**The Facts of Life**

W. Somerset Maugham

It was Henry Garnet’s habit on leaving the city of an afternoon to drop in at his club and play bridge before going home to dinner. He was a pleasant man to play with. He knew the game well, and you could be sure that he would make the best of his cards. He was a good loser; and when he won was more inclined to ascribe his success to his luck than to his skill. He was indulgent, and if his partner made a mistake, could be trusted to find an excuse for him. It was surprising then on this occasion to hear him telling his partner with unnecessary sharpness that he had never seen a hand worse played; and it was more surprising still to see him not only make a grave error himself, an error *of* which you would never have thought him capable, but when his partner, not unwilling to get a little of his own back, pointed it out, insist against all reason and with considerable heat that he was per­fectly right. But they were all old friends, the men he was playing with, and none of them took his ill humour very seriously. Henry Garnet was a broker, a partner in a firm of repute, and it occurred to one of them that something had gone wrong with some stock he was interested in.

“How’s the market today?” he asked.

“Booming. Even the suckers are making money.”

It was evident that stocks and shares had nothing to do with Henry Garnet’s vexation; but something was the matter; that was evident, too. He was a hearty fellow who enjoyed excellent health; he had plenty of money; he was fond of his wife and devoted to his children. As a rule he had high spirits, and he laughed easily at the nonsense they were apt to talk while they played; but today he sat glum and silent. His brows were crossly puckered, and there was a sulky look about his mouth. Presently, to ease the tension, one of the others mentioned a subject upon which they all knew Henry Garnet was glad to speak.

“How’s your boy, Henry? I see he’s done pretty well in the tournament.”

Henry Garnet’s frown grew darker.

“He’s done no better than I expected him to.” “When does he come back from Monte?” “He got back last night.”

“Did he enjoy himself?”

“I suppose so; all I know is that he made a damned fool of himself.”

“Oh. How?”

I d rather not talk about it if you don’t mind.” The three men looked at him with curiosity. Henry Garnet scowled at the green baize.

“Sorry, old boy. Your call.”

The game proceeded in a strained silence. Garnet got his bid, and when he played his cards so badly that he went three down not a word was said. Another rubber was begun, and in the second game Garnet denied a suit.

“Having none?” his partner asked him.

Garnet’s irritability was such that he did not even reply, and when at the end of the hand it appeared that he had revoked, and that his revoke cost the rubber, it was not to be expected that his partner should let his carelessness go without remark.

“What the devil’s the matter with you, Henry?” he said. “You’re playing like a fool.”

Garnet was disconcerted. He did not so much mind losing a big rubber himself, but he was sore that his inattention should have made his partner lose too. He pulled himself together.

“I’d better not play any more. I thought a few rubbers would calm me, but the fact is I can’t give my mind to the game. To tell you the truth I’m in a hell of a temper.”

They all burst out laughing.

“You don’t have to tell us that, old boy. It’s obvi­ous.”

Garnet gave them a rueful smile.

“Well, I bet you’d be in a temper if what’s hap­pened to me had happened to you. As a matter of fact I’m in a damned awkward situation, and if any of you fellows can give me any advice how to deal with it I’d be grateful.”

“Let’s have a drink and you tell us all about it. With a K.C., a Home Office official and an eminent surgeon-—if we can’t tell you how to deal with a situation, nobody can.”

The K.C. got up and rang the bell *for* a waiter.

“It’s about that damned boy of mine,” said Henry Garnet.

Drinks were ordered and brought. And this is the story that Henry Garnet told them.

The boy of whom he spoke was his only son. His name was Nicholas, and of course he was called Nicky. He was eighteen. The Garnets had two daugh­ters besides, one of sixteen and the other of twelve, but however unreasonable it seemed, for a father is generally supposed to like his daughters best, and though he did all he could not to show his preference, there was no doubt that the greater share of Henry Garnet’s affection was given to his son. He was kind, in a chaffing, casual way, to his daughters, and gave them handsome presents on their birthdays and at Christmas; but he doted on Nicky. Nothing was too good for him. He thought the world of him. He could hardly take his eyes off him. You could not blame him, for Nicky was a son that any parent might have been proud of. He was six foot two, lithe but muscu­lar, with broad shoulders and a slim waist, and he held himself gallantly erect; he had a charming head, well placed on the shoulders, with pale brown hair that waved slightly, blue eyes with long dark lashes under well-marked eyebrows, a full red mouth and a tanned, clean skin. When he smiled he showed very regular and very white teeth. He was not shy, but there was a modesty in his demeanour that was attractive. In social intercourse he was easy, polite and quietly gay. He was the offspring of nice, healthy, decent parents, he had been well brought up in a good home, he had been sent to a good school, and the general result was as engaging a specimen of young manhood as you were likely to find in a long time. You felt that he was as honest, open and virtuous as he looked. He had never given his parents a moment’s uneasiness. As a child he was seldom ill and never naughty. As a boy he did everything that was ex­pected of him. His school reports were excellent. He was wonderfully popular, and he ended his career, with a creditable number of prizes, as head of the school and captain of the football team. But this was not all. At the age of fourteen Nicky had developed an unexpected gift for lawn tennis. This was a game that his father not only was fond of, but played very well, and when he discerned in the boy the promise of a tennis player he fostered it. During the holidays he had him taught by the best professionals, and by the time he was sixteen he had won a number of tournaments for boys of his age. He could beat his father so badly that only parental affection reconciled the older player to the poor show he put up. At eighteen Nicky went to Cambridge and Henry Garnet conceived the ambition that before he was through with the university he should play for it. Nicky had all the qualifications for becoming a great tennis player. He was tall, he had a long reach, he was quick on his feet and his timing was perfect. He realized instinctively where the ball was coming and, seemingly without hurry, was there to take it. He had a powerful serve, with a nasty break that made it difficult to return, and his forehand drive, low, long and accurate, was deadly. He was not so good on the backhand and his volleying was wild, but all through the summer before he went to Cam­bridge Henry Garnet made him work on these points under the best teacher in England. At the back of his mind, though he did not even mention it to Nicky, he cherished a further ambition, to see his son play at Wimbledon, and who could tell, perhaps be chosen to represent his country in the Davis Cup. A great lump came into Henry Garnet’s throat as he saw in fancy his son leap over the net to shake hands with

the American champion whom he had just defeated, and walk off the court to the deafening plaudits of the multitude.

As an assiduous frequenter of Wimbledon, Henry Garnet had a good many friends in the tennis world, and one evening he found himself at a city dinner sitting next to one of them, a Colonel Brabazon, and in due course began talking to him of Nicky and what chance there might be of his being chosen to play for his university during the following season.

“Why don’t you let him go down to Monte Carlo and play in the spring tournament there?” said the Colonel suddenly.

“Oh, I don’t think he’s good enough for that. He’s not nineteen yet, he only went up to Cambridge last October; he wouldn’t stand a chance against all those cracks.”

“Of course, Austin and Von Cramm and so on would knock spots off him, but he might snatch a game or two; and if he got up against some of the smaller fry there’s no reason why he shouldn’t win two or three matches. He’s never been up against any of the first-rate players, and it would be wonder­ful practice for him. He’d learn a lot more than he’ll ever learn in the seaside tournaments you enter him for.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it. I’m not going to let him leave Cambridge in the middle of a term. I’ve always impressed upon him that tennis is only a game and it mustn’t interfere with work.”

Colonel Brabazon asked Garnet when the term ended.

“That’s all right. He’d only have to cut about three days. Surely that could be arranged. You see, two of the men we were depending on have let us down, and we’re in a hole. We want to send as good *a team as we can.* The Germans are sending their best players, and so are the Americans.”

“Nothing doing, old boy. In the first place Nicky’s not good enough, and secondly, I don’t fancy the idea of sending a kid like that to Monte Carlo with­out anyone to look after him. If I could get away myself I might think of it, but that’s out of the ques­tion.”

“I shall be there. I’m going as the nonplaying captain of the English team. I’ll keep an eye on him.”

“You’ll be busy, and besides, it’s not a responsi­bility I’d like to ask you to take. He’s never been abroad in his life, and to tell you the truth, I shouldn’t have a moment’s peace all the time he was there.”

They left it at that, and presently Henry Garnet went home. I le was so flattered by Colonel Brabazon’s suggestion that he could not help telling his wife.

“Fancy his thinking Nicky’s as good as that. He told me he’d seen him play and his style was fine. He only wants more practice to get into the first flight.

We shall see the kid playing in the semifinals at Wimbledon yet, old girl.”

To his surprise Mrs. Garnet was not so much op­posed to the notion as he would have expected.

“After all the boy’s eighteen. Nicky’s never got into mischief yet, and there’s no reason to suppose he will now.”

“There’s his work to be considered; don’t forget that. I think it would be a very bad precedent to let him cut the end of term.”

“But what can three days matter? It seems a shame to rob him of a chance like that. I’m sure he’d jump at it if you asked him.”

“Well, I’m not going to. I haven’t sent him to Cambridge just to play tennis. I know he’s steady, but it’s silly to put temptation in his way. He’s much too young to go to Monte Carlo by himself.”

“You say he won’t have a chance against these crack players, but you can’t tell.”

Henry Garnet sighed a little. On the way home in the car it had struck him that Austin’s health was uncertain and that Von Cramm had his off days. Supposing, just for the sake of argument, that Nicky had a bit of luck like that—then there would be no doubt that he would be chosen to play for Cambridge. But of course that was all nonsense.

“Nothing doing, my dear. I’ve made up my mind, and I’m not going to change it.”

Mrs. Garnet held her peace. But next day she wrote to Nicky, telling him what had happened, and suggested to him what she would do in his place if, wanting to go, he wished to get his father’s consent. A day or two later Henry Garnet received a letter from his son. He was bubbling over with excitement. He had seen his tutor, who was a tennis player him­self, and the Provost of his college, who happened to know Colonel Brabazon, and no objection would be made to his leaving before the end of term; they both thought it an opportunity that shouldn’t be missed. He didn’t see what harm he could come to, and if only, just this once, his father would stretch a point, well, next term, he promised faithfully, he’d work like blazes. It was a very pretty letter. Mrs. Garnet watched her husband read it at the breakfast table; she was undisturbed by the frown on his face. He threw it over to her.

“I don’t know why you thought it necessary to tell Nicky something I told you in confidence. It’s too bad of you. Now you’ve thoroughly unsettled him.”

“I’m so sorry. I thought it would please him to know that Colonel Brabazon had such a high opinion of him. I don’t see why one should only tell people the disagreeable things that are said about them. Of course I made it quite clear that there could be no question of his going.”

“You’ve put me in an odious position. If there’s anything I hate it s for the boy to look upon me as a spoilsport and a tyrant.”

“Oh, he’ll never do that. He may think you rather silly and unreasonable, but I’m sure he’ll understand that it’s only for his own good that you’re being so unkind.”

“Christ,” said Henry Garnet.

His wife had a great inclination to laugh. She knew the battle was won. Dear, oh dear, how easy it was to get men to do what you wanted. For appearance’ sake Henry Garnet held out for forty-eight hours, but then he yielded, and a fortnight later Nicky came to London. He was to start for Monte Carlo next morning, and after dinner, when Mrs. Garnet and her elder daughter had left them, Henry took the oppor­tunity to give his son some good advice.

“I don’t feel quite comfortable about letting you go off to a place like Monte Carlo at your age practi­cally by yourself,” he finished, “but there it is, and I can only hope you’ll be sensible. I don’t want to play the heavy father, but there are three things especially that I want to warn you against: one is gambling, don’t gamble; the second is money, don’t lend anyone money; and the third is women, don’t have anything to do with women. If you don’t do any of those three things you can’t come to much harm, so remember them well.”

“All right, Father,” Nicky smiled.

“That’s my last word to you. I know the world pretty well, and believe me, my advice is sound.”

“I won’t forget it. I promise you.”

“That’s a good chap. Now let’s go up and join the ladies.”

Nicky beat neither Austin nor Von Cramm in the Monte Carlo tournament, but he did not disgrace himself. He snatched an unexpected victory over a Spanish player and gave one of the Austrians a closer match than anyone had thought possible. In the mixed doubles he got into the semifinals. His charm conquered everyone, and he vastly enjoyed himself. It was generally allowed that he showed promise, and Colonel Brabazon told him that when he was a little older and had had more practice with first-class players he would be a credit to his father. The tourna­ment came to an end, and the day following he was to fly back to London. Anxious to play his best, he had lived very carefully, smoking little and drinking nothing, and going to bed early; but on his last eve­ning he thought he would like to see something of the life in Monte Carlo of which he had heard so much. An official dinner was given to the tennis players, and after dinner with the rest of them he went into the Sporting Club. It was the first time he had been there. Monte Carlo was very full, and the rooms were crowded. Nicky had never before seen roulette played except in the pictures; in a maze he stopped at the first table he came to; chips of different sizes were scattered over the green cloth in what looked like a hopeless muddle; the croupier gave the wheel a sharp turn and with a flick threw in the little white ball. After what seemed an endless time the ball stopped and another croupier with a broad, indiffer­ent gesture raked in the chips of those who had lost.

Presently Nicky wandered over to where they were playing *trente et quarante,* but he couldn’t understand what it was all about, and he thought it dull. He saw a crowd in another room and sauntered in. A big game of baccara was in progress, and he was im­mediately conscious of the tension. The players were protected from the thronging bystanders by a brass rail; they sat round the table, nine on each side, with the dealer in the middle and the croupier facing him. Big money was changing hands. The dealer was a member of the Greek Syndicate. Nicky looked at his impassive face. His eyes were watchful, but his ex­pression never changed whether he won or lost. It was a terrifying, strangely impressive sight. It gave Nicky, who had been thriftily brought up, a peculiar thrill to see someone risk a thousand pounds on the turn of a card and when he lost make a little joke and laugh. It was all terribly exciting. An acquaint­ance came up to him.

“Been doing any good?” he asked.

“I haven’t been playing.”

“Wise of you. Rotten game. Come and have a drink.”

“All right.”

While they were having it Nicky told his friend that this was the first time he had ever been in the rooms.

“Oh, but you must have one little flutter before you go. It’s idiotic to leave Monte without having tried your luck. After all it won’t hurt you to lose a hundred francs or so.”

“I don’t suppose it will, but my father wasn’t any too keen on my coming at all, and one of the three things he particularly advised me not to do was to gamble.”

But when Nicky left his companion he strolled back to one of the tables where they were playing roulette. He stood for a while looking at the losers’ money being raked in by the croupier and the money that was won paid out to the winners. It was im­possible to deny that it was thrilling. His friend was right, it did seem silly to leave Monte without putting something on the table just once. It would be an experience, and at his age you had to have all the experience you could get. He reflected that he hadn’t promised his father not to gamble, he’d promised him not to forget his advice. It wasn’t quite the same, was it? He took a hundred-franc note out of his pocket and rather shyly put it on number eighteen. He chose it because that was his age. With a wildly beating heart he watched the wheel turn; the little white ball whizzed about like a small demon of mis­chief; the wheel went round more slowly, the little white ball hesitated, it seemed about to stop, it went on again; Nicky could hardly believe his eyes when it fell into number eighteen. A lot of chips were passed over to him, and his hands trembled as he took them. It seemed to amount to a lot *of* money. He was so confused that he never thought of putting anything on the following round; in fact he had no intention *of* playing any more, once was enough; and he was surprised when eighteen again came up. There was only one chip on it.

“By George, you’ve won again,” said a man who was standing near to him.

“Me? I hadn’t got anything on.”

“Yes, you had. Your original stake. They always leave it on unless you ask for it back. Didn’t you know?”

Another packet of chips was handed over to him. Nicky’s head reeled. He counted his gains: seven thousand francs. A queer sense of power seized him; he felt wonderfully clever. This was the easiest way of making money that he had ever heard of. His frank, charming face was wreathed in smiles. His bright eyes met those of a woman standing by his side. She smiled.

“You’re in luck,” she said.

She spoke English, but with a foreign accent.

“I can hardly believe it. It’s the first time I’ve ever played.”

“That explains it. Lend me a thousand francs, will you? I’ve lost everything I’ve got. I’ll give it you back in half an hour.”

“All right.”

She took a large red chip from his pile and with a word of thanks disappeared. The man who had spoken to him before grunted.

“You’ll never see that again.”

Nicky was dashed. His father had particularly advised him not to lend anyone money. What a silly thing to do! And to somebody he’d never seen in his life. But the fact was, he felt at that moment such a love for the human race that it had never occurred to him to refuse. And that big red chip, it was almost impossible to realize that it had any value. Oh, well, it didn’t matter, he still had six thousand francs, he’d just try his luck once or twice more, and if he didn’t win he’d go home. He put a chip on sixteen, which was his elder sister’s age, but it didn’t come up; then on twelve, which was his younger sister’s, and that didn’t come up either; he tried various numbers at random, but without success. It was funny, he seemed to have lost his knack. He thought he would try just once more and then stop; he won. He had made up all his losses and had something over. At the end of an hour, after various ups and downs, having experi­enced such thrills as he had never known in his life, he found himself with so many chips that they would hardly go in his pockets. He decided to go. He went to the changers’ office, and he gasped when twenty thousand-franc notes were spread out before him. He had never had so much money in his life. He put it in his pocket and was turning away when the woman to whom he had lent the thousand francs came up to him.

“I’ve been looking for you everywhere,” she said. “I was afraid you’d gone. I was in a fever, I didn’t know what you’d think of me. Here’s your thousand francs and thank you so much for the loan.”

Nicky, blushing scarlet, stared at her with amaze­ment. How he had misjudged her! His father had said, don’t gamble; well, he had, and he’d made twenty thousand francs; and his father had said, don’t lend anyone money; well, he had, he’d lent quite a lot to a total stranger, and she’d returned it. The fact was that he wasn’t nearly such a fool as his father thought: he’d had an instinct that he could lend her the money with safety, and you see, his instinct was right. But he was so obviously taken aback that the little lady was forced to laugh.

“What is the matter with you?” she asked.

“To tell you the truth I never expected to see the money back.”

“What did you take me for? Did you think I was a—cocotte?”

Nicky reddened to the roots of his wavy hair.

“No, of course not.”

“Do I look like one?”

“Not a bit.”

She was dressed very quietly, in black, with a string of gold beads round her neck; her simple frock showed off a neat, slight figure; she had a pretty little face and a trim head. She was made up, but not excessively, and Nicky supposed that she was not more than three or four years older than himself. She gave him a friendly smile.

“My husband is in the administration in Morocco, and I’ve come to Monte Carlo for a few weeks be­cause he thought I wanted a change.”

“1 was just going,” said Nicky because he couldn’t think of anything else to say.

“Already!”

“Well, I’ve got to get up early tomorrow. I’m going back to London by air.”

“Of course. The tournament ended today, didn’t it? I saw you play, you know, two or three times.”

“Did you? I don’t know why you should have noticed me.”

“1 ou’ve got a beautiful style. And you looked very sweet in your shorts.”

Nicky was not an immodest youth, but it did cross his mind that perhaps she had borrowed that thou­sand francs in order to scrape acquaintance with him.

“Do you ever go to the Knickerbocker? ” she asked.

“No. I never have.”

“Oh, but you mustn’t leave Monte without having been there. Why don’t you come and dance a little? To tell you the truth, I’m starving with hunger, and I should adore some bacon and eggs.”

Nicky remembered his father’s advice not to have anything to do with women, but this was different; you had only to look at the pretty little thing to know at once that she was perfectly respectable. Her hus­band was in what corresponded, he supposed, to the civil service. His father and mother had friends who were civil servants, and they and their wives some­times came to dinner. It was true that the wives were neither so young nor so pretty as this one, but she was just as ladylike as they were. And after winning twenty thousand francs he thought it wouldn’t be a bad idea to have a little fun.

“I’d love to go with you,” he said. “But you won’t mind if I don’t stay very long. I’ve left instructions at my hotel that I’m to be called at seven.”

“We’ll leave as soon as ever you like.”

' Nicky found it very pleasant at the Knickerbocker.

He ate his bacon and eggs with appetite. They shared a bottle of champagne. They danced, and the little lady told him he danced beautifully. He knew he danced pretty well, and of course she was easy to dance with. As light as a feather. She laid her cheek against his and when their eyes met there was in hers a smile that made his heart go pit-a-pat. A coloured woman sang in a throaty, sensual voice. The floor was crowded.

“Have you ever been told that you’re very good­looking?” she asked.

“I don’t think so,” he laughed. “Gosh,” he thought, “I believe she’s fallen for me.”

Nicky was not such a fool as to be unaware that women often liked him, and when she made that remark he pressed her to him a little more closely. She closed her eyes, and a faint sigh escaped her lips.

“I suppose it wouldn’t be quite nice if I kissed you before all these people,” he said.

“What do you think they would take me for?”

It began to grow late, and Nicky said that really he thought he ought to be going.

“I shall go too,” she said. “Will you drop me at my hotel on your way?”

Nicky paid the bill. He was rather surprised at its amount, but with all that money he had in his pocket he could afford not to care, and they got into a taxi.

She snuggled up to him, and he kissed her. She seemed to like it.

“By Jove,” he thought, “I wonder if there’s any­thing doing.”

It was true that she was a married woman, but her husband was in Morocco, and it certainly did look as if she’d fallen for him. Good and proper. It was true also that his father had warned him to have nothing to do with women, but, he reflected again, he hadn’t actually promised he wouldn’t, he’d only promised not to forget his advice. Well, he hadn’t; he was bearing it in mind that very minute. But circum­stances alter cases. She was a sweet little thing; it seemed silly to miss the chance of an adventure when it was handed to you like that on a tray. When they reached the hotel he paid off the taxi.

“I’ll walk home,” he said. "The air will do me good after the stuffy atmosphere of that place.”

“Come up a moment,” she said. “I’d like to show you the photo of my little boy.”

“Oh, have you got a little boy?” he exclaimed, a trifle dashed.

“Yes, a sweet little boy.”

He walked upstairs after her. He didn’t in the least want to see the photograph of her little boy, but he thought it only civil to pretend he did. He was afraid he’d made a fool of himself; it occurred to him that she was taking him up to look at the photograph in order to show him in a nice way that he’d made a mis­take. He’d told her he was eighteen.

“I suppose she thinks I’m just a kid.”

He began to wish he hadn’t spent all that money on champagne at the night club.

But she didn’t show him the photograph of her little boy after all. They had no sooner got into he? room than she turned to him, flung her arms round his neck, and kissed him full on the lips. He had never in all his life been kissed so passionately.

“Darling,” she said.

For a brief moment his father’s advice once more crossed Nicky’s mind, and then he forgot it.

Nicky was a light sleeper, and the least sound was apt to wake him. Two or three hours later he awoke and for a moment could not imagine where he was. The room was not quite dark, for the door of the bathroom was ajar, and the light in it had been left on. Suddenly he was conscious that someone was moving about the room. Then he remembered. He saw that it was his little friend, and he was on the point of speaking when something in the way she was behaving stopped him. She was walking very cau­tiously, as though she were afraid of waking him; she stopped once or twice and looked over at the bed. He wondered what she was after. He soon saw. She went over to the chair on which he had placed his clothes and once more looked in his direction. She waited for what seemed to him an interminable time. The silence was so intense that Nicky thought he could hear his own heart beating. Then, very slowly, very quietly, she took up his coat, slipped her hand into the inside pocket and drew' out all those beautiful thousand-franc notes that Nicky had been so proud to win. She put the coat back and placed some other clothes on it so that it should look as though it had not been disturbed, then, with the bundle of notes in her hand, for an appreciable time stood once more stock-still. Nicky had repressed an instinctive im­pulse to jump up and grab her; it was partly surprise that had kept him quiet, partly the notion that he was in a strange hotel, in a foreign country, and if he made a row' he didn’t know what might happen. She looked at him. His eyes were partly closed, and he wras sure that she thought he was asleep. In the silence she could hardly fail to hear his regular breath­ing. When she had reassured herself that her move­ments had not disturbed him, she stepped, with infinite caution, across the room. On a small table in the window a cineraria was growing in a pot. Nicky watched her now with his eyes wide open. The plant was evidently placed quite loosely in the pot, for, taking it by the stalks, she lifted it out; she put the bank notes in the bottom of the pot and re­placed the plant. It was an excellent hiding place.

No one could have guessed that anything was con­cealed under that richly flowering plant. She pressed the earth down with her fingers and then, very slowly, taking care not to make the smallest noise, crept across the room and slipped back into bed.

“Chéri,” she said, in a caressing voice.

Nicky breathed steadily, like a man immersed in deep sleep. The little lady turned over on her side and disposed herself to slumber. But though Nicky lay so still, his thoughts worked busily. He was ex­tremely indignant at the scene he had just witnessed, and to himself he spoke his thoughts with vigour.

“She’s nothing but a damned tart. She and her dear little boy and her husband in Morocco. My eye! She’s a rotten thief, that’s what she is. Took me for a mug. If she thinks she’s going to get away with anything like that, she’s mistaken.”

He had already made up his mind what he was going to do with the money he had so cleverly won. He had long wanted a car of his own and had thought it rather mean of his father not to have given him one. After all, a feller doesn’t always want to drive about in the family bus. Well, he’d just teach the old man a lesson and buy one himself. For twenty thousand francs, two hundred pounds roughly, he could get a very decent second-hand car. He meant to get the money back, but just then he didn’t quite know how. He didn’t like the idea of kicking up a row, he was a stranger, in a hotel he knew nothing of; it might very well be that the beastly woman had friends there; he didn’t mind facing anyone in a fair fight, but he’d look pretty foolish if someone pulled a gun on him. He reflected besides, very sensibly, that he had no proof the money was his. If it came to a show­down and she swore it was hers, he might very easily find himself hauled off to a police station. He really didn’t know what to do. Presently by her regular breathing he knew that the little lady was asleep. She must have fallen asleep with an easy mind, for she had done her job without a hitch. It infuriated Nicky that she should rest so peacefully while he lay awake, worried to death. Suddenly an idea occurred to him. It was such a good one that it was only by the exercise of all his self-control that he prevented him­self from jumping out of bed and carrying it out at once. Two could play at her game. She’d stolen his money; well, he’d steal it back again, and they’d be all square. He made up his mind to wait quite quietly until he was sure that deceitful woman was sound asleep. He waited *for* what seemed to him a very long time. She did not stir. Her breathing was as regular as a child’s.

“Darling,” he said at last.

No answer. No movement. She was dead to the world. Very slowly, pausing after every movement, very silently, he slipped out of bed. He stood still for a while, looking at her to see whether he had dis­turbed her. Her breathing was as regular as before. During the time he was waiting he had taken note carefully of the furniture in the room so that in cross­ing it he should not knock against a chair or a table and make a noise. He took a couple of steps and waited; he took a couple of steps more; he was very light on his feet and made no sound as he walked; he took fully five minutes to get to the window, and here he waited again. He started, for the bed slightly creaked, but it was only because the sleeper turned in her sleep. He forced himself to wait till he had counted one hundred. She was sleeping like a log. With infinite care he seized the cineraria by the stalks and gently pulled it out of the pot; he put his other hand in, his heart beat nineteen to the dozen as his fingers touched the notes, his hand closed on them and he slowly drew them out. He replaced the plant and in his turn carefully pressed down the earth. While he was doing all this he had kept one eye on the form lying in the bed. It remained still. After another pause he crept softly to the chair on which his clothes were lying. He first put the bundle of notes in his coat pocket and then proceeded to dress. It took him a good quarter of an hour, because he could afford to make no sound. He had been wearing a soft shirt with his dinner jacket, and he congratu­lated himself on this because it was easier to put on silently than a stiff one. He had some difficulty in tying his tie without a looking glass, but he very wisely reflected that it didn’t really matter if it wasn’t tied very well. His spirits were rising. The whole thing now began to seem rather a lark. At length he was completely dressed except for his shoes, which he took in his hand; he thought he would put them on when he got into the passage. Now he had to cross the room to get to the door. He reached it so quietly that he could not have disturbed the lightest sleeper. But the door had to be unlocked. He turned the key very slowly; it creaked.

“Who’s that?”

The little woman suddenly sat up in bed. Nicky’s heart jumped to his mouth. He made a great effort to keep his head.

“It’s only me. It’s six o’clock and I’ve got to go. I was trying not to wake you.”

“Oh, I forgot.”

She sank back onto the pillow.

“Now that you’re awake I’ll put on my shoes.” He sat down on the edge of the bed and did this. “Don’t make a noise when you go out. The hotel people don’t like it. Oh, I’m so sleepy.”

“You go right off to sleep again.”

“Kiss me before you go.” He bent down and kissed her. “You’re a sweet boy and a wonderful lover. *Bon voyage.”*

Nicky did not feel quite safe till he got out of the hotel. The dawn had broken. The sky was unclouded, and in the harbour the yachts and the fishing boats lay motionless on the still water. On the quay fisher­men were getting ready to start on their day’s work. The streets were deserted. Nicky took a long breath of the sweet morning air. He felt alert and well. He also felt as pleased as Punch. With a swinging stride, his shoulders well thrown back, he walked up the hill and along the gardens in front of the Casino—the flowers in that clear light had a dewy brilliance that was delicious—till he came to his hotel. Here the day had already begun. In the hall porters with mufflers round their necks and berets on their heads were busy sweeping. Nicky went up to his room and had a hot bath. He lay in it and thought with satisfaction that he was not such a mug as some people might think. After his bath he did his exercises, dressed, packed and went down to breakfast. He had a grand appetite. No continental breakfast for him! He had grapefruit, porridge, bacon and eggs, rolls fresh from the oven, so crisp and delicious they melted in your mouth, marmalade and three cups of coffee. Though feeling perfectly well before, he felt better after that. He lit the pipe he had recently learnt to smoke, paid his bill and stepped into the car that was waiting to take him to the aerodrome on the other side of Cannes. The road as far as Nice ran over the hills, and below him was the blue sea and the coast line. He couldn’t help thinking it damned pretty. They passed through Nice, so gay and friendly in the early morning, and presently they came to a long stretch of straight road that ran by the sea. Nicky had paid his bill, not with the money he had won the night before, but with the money his father had given him; he had changed a thousand francs to pay for supper at the Knicker­bocker, but that deceitful little woman had returned him the thousand francs he had lent her, so that he still had twenty thousand-franc notes in his pocket. He thought he would like to have a look at them. He had so nearly lost them that they had a double value for him. He took them out *of* his hip pocket into which for safety’s sake he had stuffed them when he put on the suit he was travelling in, and counted them one by one. Something very strange had hap­pened to them. Instead of there being twenty notes, as there should have been, there were twenty-six. He couldn’t understand it at all. He counted them twice more. There was no doubt about it; somehow or other he had twenty-six thousand francs instead of the twenty he should have had. He couldn’t make it out. He asked himself if it was possible that he had won more at the Sporting Club than he had realized. But no, that was out of the question; he distinctly remembered the man at the desk laying the notes out in four rows of five, and he had counted them himself. Suddenly the explanation occurred to him; when he had put his hand into the flower pot, after taking out the cineraria, he had grabbed everything he felt there. The flower pot was the little hussy’s money box, and he had taken out not only his own money, but her savings as well. Nicky leant back in the car and burst into a roar of laughter. It was the funniest thing he had ever heard in his life. And when he thought of her going to the flower pot sometime later in the morning when she awoke, expecting to find the money she had so cleverly got away with, and finding, not only that it wasn’t there, but that her own had gone too, he laughed more than ever. And so far as he was concerned there was nothing to do about it, he knew neither her name nor the name of the hotel to which she had taken him. He couldn’t return her money even if he wanted to.

“It serves her damned well right,” he said.

This then was the story that Henry Garnet told his friends over the bridge table, for the night before, after dinner when his wife and daughter had left them to their port, Nicky had narrated it in full.

“And you know what infuriated me is that he’s so damned pleased with himself. Talk of a cat swallow­ing a canary. And d’you know what he said to me when he’d finished? He looked at me with those innocent eyes of his and said: ‘You know, Father, I can’t help thinking there was something wrong about the advice you gave me. You said, don’t gamble; well, I did, and I made a packet; you said, don’t lend money; well, I did, and I got it back; and you said, don’t have anything to do with women; well, I did, and I made six thousand francs on the deal.’”

It didn’t make it any better for Henry Garnet that his three companions burst out laughing.

“It’s all very well for you fellows to laugh, but you know, I’m in a damned awkward position. The boy looked up to me, he respected me, he took whatever I said as gospel truth, and now, I saw it in his eyes, he just looks upon me as a drivelling old fool. It’s no good my saying one swallow doesn’t make a summer; he doesn’t see that it was just a fluke, he thinks the whole thing was due to his own cleverness. It may ruin him.”

“You do look a bit of a damned fool, old man,” said one of the others. “There’s no denying that, is there?”

“I know I do, and I don’t like it. It’s so dashed unfair. Fate has no right to play one tricks like that. After all, you must admit that my advice was good.”

“Very good.”

“And the wretched boy ought to have burnt his fingers. Well, he hasn’t. You’re all men of the world, you tell me how I’m to deal with the situation now.”

But they none of them could.

“Well, Henry, if I were you I wouldn’t worry,” said the lawyer. “My belief is that your boy’s born lucky, and in the long run that’s better than to be born clever or rich.”