

Zeitschrift: Der Kreis : eine Monatsschrift = Le Cercle : revue mensuelle
Band: 31 (1963)
Heft: 4

Artikel: Poor little rich boy
Autor: Whitfeld, Frank
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-569290>

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POOR LITTLE RICH BOY

BY FRANK WHITFELD

It had stopped raining by the time Guy was through with my french lesson, the clouds were thinning and the sun was struggling through.

«You'll be able to have your walk,» he said, «I'll 'phone through for the car.»

Guy is my tutor, and I think he must be pretty good because he has managed to shove quite a lot into my thick head, which is more than any one else has been able to do. He's been with me for two years, and I don't feel I know him any better than the day he arrived. He's very quiet, efficient, patient, and he *needs* to be sometimes. And, though he never shows it, I don't think he has any time at all for me.

I'd been trying to needle him that morning, pretending not to know things I really knew perfectly well. But he's so patient, or is it stubborn? Anyway, he just kept on and on, and in the end I was the one to give in. He never said anything about it, just looked at me a bit straight through his glasses, the kind with heavy frames. I think he could be pretty relentless if he wanted to.

While we were waiting for the car to come round Guy made sure I was going to be warm enough. «It's hardly spring yet, you know. You don't want to get one of your colds.»

God, he does fuss, but I suppose he's responsible for me, and he'd get merry hell if anything happened to me. I'm supposed to be delicate, but it's a lot of rot.

It may seem a bit odd to take the car when I was going for a walk, but the thing is, I liked to take the dogs and drive to the hills a few miles away where they could have a good run.

«By the way,» said Guy as we heard the car draw up, «You remember it's the new man today. But he knows what to do.»

I didn't give a damn. I'd hated old Marks, and couldn't have cared less when his inside went wrong and the operation finished him off. I expected the new man to be an equally dreary old fool; I expected to hate his guts too.

So when he opened the car door for me I just shoved the dogs in, told him to drive towards the hills until I told him to stop, and got in myself. I didn't even bother to look at him, in fact we had been driving for ten minutes or so before it dawned on me that he wasn't like old Marks at all. To begin with, he wasn't a miserable little runt, and that was a point in his favour; I just can't stand little men. On the contrary, he seemed to be on the big side, with solid, heavy shoulders. He wasn't wearing an overcoat, and looked smart in his blue uniform and peaked cap. I liked the way he drove too. Old Marks used to dawdle along as if we were at a funeral, but this chap got quite a move on. Well, that was an improvement too.

Then I pushed the dogs along to the other end of the seat and moved over so that I could see him better. Another surprise, he was quite young. I could only see his profile, but he didn't look more than twenty-five or six.

Not that I cared a damn actually. He'd be in league with my father and Guy and the others against me. So I just sat there and dished out a bit of private hate all round. And that made me feel better, as it always did.

I'd forgotten we were getting along faster, and presently I realised that we'd gone further than I intended, but this was alright, so I banged on the glass partition and he drew up at once. He was out of the car like a flash, and had the door open for me. Old Marks just used to sit on his backside and let me get on with it.

So I had a good look at him as I got out. I thought with those big shoulders he would be short and stocky, but he was fairly tall, quite good-looking, very pale, with grey eyes that looked at you straight. He didn't exactly smile, but looked as if he were ready to if expected.

«Everything satisfactory, sir?»

And that was something. Old Marks had never asked that in seven years. The dogs were making up to him with a lot of tail-wagging and so on, and he put his hands down to pat them, but kept watching me, the way it should be.

«Yes thanks. Just wait here; I'll be half an hour or so.»

I whistled the dogs, and we set off up the lane. Then I stopped and turned back.

«By the way, I don't know your name.»

«Webb, sir.»

«Oh yes. And I don't like to be called sir, just Mr. David.»

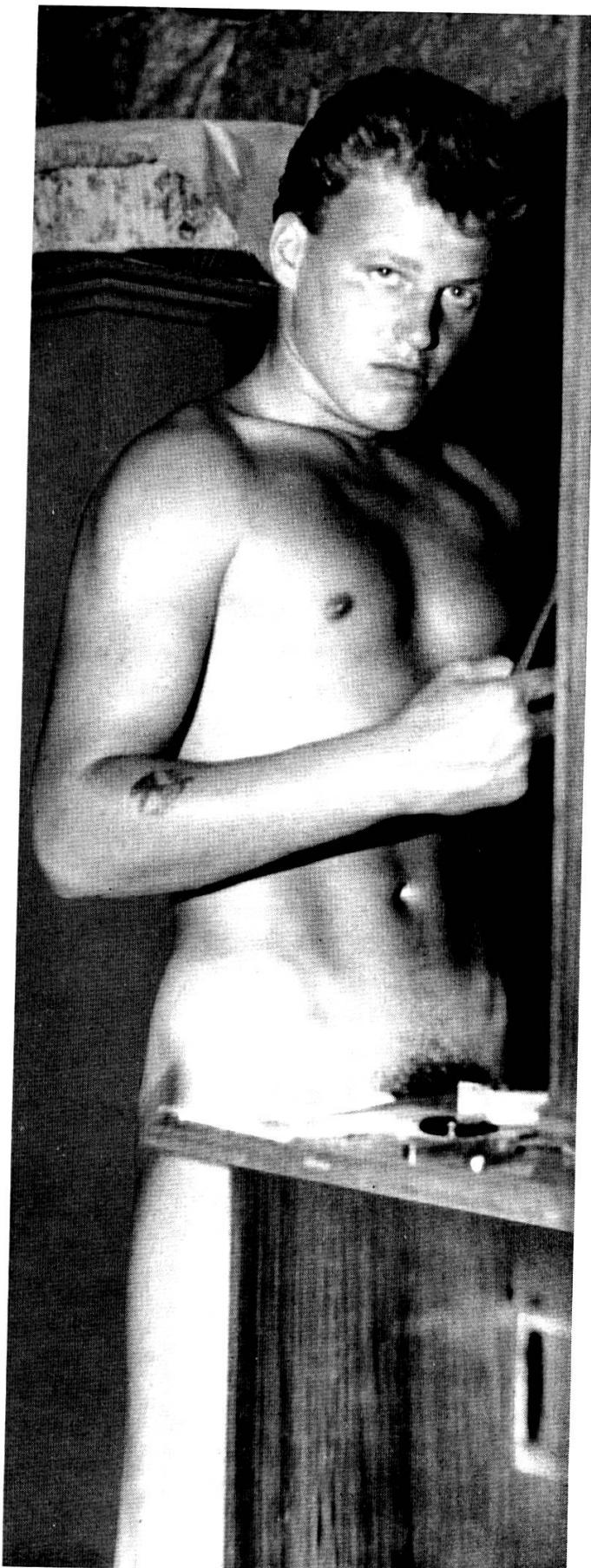
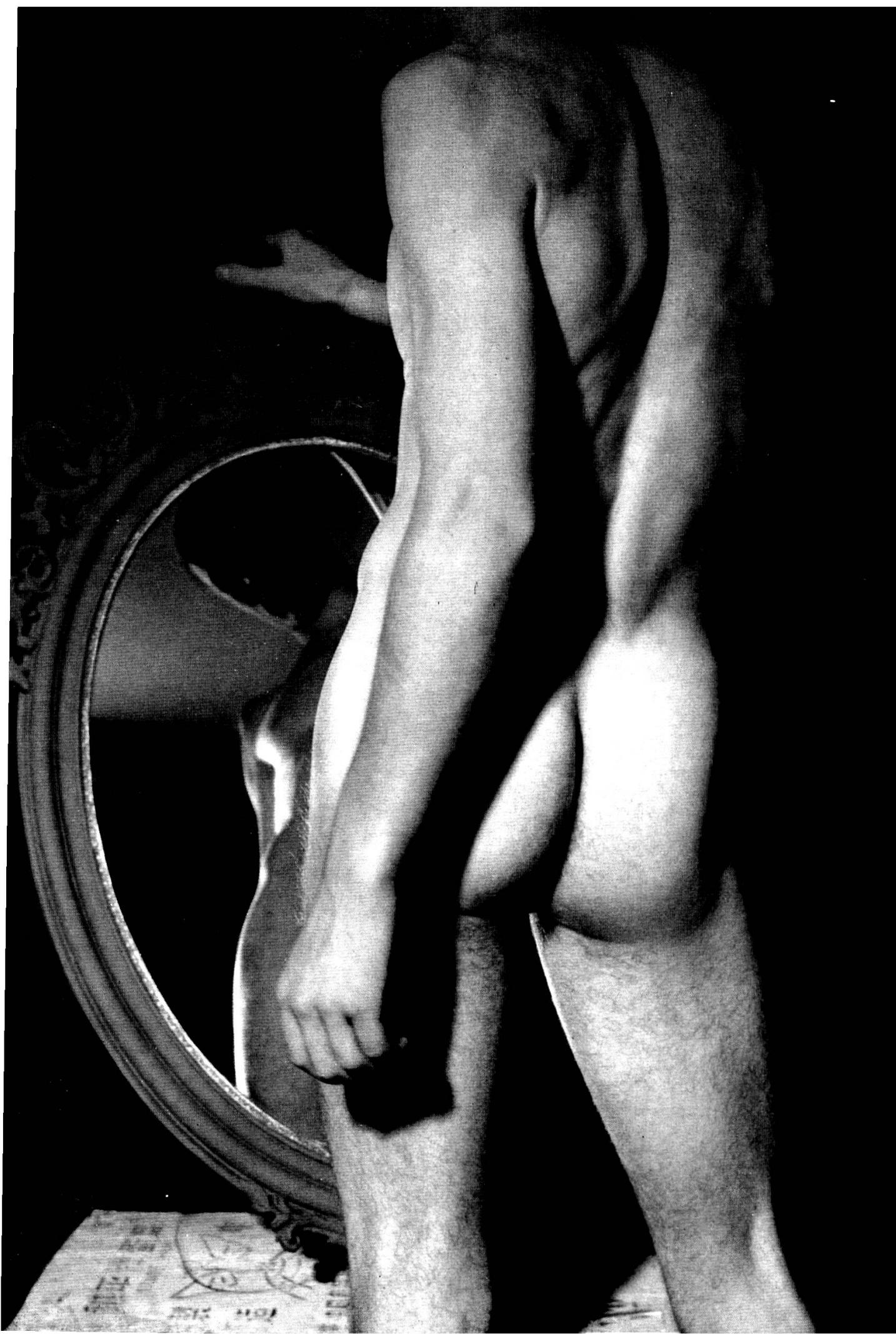


Photo: Jim, Zürich



«Yes, sir — Mr. David. Sorry, it just slipped out. I'll remember, Mr. David.»

This time there was a smile, just for a moment, and I found I had smiled back. I hadn't meant to, and I switched it off pretty smartly and turned off up the lane. His approach might be different, but he'd be the same as all the rest.

Getting up on the hills was just about the best thing I knew, just being alone, right away from everything and everyone, with the cloud shadows chasing across the hills and the wind fresh from the sea. Funny thing, being alone up there was great, yet at home I was often lonely as hell. The dogs were crazy about it, running about like mad things, but when I whistled they came at once, tails wagging, looking up at me as if to see if I'd enjoyed it too. I reckon dogs are a damned sight better than most people.

Webb was on the lookout for me, and was out and had the door open before I reached the car. He settled me in and was about to shut the door when he changed his mind.

«Excuse me, Mr. David. May I ask you something?»

«Why not?»

«It's just that—well, Mr. Marks had been with you a long time, he knew just what you wanted without being told. So if there's anything that's not right, anything at all, will you please tell me?»

He had gone quite pink with embarrassment. «I do want everything to be just as you like it, Mr. David.»

«Don't worry,» I said, «I'll soon tell you.» And I would too, I thought.

We seemed to be home very quickly.

«How is Webb?» asked Guy at lunch.

«Webb?»

«The new chauffeur.»

«Oh, has he a name? I hadn't heard. Oh, alright, I should say. Anyway, he doesn't drive like a Zombie. I'm surprised you trust anyone less than seventy to take me out.»

«I would have preferred an older man, but good chauffeurs don't grow on trees, and the flat over the garage is only suitable for a single man. He was the best of all those I interviewed, and his references were suitable.»

«Forged, no doubt.»

For an instant I thought that Guy was going to snap out at me, but he said nothing, and we finished lunch in a blaze of silence.

«About Webb,» he said as we left the dining room. «Let me know if he's not satisfactory in every way.»

«Oh, I will. And I've no doubt he'll report on me.»

Guy said nothing, and left me alone to face the desolation of an empty, pointless, endless afternoon.

It was several days later I first noticed Webb's hands. The weather had become much warmer, and for the first time he did not wear gloves. I had leaned forward to tap for him to stop the car when I saw his hands on the wheel, and for several minutes I just stared at them so that we went long past the place where I had intended to stop.

As I walked along the ridge of the hill, with the dogs barking and bounding about ahead of me, I could not get those hands out of my mind. Very white, they were, large and rather square, with long, muscular fingers. They suggested enormous strength, and, as they lay quietly on the wheel, absolute confidence and power.

On the way home I sat in front beside him, something I had not done before, so that I could look at them more closely. I noticed too his thick, strong wrists, but it was his hands that fascinated me, and after I had returned home I still seemed to be able to see them. As long as I knew him it was those hands that most attracted me. At that time I did not even want to touch them, just to look at their power and beauty.

I knew then that I was getting a «thing» about Webb, something I had not had seriously about anyone for ages; but then, I didn't see many people. I had seen Guy once without his glasses, and he looked quite different, harder, keener. I thought then I might get to feel that way about him, but I never saw him without them again, and whatever there might have been just petered out.

The few times I'd had this feeling for people had been pretty miserable and frustrating, so I wasn't too pleased when I found I was getting interested in Webb. But hell, I saw him every day, there wasn't anyone else, what could I do about it?

The first thing was, I must see what he really looked like, without his cap I mean. I wanted to find out about his hair. I knew it was dark, but was it long or short? He might be bald for all I knew, and that would soon kill things. Anyway, I soon found out, and quite easily.

Next day, when he opened the door for me after my walk, I hopped in and then edged over into the driver's seat. «I'll drive going home.» I said, «We'll break all records today.»

Poor Webb looked quite nonplussed. «Now, Mr. David,» he said, leaning into the car. «I don't know... I really don't think...»

«I'd better have your cap,» I said, laughing, and whipping it off his head I put it on mine. I could see then that he had a crew-cut, and it suited him, made him look quite tough and exciting. And I knew then that this was it.

«Alright, Webb.» I said, «I'm only fooling.» And I edged back into the other seat to let him get in.

«You had me worried, Mr. David. Nobody had said about you driving, I didn't know...»

«In any case, I can't drive. No, I wanted to learn, but father wouldn't hear of it. Keep death off the roads and all that. So, of course, Marks wouldn't teach me. It's like that about everything I want to do.»

We drove on for a while in silence.

«Look, Mr. David, I could teach you to drive.»

«And you would?»

«Why not? Only for God's sake not a word to anyone, or I'd be for it.»

«Not a word, not to a soul!»

«A kind of secret between us.»

He held out his hand and shook mine, and I could feel the strength of it. I pressed it harder and he gave me an answering squeeze. I only let it go at last because I couldn't think up a reason for holding it any longer. I was shaking with excitement. Why do hands always affect me that way? Once I notice that someone's hands are beautiful I must look and look at them, then touch them, have them touch me.

«They keep you down rather, don't they, Mr. David? I mean, well, you're shut away here, you don't see many people, a bit dull for a young chap.»

I couldn't decide whether to take umbrage about this, or to talk about it. But he was right, I was treated like a bloody prisoner.

«You're right, Webb. Father's abroad nearly all the time, and he's in London when he is in this country. He doesn't give a damn about me or how I am. He hasn't any time for me. Guy sees to everything. Oh, he's alright, I suppose, but it's damned miserable. I get as fed up as hell.»

«You don't ever go away, Mr. David?»

«No, I'm here all the time. I suppose it's my fault partly. I've got this temper, you see. If anything happens to make me mad I just go clean up the wall, I don't know what I'm doing. There's been hellish trouble about it in the past, so now, here I am and here I stay, out of harm's way. Prison without bars.»

A few minutes later he slowed down and stopped the car.

«What's the trouble?»

«Nothing wrong. Look, Mr. David, if you don't like what I'm going to say, please don't be mad at me. I mean it well, but if it's the wrong thing—well, I'll apologise beforehand.»

«What is this terrible thing? Go on, I shan't be mad.»

«Well, it seems to me, Mr. David, that you need a friend, someone you could talk to when you want to.»

«And?»

«Well, Mr. David, if you do ever feel like that, and think that I'd be any use, well, here I am. I expect that's impertinent; I shouldn't have said it.»

«It's about the nicest thing anyone's said to me in a long time.» I felt a sudden glow of affection for him, and put my arm round his shoulder, giving him a slight hug. He turned to me with a delighted smile.

«Then you'd like that?»

«I'd like it fine. That's the thing I do most need, someone I can talk to, unburden to. A real friend.»

«We'd better be a little careful, Mr. David. Friends, I'd like that fine too. But just when we're on our own, eh? With anyone else there it must just be as it used

to be: Mr. David and Webb. That's wise, isn't it?»

«And when we are alone, then, I'm just David.»

«If you're sure that's what you like.»

«And what can I call you?»

«Well, I'm James; Jim is what I'd like.»

«Jim.»

«David.»

He took my hand again and pressed it warmly. «I can say this now, David. I'll be pretty glad of a friend myself. It's something I've never really had.»

«I should have thought you had a lot of friends; you seem so—confident.»

«Oh, I know a lot of people alright, but a friend, a real friend, do you know, that's something I've never had. I used to wonder how, with all the people there are in the world, it was possible to be so lonely. Then I just sort of got used to it and managed on my own. But a real friend, that seems to me the finest thing in the world.»

«But what about your home, your family?»

«I've never had either. Whoever introduced me into this world also decided to get rid of me at the earliest possible moment—on the orphanage steps.»

For a moment his voice became hard, then he recovered and went on. «I was there until I was fifteen. I was happy enough, I suppose, and I learnt how to take care of myself. They found me a job, later I got a better one and had the chance to learn about cars. Quite by chance I got a driving job for an old gentleman, that led to others, and at last to this one. It's the best I've had, I've a place of my own for the first time.»

«I don't think your flat is all that good.»

«But it's my own, you see, a place of my own. That's why I must make a success of this job.»

We talked for some time, and I was late getting home for lunch. Guy was not pleased. «I've been worried; I thought something had happened to you.»

«My fault; I walked further than I intended, and forgot the time.»

He said nothing more, but his expression said it all for him. I didn't apologise. Who employed whom anyway?

Jim started the driving lessons, and as I expected I was a perfect fool. I'm just no good at anything like that, but he was very patient. As a matter of fact I didn't care if I could drive or not, but it was fun having him to teach me, it seemed another bond between us. These secrets certainly made life more interesting. I used to look at Guy sometimes and wonder what he would say if he knew.

Sometimes I used to get this excited feeling about Jim, and I gave him a few opportunities, but he didn't seem to notice anything and I decided it was no go. Anyway it was fine just to be with him, fun or no fun.

Sometimes in the evenings I would long to slip out and go to see him in his flat above the garage, but he never suggested this and I was not sure if he would like it. Guy went into town once a week to some music club, and now and then to a concert, and several times when he was away I slipped into the garden and went over to the garage, hoping that Jim would see me and ask me up. But in the end I had to go back to the house, to the lonely prison of my room, to longing and temptation, and at last self-loathing and regret.

Often Jim would lock the car and walk with me on the hills, and when he did that I wondered why I had ever wanted to be alone up there. I had to admire the way he walked, easy and graceful, holding himself very well. Once we came to a high gate, and putting his hand on it he vaulted over, so easily with no effort.

«Marvellous, Jim. I could never do that. Do it again.»

But he wouldn't. «I don't like showing off. It's nothing, just one of those things you can do or you can't.»

He always had plenty to talk about, all sorts of amusing things that had happened to him, of his hopes and ambitions. I was happier than I had ever been in my life, and it was grand to know that every day I should see him, he would be pleased to see me.

I had to be careful not to let Guy see any difference in me, and I made sure of this by being particularly bloody-minded most of the time. And it was this I suppose that really started things. I can't remember exactly what happened, except that I had been needling Guy even more than usual. I suppose he had taken just about all he could, and suddenly he snapped out at me, pretty fiercely too. That set me

off, and we had one hell of a row which ended with me going right off the deep end with one of my famous tempers, as bad as any I can remember.

Eventually Guy left me with such a look of contempt that I felt like a bit of dog-dropping in the street, and as usual reaction set in. I couldn't stop myself shivering, and my head began to ache like murder. I couldn't find any aspirin, Guy never left much of anything around. I lay down for a while, but my head didn't get any better, like a ruddy sledge-hammer. So I wandered about, hating Guy, hating myself, hating everyone in fact.

When Jim brought the car round I decided at first I couldn't face a walk, then I thought the air might help me so I went down and we set off. I expect I looked pretty ghastly, I certainly felt it, and we drove for a while in silence. I knew Jim was glancing at me now and then, and presently he stopped the car and asked me what was wrong.

«You look all in, David; what's up?»

For a moment I couldn't speak, then I started to tell him, and the words poured out, faster and faster. I could feel all the hate and bitterness building up in me again. I started the old shivering, and my head hurt more than ever, and suddenly I found that tears were pouring down my cheeks, I couldn't speak any more, couldn't stop crying.

«Hey, David. Hey, kid, take it easy.»

Jim put one arm round me and moved me so that his shoulder was supporting me. «It's alright, kid, gently does it.»

Presently the crying died off. «It's this damned headache,» I told him. «My head feels as if it will burst.»

«Just keep still, keep quite quiet, try to relax.»

He moved his hands to the back of my neck and started working at it with his fingers. For a moment the pain was so frightful that I could have screamed, then suddenly it was marvellous. I could feel the strength of his hands working there. Gradually I seemed to be unwinding... unwinding... and as the pain subsided I felt a wonderful soothing glow, just as if some of his strength was flowing into me. I leaned back against him, utterly relaxed and drowsy, drained of the pain, the hate, the misery, just content to be there. At last he stopped and put his hands on my arms, holding me closely.

«Better?»

«Better. Oh yes, Jim, I'm so ashamed.»

«Good Lord, why?»

I felt so calm, relaxed, resting there against him.

«I don't know how to thank you, Jim.»

«Look, David, we're friends, aren't we? Real pals? Then promise me something; if you're in trouble, if you get in a state, come to me, anytime, anywhere. That's what a friend is for. Right?»

«I will, Jim, I will.»

He started up the car. «I think I'd better get you home, cut out the walk, eh?»

We didn't speak again until he turned the car into the drive.

Then: «Jim, there is something I'd like.»

«What's that?»

«Sometimes in the evenings, if I feel fed up, can I come to see you?»

«Sure, David, why not. You know my little place isn't very much, but I'd be proud to have you there, anytime you want.»

As I left the car I gave his hand a squeeze. I couldn't trust myself to speak.

At lunch I apologised to Guy. He looked a bit startled, but was very nice about it.

«Try not to get into these states, David, it's awfully bad for you. It's pretty rotten for me, but that doesn't matter. It could be serious for you if you go on like that.»

I felt I couldn't take a lecture just then. I felt bloody exhausted, so I said I would try to behave better, and that was that.

All this must have taken a lot out of me because for several days I had no energy, no interest in anything. Then gradually I got back to normal. I hadn't had the car out since that day, so I hadn't seen Jim, but I'd certainly thought about him, even in the night when I couldn't sleep. I couldn't stop thinking about his marvellous hands, and again and again I tried to recapture the extraordinary feeling I had had when he was working on my neck, kneading the pain from me, giving me some of his power.

I felt that I simply had to see him, to talk to him about it. That evening Guy would be going to his music club, and that would be my opportunity. After dinner it seemed that Guy would never leave, in fact I wondered if he had decided not to go.

«Is this your music club evening?»

«It is, but it's half an hour later tonight. Why, would you rather I didn't go? It's nothing special that I should mind missing.»

«Of course you must go. There's a play on T.V. I thought I would watch, and I shall turn in early.»

I waited for ten minutes after he had gone, then switched on the television in case any of the servants should pass my room, and slipped out of the french windows into the dusky garden. My heart began to pound as I reached the garage and saw there was a light in his room. My luck was in, he was there.

The outer door was unlocked, so I went up the stairs and paused outside the door at the top. I could hear Jim moving about inside. I tapped on the door, then opened it and went in.

Jim had his back to me, and spun round as he heard me, a tough almost hostile expression on his face. Then he grinned and came towards me.

«David! Nice surprise; come on in. I've been worried because you haven't had the car. I was afraid you were ill.»

«Just a bit off colour; my fault for having that scene with Guy. I'm alright now.»

«Sit down, David. You see it's not much of a place, but it's good to have you here.»

It certainly was rather bare, just a bed, chair, table and cupboard. The carpet on the floor was old and faded. A door opposite the front door led, I knew, to the small kitchen and the lavatory. The place was very tidy and clean.

«I thought I'd explain why I haven't had the car. I could have 'phoned through, but I wanted to thank you for what you did the other day.»

«Forget it, David, please. It was nothing.»

«If you knew how ghastly I felt before you started, and how marvellous afterwards, you wouldn't say that. You must have some sort of healing power. Have you ever done it before?»

«Just a few times. I can't explain it, David. Those times I just knew I could do it; other times I've felt nothing and I knew it was no good.»

Suddenly I felt shy and awkward, and silence fell between us.

At last: «Guy has gone to town?»

«Yes, or I couldn't have come.»

«I can't offer you a drink, I've nothing here, unless you'd like some tea.»

«Nothing, Jim, thank you. I just felt like a *yarn*, unless you were going out?»

«No, no. Well—look, David, I feel a bit awkward about this. Truth to tell, I was just going to have a bath; I've run the water. Could you wait while I have it?»

I remembered then that there was no bathroom. Father had refused to have one put in, typically mean of him.

Jim seemed to know what I was thinking. «Yes, it's all a bit primitive. I have to fill the bath from the heater in the kitchen, and then drag the bath in here. I don't really want to waste the water, will you mind if I carry on?»

«Of course not; I'll go. We can talk tomorrow.»

«Don't go, David, please. This is your first visit. I'm sure you're not shy. After all, we are pals.»

He dragged the bath in, and I watched fascinated as he threw his clothes off and stood there smiling at me. Until that moment I had not realised how perfect a body could be. His skin was very smooth and white, his limbs beautifully muscular, his chest deep, his belly flat. What little hair he had was very black against his pale skin.

He flexed his muscles and made a few little dancing movements, like a boxer waiting for his fight to begin. «I always feel fine without clothes, really free. I think I must find a south sea island where I need never wear any.»

Then he hopped into the bath, and sat there with his powerful knees drawn up, soaping and splashing himself. I could not take my eyes from him. I had expected him to strip well, but he was superb, like a Greek god, like a statue come to life.

«This isn't exactly luxury,» he said grinning. «Perhaps you can persuade your old man to have a bath put in.»

«Perhaps, but I doubt it. He's got bags of money, and loves spending it on anything that pleases him. Yet in other ways he's mean as hell.»

As I watched Jim all the old excitement was growing, my mouth felt hot and dry, my pulse seemed to be racing like mad. It was all like some dream. I just couldn't believe it was really happening.

«Like to do me a favour, David?»

«If I can. What is it?»

«Soap my back. It's funny, all my life I've wanted someone to do that, and scrub it, but no one ever has. How about it? Show we're real friends.»

«Of course.» I got up and went across to him.

«Oh, you'll get all splashed, spoil that nice suit and shirt. Better forget it. Unless you slip your things off while you do it. You're not shy, are you? Well, look at me.»

My hands were trembling as I loosened my clothes and took them off. I still seemed to be in a dream. I picked up the soap and soaped his back and shoulders, and gently rubbed it in.

«Good boy, that's wonderful, but much harder.»

Under my hands I could feel his hard, strong shoulders. I moved my hands up and down his arms; the muscles were like iron. As I washed the soap from him my excitement grew and grew, and soon he must see it. Then he stood up and reached for a towel, rubbing himself vigorously.

«That was splendid, David. There, you've done for me something I've always wanted. But, David, you're shivering. Are you cold? Look, the water's lovely and hot; jump in and get warm.»

I sat in the old tin bath while he splashed the hot water over me and rubbed me with those splendid hands. «I bet it's the first time you've had a bath like this.»

I stood up and he dried me with the towel, rubbing me until my body glowed. Standing there, my body almost touching his, I felt faint with desire, and hardly knowing what I was doing I put my arms round his neck and pressed myself against him. I felt him tense himself, but he didn't move away. I took his arms and folded them round me. «Oh God, Jim,» I whispered, «I can't help it, I can't help it.» He let me stay there, not responding nor yet repulsing me. Then I turned my face up and my mouth against his.

«Forgive me, Jim.» For some reason I was whispering. «Please understand and forgive.»

And then gently he put me from him and took me to the bed where we sat, his arm round my shoulders.

«Things have moved a bit fast for me, David. I'm a bit out of my depth.»

«But not angry? Please don't be that.»

«Of course I'm not angry: it's just been a bit of a shock. Don't look so worried, I'm your friend, remember. I want to make you happy. It's just—well, I'm a very ordinary guy. I—well, I don't know quite what you want.»

He was looking very embarrassed; poor Jim, I wanted to say something that would take that frown away and make him smile, but somehow, words would not come. There was so much, so much I wanted to say, but I found myself speechless.

I sat there close to him, his arm warmly round me, aware of the sweet curve of his thigh against mine. He must have noticed my excited state, but he made no comment, we sat there in silence.

At last: «Tell me what you want, David. Tell me what you'd like. I do want to make you happy, but I don't know... Please tell me. Just say how you'd like things to be.»

I couldn't speak. God knew, I wanted so much from him, but words would not come.

«You see, David, I'm different from you, I've been brought up rough. I might do things you wouldn't like. If I got started you couldn't stop me. I might hurt and upset you.»

He looked at me searchingly, but I could only shake my head. I longed, oh I longed for so much, but could not tell him.

«You're shy, David. You mustn't be that with me. I'm your friend, you can say what you like, anything. No? Well look, how's this? You can't tell me, you're shy and nervous; I'm nervous too in case I offend you. Why don't you write me a letter telling me the things you can't say? I'd treasure that, a letter from you, and it would help me, I should know then and understand. Sometimes it's easier to write things than to say them. Will you do that?»

I nodded. «I will, Jim.» I told him, «I'll do it tonight.»

«Good boy.» He smiled again, the smile that always touched my heart. «Now I'm going to take a risk; don't hate me if I'm wrong.»

He lay over me, his arms round me, his body pressed against mine. I could not move, nor did I want to. He kissed me fiercely, held me even closer till I seemed to be part of him, then he let me go and sat up.

«Was that wrong? Are you angry?»

«Wrong? Angry? Oh Jim, if you knew.»

«When I have your letter I shall know. And now, David, I think you should go. Sometimes Guy is not very late getting back.»

My hands were trembling so much that I was slow dressing. My desire had in no way diminished, but now things had suddenly developed so much further than I had ever dared to hope, I felt content to wait a little longer.

«No need for me to dress,» Jim said, laughing. «I'm for bed. No, I don't bother with pyjamas.» He did a few exercises, setting his muscles rippling, then jumping into bed he sat there, grinning at me.

«Going to tuck me in?»

My body seemed to be on fire as I went across to him.

«I was only joking.»

He took my hands in his, pressing them so strongly that I had to wince with pain. «Pals, David? We're *real* pals now, eh? Now, off you go. I wonder if I shall get that letter tomorrow?»

«You will, Jim, tomorrow.»

«Be good tonight, David. Don't spoil it *that way*, you know what I mean.»

I hadn't been in bed long before I heard Guy come in. I switched off my light and lay quietly until I heard him go to his room, then I flicked it on again. My mind was still in turmoil over all that had happened, it all seemed too wonderful to be true. What a fool I had been not to tell Jim all that had been in my mind. Still, I would write it, I would write it now.

I did not find it easy, and several times I tore up what I had written and started again. Gradually it became easier, but when I had filled two sides of a piece of paper I suddenly felt desperately tired, too tired to write any more. But at least I had told him a little.

I slipped the note into his pocket next day: «Read it while I am exercising the dogs.»

When I got back to the car I knew that he had read it, but he did not mention it until we were nearly home.

«That was a nice little letter, David. But you didn't tell me very much. I think you can do better than that.»

«It wasn't easy. I was afraid you might be annoyed if I said too much.»

He turned towards me, gripping my arms very hard. «Look, David, say whatever you like, write whatever you want to. I'm understanding, you know. Why not write me a little letter each day. We can't really meet until Guy goes to music next week, and the letters would be something for us to share. Tell me what you really feel about me, what it is about me that you like, what you want from me.»

I wrote every day, and each time it was easier. Jim told me he was thrilled with them. «I've never had such wonderful letters; please go on writing.»

And then out of the blue I heard from my father, not a long letter, telling me that he was not likely to be back in England for at least a year. Only the last part of the letter was important.

«I have written to Mr. Mortimer at the bank. I want you to go to see him. He will explain the reason for this much more easily than I could write it. I hope you will let yourself be advised by him.»

«I have been pleased by the better reports Guy has been sending me about you; I hope your difficult time is ending, and that you begin to feel ready to face up to life and its responsibilities...»

I couldn't imagine why he should want me to go to see the bank manager, but I got Guy to telephone and make an appointment for the next day. Guy offered to come with me, but I could see it was not very convenient. It was his music club evening, and I expect he was afraid he might be delayed. I said I would prefer to go alone.

Jim was quite pleased to drive me into town, I expect he got rather bored with the hills. I told him to park the car and do what he liked until three o'clock.

I suppose I was nervous, because when I told the cashier I had an appointment with the manager and he asked my name I felt bitchy and said surely he knew the names of his customers. That was unreasonable because I very seldom went there, and I felt sorry when he went red and explained that he hadn't been there long. So then I tried to be nice, but though he was very polite I could tell what he thought of me.

The manager was friendly and made me feel at ease.

«I think you know that I have heard from your father. What he wants me to explain to you is that under the terms of the Will of your late aunt, Miss Rutherford, you inherit quite a considerable sum of money.»

This was a surprise. Aunt Rose and I had hardly been on speaking terms, but I suppose beyond Cats' Homes there was nobody else for her to leave it to.

«Up to now, I believe, you haven't taken much interest in your financial affairs, but your father feels, and I agree, that it would be wise for you to start handling your own money. You see, you are your father's sole heir, and unless he remarries which I believe he does not contemplate you will one day be a very wealthy man.»

It's strange, but at that time I had given very little thought to money. It always seemed to be there. I just took it for granted.

«So what do you want me to do?»

«Nothing at all difficult. The inheritance has been very soundly invested, and the dividends will come here to be credited to your account. I suggest you might open a separate account for this income.»

«How much do I get?»

«You can depend on an income of at least £ 1500 a year, and this is likely to increase. Your father proposes to continue your present allowance, and what he wants is for you now to handle all your personal expenditure. Quite a substantial balance is likely to build up on the new account, and he suggests that from time to time you should invest this. I shall be happy to give you any help and advice.»

All this sounded quite fun. «How shall I know what income I am to receive, and when?»

«This is a list of the investments, and it shows when the dividends will be received and the probable amounts. The various certificates will be held here in your name. Now, any questions?» He smiled very pleasantly.

«I don't think so.»

«Your father, through your tutor, will of course continue to take care of every expense in connection with the house and estate. I don't think there is any more to tell you. You will see from the list that your new income starts almost at once. I hope you will not hesitate to consult me on any point you wish.»

He rose and held out his hand.

As I was leaving I had a sudden idea.

«Oh, by the way, as I am of age I take it that my affairs will be absolutely confidential? I mean, you would not divulge any information to my tutor, not even to my father.»

«You can rest quite assured on that.»

I don't know why I asked that. I suppose I just wanted to feel that at last something was entirely, absolutely mine.

Jim was waiting for me as arranged.

«Everything O.K.?»

I told him briefly what had happened.

«My, my, I shall know who to borrow five bob from now! But seriously, David, I think it's grand. It's the beginning of your break away towards being yourself and living your own life.»

«Are you in a hurry to get back, Jim? I don't feel like going home yet. Shall we do a film?»

«Fine, I'd like that. Had you better 'phone Guy that you'll be late? Otherwise he'll get in a state.»

«Hullo, Guy,» I said when I got through, «I think I'll stay and see a film. The new Alec Guinness one is on.»

«What time will you be back? What about dinner?»

«Let me see, it's your music club tonight, I don't want to hold you up. I'll eat somewhere here.»

«Perhaps that is best. Be sure you get a good meal. Oh, by the way, I shall be late

back tonight; it's a special evening with a supper afterwards. Everything alright at the bank?»

«Fine, fine.» I told him. «Bye for now.» And I rang off. That's all you'll get from me, dear Guy, I thought.

We enjoyed the film, and it was fun being there with Jim. He held my hand a lot of the time. He's no idea what a grip he has, my fingers were quite numb, but I didn't care.

It was fun too having dinner with Jim, the first meal we had had together. I didn't feel hungry, but I liked to see Jim enjoying his. I suppose I'm a filthy little snob; I had wondered what his table manners would be like. I need not have worried, they were perfect, probably better than mine.

«Feel like a drink?» Jim asked as we left the restaurant. «I know a nice little pub near here.»

«Suits me.» I said. Actually I'm no drinker, can't hold the stuff, but if he wanted to I was easy.

The pub he took me to was small and cosy, and at first it was nearly empty. Jim fetched me a drink, and we sat at a small table in the shadow. I sipped my whisky neat, and felt it warm and comforting inside me.

«Happy?» He smiled at me.

The place began to fill up, and several people spoke to Jim, one or two of them glancing curiously at me. Then a young man came across and shook hands with Jim, greeting him as an old friend.

Jim introduced me to him, and he shook my hand warmly, then sat down with us. Soon Jim leaned across to me. «Will you be alright if I leave you for a few minutes? I must go to see someone. Leo will stay with you. Shan't be long.»

I glanced carefully at Leo; he was stocky, not as tall as Jim, handsome in rather an obvious way. He caught my eye and smiled at me.

«Quite a boy, Jim.»

«He certainly is.»

«Are you very good friends?»

«We're friends; I like him very much.»

Conversation died; the silence between us seemed endless.

«Another drink?»

«Thanks; whisky, please. Do have one yourself and let me pay.»

I slipped a pound note to him, and he did not argue. When he came back I tried to be more conversational.

«Is Leo really your name? It's unusual.»

«The boys just call me that.»

«Because of your colouring? You're sort of tawny; very distinguished.»

«I guess that's it.» Evidently I had said the right thing for he looked pleased.

«I'm Harry really, Harry Foster. But call me Leo.»

«And I'm David.»

He studied me quite openly. «Yes, I can see that Jim is your type alright.»

«We get on well.»

«I bet you do.» He smiled at me meaningly. There was something about him I didn't quite like. He was pleasant, presentable... but there was something...

«Trust old Jim. I reckon he knows his stuff too.»

I didn't quite know what to say, so I sipped my drink and looked around. I noticed that he was looking at me again, and soon he edged nearer to me.

«Everyone wants a change sometimes, even from Jim.» He pressed his leg against mine, laid a hand on my knee and moved it insinuatingly up and down my thigh.

«If you feel like a change of scenery, get in touch.» He produced a card. «You can always get me there. I'd certainly like that.» He smiled again, most pleasantly, but for some reason I felt a sudden cold touch of unease.

«Thank you; I'll keep the card.» I slipped it into my pocket.

«Goodoh. Let's hear from you, any time.»

I was relieved to see Jim coming back to the table, and shortly after that we left. The second drink had made me pleasantly drowsy, and we were well on the way home before I spoke.

«Who is Leo?»

«Oh, just a guy. I don't know him all that well. Do you like him?»

«He's very spectacular.»

«Real film star type. I think he has done a little film work. Did you like him?»

«He's not really my type.»

«And who is?»

I leaned against him. «Need you ask?»

I think I slept soon after that because the next thing I knew we were turning into the drive.

«Better now?» Jim smiled at me.

«Just fine.»

«Coming to the flat?»

«You bet. Guy's going to be late tonight. I'd better go to the house first. I'll slip across soon.»

When I opened the door of the flat the light was on but the room was empty. I closed the door, and the next minute Jim had pounced on me, pinnioning my arms to my sides. «Got you; now try to escape.»

I struggled desperately, unavailingly. «No good, David; no escape.»

«I surrender.»

Laughing, he let me go. He had taken his clothes off already. «Quick, off with them. Don't keep a hungry man waiting.»

Then I was on the bed, with Jim powerfully above me.

«Those letters, David, did you mean what you wrote?»

I nodded.

«So now I know.»

I could make no movement he did not will, no resistance was possible. At first I seemed to be alone in some timeless space, blackness beneath me, while above me stars danced and shuddered. Then I knew that he was there with me, warm, animal, demanding, but affectionate and kind. Somewhere flames were flickering, hot, brilliant, advancing, receding, exquisite, tormenting... And at last one flame, brightest of all... nearer... nearer... consuming... consuming... then at last I was nothing, less than nothing, and the darkness rushed up to surround me.

When I opened my eyes, Jim was smiling down at me.

«That was quite something.»

I sighed, lying in his arms, perfectly happy.

Presently: «You're a lovely kid.»

«No, I'm weak, soft.»

«Perhaps that's what fascinates me. Don't be afraid that I'll ever hurt you.»

«You could. You could if you wanted to.»

«Look, David. Because I'm strong it doesn't mean I'm a brute. Stop thinking such things.»

I longed to stay all night in his arms, but at last I had to leave him. I must be safely in before Guy returned.

That night I wrote to Jim again, words seemed to pour from me. I told him everything that the evening had meant to me. I was bound, captive, his.

The week of waiting was agony. I begged Jim to take me when we were alone on the hills, but he would not.

«Much too risky; it would be mad. It's not all that long, and it's worth waiting for.»

And so, once a week he brought me alive, brought meaning to my existence. I had never been so happy in all my life.

Then one evening when we were alone together he seemed quiet, not himself. For the first time we seemed to miss perfection.

«There's something wrong, Jim. What is it?»

He hesitated, then at last: «I'm in a jam, David.»

«What sort of a jam?»

«Can't you guess? Money, what else?»

«You mean you're hard up?»

«That's putting it mildly: I'm flat broke. I've been a complete fool. I needed money badly, and tried to get it by backing horses. Of course I lost: I've lost everything. You see, David, your old man isn't specially generous over money, and there were so many things I needed, for this place and for myself. Now I don't know what the hell to do.»

«Get the wallet out of my coat pocket, Jim. There's money in it, take what you need.»

(To be concluded.)

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