours. He chose his pencil carefully, and set to work.

Not for him was the one-line of the real artist, but by patient work he achieved a very accurate drawing of the little tree. Its beauty grew on him as he studied it. Its airy grace, the delicate spacing of its fine leaves which decorate but never hide branch or fruit. Its shape as it grows older is much like that of a pear tree, but the abundant, daffodil yellow fruit hangs so clear of branch or leaf, that it seems to be backed only by the bright blue of the sky, and against that sky the effect is enchanting.

Inskipp enjoyed the work. Unlike the writer, the artist, however poor, finds that if he is patient he enters into a life within life, a world within the world. Colours become more than something seen by the eye—they have a meaning—they have a magic——

Inskipp decided to put in the kitchen door, the maize field with its tassels and the scarecrow that stood in one corner, and a tiny lemon sapling which grew at the base of the second lemon tree, with its little fruit the size of an acorn, but perfect in colour and shape, dotted like fairy lamps all over the slender branches.

"*Tiens!* You sketch? Well, perhaps?" It was Monsieur Laroche, sipping a glass of Chateauneuf du Pape. As for the local stuff, Laroche maintained that it was not wine at all, but merely vinegar in the making.

Monsieur Laroche repeated his remark. His

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mother had been Irish, and he spoke English as though born in Dublin.

"Why should I not sketch?" Inskipp asked, putting his drawing away.

Laroche had a way of making him feel as though he were under a microscope, than which there is no sensation more distasteful to a Briton.

"I agree that it is in character." Ah, there he was again! Laroche could talk by the hour on what was in a man's character and what was not.

Miss Blythe came towards them.

"Has the noon-gun gone yet?" she asked.

They all set their watches by the cannon fired from Menton fort.

Inskipp thought she had a pretty but rather vacant face. She was very dull to talk to, very heavy in conversation, and she had a habit, which embarrassed him, of listening with her eyes rivetted intently on the speaker, as though she would never see him again, and the memory of each feature and of each expression might make all the difference to her own future.

The gun boomed. Miss Blythe set her watch, and passed on.

"What's *her* character?" he asked Laroche under his breath as the Frenchman stared meditatively after her.

"Ah!" said Laroche between his teeth. "That is the thing she hides with all her skill. But I have my ideas!"

Inskipp was amused. Poor quiet, dull Miss Blythe!

"I can't think what you see of interest in her," he said truthfully.

"I see a most uncommon sight," said Laroche almost sadly. "I see a person afraid of themselves.

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Yes, just that. Not, as I thought, merely afraid to show herself to others, but afraid of some weakness—or some impulse—in herself. I suspect drink," he said finally.

" Mind you," said the writer apologetically, " that is only a guess. Chiefly because of the choice of this farm. No temptations here. Mr. Norbury keeps no cellar. His *eau de vie* is only useful as an embrocation." The farm had its own still, a perfectly respectable farmhouse appurtenance in France, where every windfall finds its way ultimately into it. " I wish I could clear her up," he added ; " but it might take years."

" How about asking her brother ? " suggested Inskipp.

The Frenchman considered a moment, then he shook his head. " I think not. He is born a bully under his varnish of the public school. And, by the way, how he avoids saying what school he was at."

A sound of voices made them look up. Rackstraw and Du-Métri were walking together towards them. Mrs. Norbury was behind them.

" Another painter ! Here's Du-Métri with a pot." Laroche stepped aside to avoid its swing.

" For the Golden Goat," said Two-Yards, with a gleam of his strong teeth, making for the gate, where he began to repaint the name. As he did so, he started one of his songs of which the refrain was :

Apres aco, su anac. (After which I left.)

Laroche listened to it with delight. He wondered what Mrs. Norbury would say if she could understand the words of the Rabelaisian old ditty.

Mrs. Norbury, as it happened, was thinking of the painting that was being done, not of the song.

" I do so dislike the farm's name." She looked at the gate frowningly. " I wanted to change it to

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Lou Lavandou, or *Las Mimosas*. Provençal names, too, both of them, but you can't change things in Provence. Not even though the last owner was gored to death in a field over there by one of his bulls."

"But the name wouldn't alter the luck, surely." Inskipp's voice was amused.

"It's supposed to be unlucky," said Mrs. Norbury shortly, turning back into the house; "but my husband doesn't believe in luck."

"I thought *La Chèvre d'Or* is a beneficent creature who guards the hidden treasures left by the Saracens," said Elsie, who, together with Rackstraw, had come out after Mrs. Norbury.

"And I thought he was the defender of Provençal relics, butting away the archæologist who got too close to anything interesting," said Rackstraw.

"One of its duties, certainly," allowed Laroche. "That Chèvre d'Or is evidently in the pay of the Department of Public Works. But he has another side. A more mysterious side. He is also The Unattainable. The Impossible-to-realise. And to see *that* Chèvre d'Or is to die shortly afterwards."

"They would get that side of him from the Greeks, who settled all this part of the coast and built their temples and theatres here," said Rackstraw, who was an archæologist.

"Yes, in many places he is Pan. But he is other things, too. A blending of many old superstitions." Laroche made a gesture as the luncheon bell sounded. "Unless you are a Provençal—and even then—it is better to leave the mysterious creature alone."

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CHAPTER III

INSKIPP WRITES TO MIREILLE, AND AN ACCIDENT HAPPENS TO FLORENCE

By the end of the month Inskipp was corresponding with the beauty of the photograph. It came about through Florence having come down one morning with her hand and arm in a sling. A bad attack of neuritis, she called it. She sought him out later in his room, and explained that she was sending some flowers to her friend Mireille de Pra, and now could not write the letter for her birthday that should go with them. She did not care to ask her mother to do it for her, for, as Inskipp knew, she did not want Harry to get to know Mireille, and she could not ask her mother to keep the letter a secret.

"He would fall in love with her. She would loathe him. And our friendship would never be the same again," she said for the second time. "Would you write a letter to my dictation?" she asked, and Inskipp, trying not to flush with pleasure, said he would be happy to do so.

"It must go by the afternoon's post," she told him, and suggested three o'clock for the work, but at two she looked in to his room to say that she had a raging toothache, and was going to drive down to Menton to have the tooth out. Would he write instead, and explain that she—Florence—had a bad attack of neuritis? Mireille knew that she was subject to them.

Inskipp had spent a whole afternoon over the

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letter until it was a monument of the stilted and the stiff.

He received a charming reply, but all too short.

As a reply to this reply, Inskipp ventured to send a basket of mimosa, accompanied by a little very carefully written note entirely about Florence and the farm.

He received another charming letter, and a very delightful correspondence started, though on Madame de Pra's part the letters were all too brief, and not very frequent. Yet, even so, they brought an unaccustomed look of happiness to Inskipp's face.

In the first ones, Madame de Pra had written as to an elderly man—an invalid—and Inskipp had hardly dared speak of his real age, but he had done so. The interval that followed this had been longer than the first one, and the next letter from Mrs. de Pra was very short and stiff, but that coolness was now wearing off, and when they met it would be without awkward explanations. As to when that meeting would be, Mireille said that when she had finally obtained her divorce she wanted a long change up on the hills that she knew so well. Florence had told Inskipp that Mireille was born in the Esterels, the daughter of a small proprietor named Briancard, a scholarly man, who had paid too much attention to his books and too little to his land. His wife, an Englishwoman, had died a year after the marriage of Mireille, their only child, and Madame de Pra was now an orphan.

Florence made no secret of her hope that Mireille could eventually come to the farm, and Inskipp made no secret of his sharing that hope. He wondered how he could ever have disliked Florence as he had just before his break with her. Evidently he had taken her far too seriously. Evidently it

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had just been a whim of hers—passing—quickly forgotten—to try to make a fool of him.

Even at the time of his break with her he had thought that it was love of domination rather than affection. He was sure of it now. Yet there was another side to Florence, and this morning it was very charmingly in evidence. She had used some phrase that had startled him, for it was word for word what Mireille had written him in his last letter. Seeing his start, Florence had at once explained that she had heard the sentence from Mireille herself apropos of the bond between a writer and his pen. And from that she had gone on to talk of Mireille in a way that enchanted him. He diffidently told her what her friend's letters meant to him, what character, what heart they revealed. Florence listened with a very soft look on her face—a look that touched him.

"I believe you would have fallen in love with her from her letters, even if you had never seen her picture," she said finally, turning away to choose her gloves.

"No," Inskipp said honestly, for the vision of that lovely face was ever with him. And on that he now ventured to ask her if he might have one of the photographs of Madame de Pra which she had. Florence refused absolutely and curtly. Inskipp told himself that he had roused her jealousy as a friend. But Florence explained that she would feel it to be treachery to Mireille to hand on her picture to any one else. "But if you ask her, she might send you one. Perhaps a later one still," Florence said, turning at the door. And Inskipp realised afresh how ugly she was.

He thought of what Elsie had said. Theoretically he, too, held that faces are records of thoughts and

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emotions, but poor Florence's face was surely just a freak of nature.

"Upon my word, Inskipp," said Laroche, as he and Rackstraw came on him a moment later. "I think you have had a glimpse of golden hoofs and horns, eh? You look as though you had. If so, beware!"

Inskipp flushed.

"I think he has seen *Mireille*," suggested Rackstraw with a grin. "I don't mean the film of that name; I meant the damsel herself."

"Then you *have* met her?" Inskipp said instantly.

The two men roared their amusement in great peals. As for Elsie, she had gone on into the house.

"*Touché!*" Laroche ejaculated, laughing afresh. "Ah, *Mirèio!* If a lady is the reason, then indeed——!" And he threw up his hands.

"What are you two talking about?" Inskipp was vexed. "You mention a lady's name whom I don't think you know?" He looked at Rackstraw questioningly. "And you and Laroche seem to think I've made a special-sized joke."

Rackstraw hastened to apologise. "Sorry, my dear chap, sorry! I don't know the lady. I merely mentioned the name of Mistral's famous heroine as a chance explanation for your look of general content these days. I've evidently hit some mark."

"Mistral? That's the damned wind that gives every one the pip, surely?"

"It's also the name of the great Provençal poet —Frédéric Mistral. Or was," Laroche explained. "His *Mirèio* is a Provençal epic. Though personally I prefer *Calandau*. But Miréio is Provençal for Mireille, the name of his heroine, a name used long before his day for any pretty girl."

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"I only meant that you must have met some village charmer—no offence, Inskipp." Rackshaw was feeling very amiable this morning.

Inskipp was already appeased. He was glad to be assured that Harry Rackstraw had never met his sister's lovely friend, and he hummed to himself as he too went indoors.

These were the days of the grape harvest. The weather was ideal. The sunshine poured down on the vineyards, the countryside rang with the singing and laughing of the grape gatherers; yet Norbury looked very glum, and said openly that but for his guests he would not have been able to carry on. Only Mrs. Norbury, apparently unruffled as ever, cheery as ever, saw to the housekeeping with undiminished efficiency.

"If Mrs. Norbury feels so cheerful, I needn't be in a hurry to pay last month's accounts," Rackstraw said to his sister.

"Mother left you the money to settle for her," said Florence with a sudden frown. "Where's the receipt? I'm writing to her. I'll enclose it."

Mrs. Rackstraw had decided to go to a married daughter in Rhodesia who had had a bad accident and was stranded with no one but a couple of children to help her. It was not money but physical help that was needed. The mother had left over a week ago. Florence had refused to accompany her. She had a tiny income of her own, and the expenses here at the farm were low enough to let her live on it without working. She was by profession a librarian, and had worked as such in South Africa, where she was born.

"I'm writing to her, too. I'll send it." Her brother spoke shortly.

"I don't believe you've paid up yet Mother

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ought to have given the money to me," Florence said in her most superior tone.

"You'd have forgotten to settle, in your new campaign against Inskipp," he retorted.

"My new campaign?" she asked loftily, arranging her hair.

"My dear girl, I've known you for over thirty years, remember! Those letters to that old witch in Rennes, Mademoiselle—what was her name—the housekeeper who used to be at that awful boarding-house in Paris when we were there. Don't you suppose I know you're up to something? And something which will pay Inskipp out?"

There was a short silence, while Florence chose a walking stick. She was off for a long scramble.

"Whatever you're at, has slowed up his output," Rackstraw said, lighting a cigarette.

She smiled a slow, very unpleasant smile. By Jove, Flo was plain, Rackstraw thought as he caught it. How on earth she ever expected to marry——

"He'll be writing better than ever soon," she promised in a curiously amused voice.

"I didn't say anything about its quality—quantity, too, counts. As a matter of fact, in the last scene of his he got the love-talk far better than in his opening one."

"Well, there you are!" said Florence, laughing a little under her breath.

"What can you have done that makes him look as though he had been left a million?" persisted her brother. "And who is this friend of his called Mireille?"

"How should I know? Mireille? . . . Sounds a fancy name," she said innocently.

He gave her a suspicious look, but she began to sing in her hard, nasal voice, and led the way

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through the garden. She and Blythe were walking over to Castillon. Rackstraw was off for Menton, there to be rowed out to the *Baoussé Roussé*, the famous Red Cliffs just over the Italian border where fifty thousand years ago paleolithic man lived—in bodily shape very much like his descendants, where the women wore shell bracelet jewellery very much such as can be bought at the local fairs.

The other two might join him later on, and all three come home together, or they might not get so far. Rackstraw never waited for any one.

Since Inskipp's resolute withdrawal, Florence had turned her attention to Blythe, with what success it was hard to say. Certainly Edna Blythe seemed pleased. Edna was an indolent person who spent long hours extended in a deck chair in the garden.

Whenever visitors came in for a drink, and they were fairly frequent these fine days, and she was out in the garden, she would envelope herself in a *Times* until the visitors had been shown to their rooms. Once, Inskipp happened to pick up her paper after it had been serving her for some time as a screen, and was amused to find its centre neatly pierced by a large pinhole. So that wrapped-up aspect concealed quite a good observation hole; but he dropped the paper again without giving the matter a second thought.

Blythe could be heard now calling: "Miss Rackstraw! Miss Rackstraw!"

His sister looked up and chaffed them as they set out, lunch in their shoulder-bags, stout sticks in their hands. Florence laughed back at her, and waved her hand to Inskipp up in his window.

He promptly sat down and started a letter to Madame de Pra far away in Rennes. A very humble letter, asking her if she could let him have a photo-

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graph of herself. He did not say that he had seen those in Florence's possession, but he did say how much he would like to have a picture of the writer of the enchanting notes which were his greatest joy in life. It took him quite half an hour to write, and he posted it in the nearest letter-box to the farm.

It was while walking back that he caught sight of some one—a man—waving and shouting and running. Inskipp waited. A minute later he saw that the man was Blythe. He hurried to meet him.

"It's Miss Rackstraw!" called Blythe, as soon as he got within talking range. "We must get something to carry her on——"

"What's happened?"

Then as Blythe, who looked very pale, did not reply, Inskipp went on: "Has she hurt herself?"

"She's dead." Blythe spoke in a tone as though overwhelmed by the calamity. He looked ghastly. "I'll tell you all about it in a moment. . . . As soon as I've seen Edna. . . . When I get my breath. . . . Back at the farm. . . ." He seemed uncertain where to tell it.

The two, without another word, hurried to the house. There they met Norbury mending the front gate. Blythe grasped his arm.

"Get a stretcher of some sort. Miss Rackstraw slipped off a rock, and is lying dead in a valley near here. Where's Edna?"

"Hold on a moment," said Norbury. "One at a time. Miss Rackstraw slipped? Where? How? But you need a whisky and soda."

Blythe did. Drinking it, he pulled himself together. They were walking in single file, he said, Miss Rackstraw leading, along a narrow ledge of rock, when suddenly a huge roar sounded behind them—a roar like nothing on earth, said Blythe.

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Startled, Miss Rackstraw missed her footing. She plunged over the ledge before Blythe or the man who was leading a baboon by a strap, and who had sat down to rest by the roadside, could put a hand out to grasp her. Blythe had clambered down after her and found her quite dead with a broken neck, as well as broken back.

"Good God!" muttered Norbury. "What a shocking accident! What became of the man and the beast?"

"I told him to wait by the body. The baboon was on its way to the Chateau Grimaldi, of course."

"I suppose you stopped at the *Commissariat de Police* to tell them about it? It was on your way here," Norbury said, hurrying back with them to the outbuildings.

Blythe had not. He seemed to have no idea where the Castellar police station was.

Norbury shook his head again, and said that they must go there at once. The police would attend to bringing up the body and getting into touch with the man who had the ape. "I suppose you can describe him?"

Blythe said that he was afraid not, beyond that he was middle aged, very dirty, dressed in innumerable garments all more or less ragged, and that the baboon was a big one.

Norbury pursed his lips over this, and again said that the only thing to do was to start at once for the police.

"I want a word with my sister first." Blythe made for the stairs.

"My dear fellow," said Norbury in his most peremptory manner, "you mustn't wait a moment! You must let the police know at once!"

"I must tell Edna!" said Blythe in a dogged

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tone. "She was a great friend of Miss Rackstraw. I want her to be prepared. The shock, you know——"

But Miss Blythe was not at the farm, and Norbury peremptorily refused to let Blythe try to find her outside. He dragged him almost by force to his car.

Inskipp was genuinely shocked at the news, but then came the thought that now the two photographs of Mireille were ownerless. He knew the drawer where Florence kept them. As soon as Norbury and Blythe were off he would take them out into his own keeping.

But how dilatory Blythe was! When he finally got into the car he still looked strangely disturbed, Inskipp thought.

"Got your passport?" asked Norbury.

Blythe shook his head. "I haven't the faintest idea where it is. Besides, it's Miss Rackstraw, not me, who's been killed."

Norbury said no more; he drove away quickly. Inskipp slipped up to Florence's room and opened a certain drawer—it had no lock on it; nothing at the farm had a lock on it—and found the precious pictures. Slipping them into his pocket, he went on to his own room and put them safely away.

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