

Born in Edinburgh in 1906, **John Innes Mackintosh Stewart** was educated at Oriel College, Oxford, where he was presented with the Matthew Arnold Memorial Prize and named a Bishop Frazer's scholar. After graduation he went to Vienna to study Freudian psychoanalysis for a year.

His first book, an edition of Florio's translation of *Montaigne*, got him a lectureship at the University of Leeds. In later years he taught at the universities of Adelaide, Belfast and Oxford.

Under his pseudonym, Michael Innes, he wrote a highly successful series of mystery stories. His most famous character is John Appleby, who inspired a penchant for donnish detective fiction that lasts to this day. His other well-known character is Honeybath, the painter and rather reluctant detective, who first appeared in *The Mysterious Commission*, in 1975.

Stewart's last novel, *Appleby and the Ospreys*, appeared in 1986. He died aged eighty-eight.

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THE GAY PHOENIX	

MICHAEL INNES

# HARE SITTING UP

You yourself, don't you find it a beautiful clean thought, a world empty of people, just uninterrupted grass, and a hare sitting up?

D H LAWRENCE, *Women in Love*



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PART ONE

JUNIPER



# 1

Juniper had been to Oxford to attend a conference of headmasters of preparatory schools. It was the middle of the long vacation, and he hadn't expected to see many undergraduates. But now, just as his train was about to move out of the station, half a dozen of them tumbled into his compartment. He would have their company non-stop to Paddington. It would be rather a squash.

Actually, there were only five: three men and two girls. As one of the men swung his suitcase up on the rack Juniper noticed that it had been hastily packed. There was the toe of a black sock hanging out at one end, and a scrap of white fur at the other. Of course the scrap of white fur explained matters. It couldn't be anything but a BA hood. These young people were not undergraduates. They were graduates – of perhaps a couple of hours standing. This was a Degree Day, and with hundreds of others who had lately passed their final examinations they had come up for a graduation ceremony. Three young men and two young women. All with their careers before them.

Juniper found himself taking a deep breath. He hadn't much cared for the conference; he wasn't in very good spirits; he was fifty-two. And now here was all this vitality and eagerness crowded round him. Merely as a spectator of it, he had to brace himself by taking this deep breath. Curiously enough, as the train jerked forward, the young man sitting opposite Juniper found it necessary to do precisely the same thing. He took positively a gulp of air.

'Well!' the young man said, '– goodbye to all that.'

'But it still goes on, remember.' The reply came from a ginger-haired and freckled youth sitting next to Juniper. 'Chaps sweating

through their last long vac now. Hungry generations, getting ready to tread us down. Twelve months, Toby my boy, and they'll be after the same jobs that we are.'

Toby stretched out long legs on each side of Juniper's ankles. 'My dear Arthur,' he said comfortably, 'you and I can go a long way in twelve months.'

'And so can the world.' A dark young man sitting in the corner diagonally opposite to Juniper looked up from a book he had opened to offer this. 'Take comfort from that, when you get in a bloody panic job-hunting.' He glanced at the girl sitting next to him. 'Sorry,' he added conventionally.

The girl looked at him in silent scorn. She clearly regarded the habit of apologizing for feeble bad language as beneath contempt. The second girl, who was sitting on the other side of the ginger-haired Arthur, so that Juniper could see nothing of her for the moment except that she was wearing one bright yellow stocking and one bright green, seemed to judge it necessary to bridge an awkward gap. 'Gavin,' she said – apparently meaning the dark young man, 'gets these apocalyptic feelings. There's nothing in them. The great world rolls for ever down the ringing grooves of change. But far more groove than change.'

*'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.'*

The comfortable Toby had produced this. It elicited gasps of ironical admiration all round. Juniper realized that all his travelling companions were acquainted with each other, and they would probably chatter on like this throughout the journey. It might be quite fun. He had nothing to read except a pamphlet which he had picked up at his conference and which he hadn't much expectation of finding absorbing. But he had better keep his nose in it. If he was felt to be an outsider listening, the talkers might become self-conscious and dry up. Arthur had already given him a sharply considering glance. So Juniper managed a frown of concentration over the blur of print in front of him.

And now the girl to whom Gavin had so ineptly apologized spoke crisply. 'But some basic things do change. Things that have remained

## HARE SITTING UP

constant for hundreds of years have changed quite a lot between last year and this year. It's rather striking, really.'

'Do you mean Alice's stockings?' Toby asked. 'They're striking – and quite charming. And I suppose they haven't been happening quite like that since the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Elegant pages in Perugino or Pintoricchio. Terribly nice.'

The girl called Alice, who might have been expected to tuck her legs modestly beneath her at this assault, merely leant forward and scratched her own brightly clothed ankles. 'Jean means nothing of the sort,' she said. 'She means bombs and things.'

'Oh, bombs!' Toby sat back as if withdrawing from the talk. 'Probably I might have said things that have remained constant for millions of years, not just for hundreds.' The brisk Jean was entirely serious. 'Take elks.'

'Elks?' Gavin said. 'Some sort of American freemasons?'

'I mean real elks, particularly in the north of Sweden. The radioactivity in their bones is up by 200 per cent. Contaminated pastures. If Gavin gets apocalyptic feelings, I think he's entitled to them.'

'Isn't it all exaggerated?' Toby asked, as if with a return of mild interest.

'Not so much exaggerated as tricky.' The ginger-haired Arthur was now as serious as Jean. 'Or that's what our Provost tells me. And he's in on radiation, all right. Chief scientific adviser, in fact, to Euratom's health division.'

There was an impressed silence. Juniper let his pamphlet drop into his lap. These young people were now interesting him very much.

'And what does your Provost say?' Alice asked.

'He says that you have to be damned careful what you say. A scare headline in a national paper might persuade thousands of people that it was dangerous to give their babies milk. And public agitation, if it got out of hand, might cripple a government in effective international negotiation.'

'To hell with that, anyway,' Toby said.

Gavin nodded his dark head. 'Yes, to hell with that.'

And Arthur nodded too. 'Well, there I agree with you. I'm all for crippling the bastards if they can be crippled. But can they? Not by protest marches, and being a nuisance to bobbies outside research establishments, and all that stuff.'

'But isn't what you call "all that stuff" the only thing we have to chuck at them?' Jean asked. 'It's like fighting with bottles, I quite agree. But bottles are better than nothing.'

'Certainly they are. But our Provost says another thing about popular agitation. It can do all sorts of mischief just by getting its facts half wrong. Suppose that the strontium rate in grass, or in your elks, Jean, goes bumping up sharply just after the Russians have done a series of experiments. Everybody starts shouting that the experiments have been dirty – dirty in the technical sense, that is. And the Russians say No, not at all, they were frightfully careful to make them as clean as clean. At that we all start shouting – those of us that aren't party-line boys – that Russians are frightful great liars. This might happen, you see, just at a time when there was some chance of a thaw and a general gleam of sense all round. Which would be a disaster. And it would be happening because we hadn't stopped to collect our scientific facts – all our scientific facts. You see, the strontium percentage bumps up and down for other reasons besides bomb tests. Wet weather or dry is quite enough to set the hypersensitive instruments that measure such things swinging one way or the other.'

The well-informed Arthur paused. There was another – and this time rather baffled – silence. Then Jean thought of a relevant question. 'How old is this Provost of yours?' she asked.

'Sixty-nine. He retires next year.'

'Well, that's *him*,' Alice said with decision. 'They just don't, at that sort of age, know what it's all about.'

'Does he,' Toby asked mildly, 'have a stroke every now and then?'

'Or have the surgeons,' Gavin added, 'been obliged to excise the softer bits of his brain?'

'Oh, shut up,' Arthur said crossly. 'We'll all be that age one day.'

'Shall we?' Jean asked. 'I'd say that's rather the point.'

## HARE SITTING UP

‘Well, anyway, they’re not decent – personalities like that. Our Provost may have reaction-times like a hearse, but he does ask one to lunch.’

‘We can certainly drop him,’ Gavin said tolerantly. ‘He does no harm in your blessed college, and probably not much on Euratom either. But he’s a symptom of something pretty grim, you’ll agree. Our fathers, when they were our age, declaimed against government by the grey-haired. But they didn’t have to declaim against government by near-corpses. In those days, the really disabling diseases killed fairly quickly. Nowadays, you can have a man sitting at a conference table when there’s pretty well nothing left of him except will and judgement. And will can last longer even than judgement in a mortally sick man.’

‘That’s thoroughly true.’

This time, the silence was a startled one. For it was Juniper who had spoken. He hadn’t in the least meant to.

It was the ginger-headed Arthur – he who had already looked curiously at Juniper – who spoke first. He spoke to the accompaniment of a surprisingly sheepish grin, and to an entirely unexpected effect. ‘Hullo, sir. I’m afraid we’ve been failing to recognize each other.’

For a moment Juniper stared at him blankly. Then he laughed. ‘Well I’m blessed,’ he said. ‘It’s –’

‘Arthur Ferris, ’44 to ’48.’ The ginger-haired youth spoke quickly, in case his former headmaster should in fact be baffled. ‘The worst mathematician you ever got into Rugby, sir.’

‘I doubt that. Did you overlap with Bingo Parker? Probably not. But the surgeons had certainly been at *his* brain – in his first childhood and not his second – and taken out the bit with sums in it.’

Everybody laughed politely. Since the stranger had joined in their conversation, they felt that this was the thing to do. Probably they were a little sorry for Arthur, who had been gassing away, with this elderly beak of his beside him all the time. It was perhaps because

Juniper was aware of this that he hastened a return to the former general topic.

‘I was saying I thought you right about will and judgement. One can never confidently trust the judgement of a very sick man. The will may crack much later.’

‘Then isn’t it odd, sir,’ Toby asked politely, ‘that what happens nowadays isn’t more disastrous than it is? Really important people seem to be kept alive in the most fantastic way. And their judgement can’t be – it can’t possibly be – what it was. They dominate contending nations – and yet here we are, alive, and the world at peace, more or less, and nobody’s killing anybody else except in quite obscure corners of it.’

Juniper nodded. He guessed that intelligence lurked in the easy-going Toby. ‘Perhaps,’ he said, ‘will is more important than judgement – up at that level. It can’t find solutions, but it can block the way. Sit at a table opposite to an absolutely inflexible will and – if you’re an absolutely inflexible will yourself – the probable outcome will be just nothing at all. And there’s no harm in that. It’s budging or being budged that may be fatal.’

The serious Jean sat up straight. Juniper could see at once that she was what they call father-eclipsed. Either she had to crumple before an elderly man or react against him vigorously. ‘You mean,’ she asked, ‘that we should see to it that near-corpses negotiate with near-corpses, and that they need have neither wits in their heads nor compassion in their bowels as long as their jaws set like rat traps?’

Juniper hesitated for a moment. He was aware that the other young people had become slightly uncomfortable. They were all capable of being serious – indeed they liked seriousness – but they hated a hint of any sort of emotional overtone to all this. And before he could frame a reply, the multi-coloured Alice again took on the role of smoothing things over.

‘But if you don’t budge and he doesn’t budge,’ she said, ‘then you will both go on manufacturing those ghastly things. And bankrupting yourselves in the process. For the expense is astronomical, isn’t it?’

## HARE SITTING UP

‘Certainly it is.’ Juniper followed this up briskly. ‘Killing people gets more and more expensive century by century, and war by war. And when you break down the cost of nuclear fission you get some quite fantastic results. Advertising vacant appointments, for instance. Getting the right man for a moderately senior job often costs £8,000, that way alone.’

Arthur Ferris laughed. ‘It would be bad if getting an assistant master cost that, sir.’

‘My dear Ferris, I’d regard it as a facer if it cost a thousandth part of it. Even for somebody who can teach mathematics with an eye on Rugby – and I assure you they’re much the hardest to get hold of.’

‘And it could all be spent on medical research,’ Alice said. ‘Or on getting millions of people in what Toby calls obscure corners of the world up at least to something near the bread line.’

‘They’d only breed faster,’ Gavin said.

‘That’s where medical research would come in.’ Alice hesitated for a fraction of a second. ‘Contraception’s no good as it is – not among primitive peoples. But if you can manage it orally, the old Malthusian nightmare is solved.’

Everybody started talking at once. And Juniper, who knew that his nerves hadn’t been too good of late, was suddenly aware that he was almost in a queer way. For, quite out of the blue, he felt affection for these young people – and felt guilty about them too. He liked the small boys at Splaine Croft – he just wouldn’t be there if he didn’t – but the shades of their prison house were still far off. These young men and women were, so to speak, just ready to be tumbled in. For a still moment, while the chatter ran on, Juniper sat back and wondered what fool or blackguard had made the world into which the tumbling must be done.

It was Toby’s voice that brought him back to an awareness of the course of the argument. ‘So if people must be killed,’ Toby was saying, ‘there’s everything to be said for doing the job cheaply. It comes to that. Back to Tamburlaine and Genghis Khan.’

‘But there’s also much to be said for doing it with discrimination,’ Juniper said. ‘High explosive wasn’t too bad there. If you dropped it

from Zeppelins' – he paused for a moment, wondering if any of his hearers would be very clear about what a Zeppelin was – 'or torpedoed it into a passenger liner, you were at least still more or less taking aim. And even if you blockaded a whole nation, you presumably knew what you were about – if that indeed can be called knowledge, which is, presumably, unaccompanied by imaginative realization.' He paused again, aware that there was a real stillness in the railway compartment. 'But the hydrogen bomb is, of course, quite simply madness. It's spectacularly effective – just as would be some contrivance for ensuring that the earth should fall into the sun. It's indiscriminate to that degree. We bankrupt ourselves, as one of you said, to manufacture something which must destroy us if put into use. So cheap ways of indiscriminate slaughter would be a *little* more rational. And cheap ways of very large-scale but yet *controllable* slaughter would be more rational still. A relative rationality, of course. Considering the whole thing entirely as an inside job.'

There was silence. 'An inside job?' somebody asked.

'Inside the madhouse. My generation are all inside. We're trapped into making all our calculations as if an outside didn't exist. Your generation has the job of breaking out, wouldn't you say?'

'Certainly we have.' Toby stretched his long legs farther on each side of Juniper's shoes. He had the appearance of being very relaxed. 'But we need to get the know-how. A hint or two, say. And I take it you don't mean, sir, that your own generation is entitled simply to abdicate responsibility?'

'Certainly not. But I'm being a bore.' Juniper suddenly felt so tired that he wanted to get out of the whole conversation. 'It's not really stuff for a schoolmaster to pontificate about.'

'You seemed to have some specialized knowledge,' the dark Gavin said abruptly. 'Those £8,000 advertisements, for instance.'

Juniper smiled. 'It's very indirect. A sort of family connexion.'

'We may all have that, in a manner of speaking.' Arthur Ferris spoke after having remained silent for some time. 'I don't know whether you heard us joking about job hunting. Well, we can't tell where any job will land us. Whether we've read Arts or Science, some

vast industrial concern is quite likely to suck us in. That's true even of the women –'

'Thank you,' Alice interrupted with spirit. 'Although the probability is that we shall become governesses, no doubt.'

'Don't trail feminist red herrings, Alice dear. I'm saying we're all liable to be sucked into concerns which have what you may call close family relationships with slaughter. There's no escaping it.'

'You can teach,' Juniper said – and knew he said it a little stiffly. 'Not much money. But you can teach in a decent school. I'll get any of you a job tomorrow.'

'But what if we taught sedition?' Toby asked cheerfully. 'Or, if not sedition, at least thoroughly subversive ideas? What if we marched the kids to one of those atom-busting places, and urged them to lie down and bite the bobbies in the calves? It might be keeping schoolmastering going as an honourable profession, if you ask me. But what would the parents say? And what would happen to the fees?'

'What indeed,' Juniper said, and let his tone indicate his disinclination to pursue this line.

'I'm much more interested,' Gavin said at once, 'in something else. It's the twilight of the gods idea – the fascination of bringing everything else down with you as you fall. Hitler was gripped by that, I imagine. But you needn't necessarily be a Wagnerite to feel the tug of it.'

Alice crossed a green leg over a yellow one. 'Death-wish stuff,' she said. 'How does it correlate with actually dying? Does anybody know? You see, we've been talking about the dangers of concentrating power – and far more potential destructive power than has ever existed before – in the hands of old, sick men. Suppose they're dying because they *want* to die –'

'Which is very great rot to begin with,' Toby interrupted cheerfully.

'But I'm just trying to keep an open mind. Would there really be any tendency in an old, sick man – an unconscious tendency, I mean – to take the whole outfit with him?'

For a moment everybody considered this problem soberly. And again Juniper found himself strangely moved – this time, just by the silence. The thought of these young people didn't perhaps go very deep. But they were applying what information they had – including some surprisingly old-fashioned psychological conceptions – to problems that were very real to them. And to him.

'I don't believe in your fatal old men,' Arthur said. 'I'm more ready to be scared of fatal young ones. Chaps just like you and me. The chaps who cruise round with these things in the sky. What about one of them going off his head?'

'But they're not quite like you and me.' Toby said this with ironical conviction. 'They're not highly educatable types like us – and therefore, of course, they're far less neurotic and unstable. Which is fortunate, is it not?'

Once more Jean sat up straight. 'What awful rot! It's been proved again and again that the most surprising people will pack up under strain. And I think Gavin is right with his twilight of the gods stuff. And then, you know – I'm not sure if it's the same thing – there are people obsessed with a violent pathological loathing of the whole human species. I have one in my own family, as a matter of fact. Imagine giving Jonathan Swift a hydrogen bomb.'

'Jonathan Swift?' Arthur asked. 'Is that a chap at Balliol?'

'He wrote a book called *Gulliver's Travels*,' Jean said crushingly. 'As it's a nursery book when the awkward bits have been expurgated, even you might be supposed to have heard of it.'

'All right, all right,' Arthur said, slightly abashed. 'But there *is* a Jonathan Swift at Balliol. I've played squash with him.'

'And have you ever,' Gavin asked, 'played squash with D H Lawrence?'

'A bearded chap at Trinity,' Toby added gravely.

'Of course if you have to talk like idiots –' Arthur said, gravely offended, and reached for a newspaper.

'Perhaps you'd prefer a book?' Gavin asked, and held out the volume he had opened at the beginning of the journey. 'I'll show you at which end to begin.'

## HARE SITTING UP

Without rising to this childish insult, Arthur took the book and glanced at the title. ‘*Women in Love*? I’ve read that one.’

They had all, it seemed, read *Women in Love* – a fact that surprised Juniper a good deal. But he remembered having been told that, for this generation, Lawrence was the sole novelist to have survived from the beginning of the century.

‘Is there something relevant,’ he asked Gavin, ‘in *Women in Love*?’

‘Something frightfully relevant, if you ask me. Do you remember a character called Rupert Birkin? He ends up all cosy and smug with something he calls an ultimate marriage, while his unenlightened friend Gerald Critch walks out into the snow and gets frozen dead like a rabbit. That’s the story. But, earlier on, Birkin has this hating mankind in the guts neurosis pretty badly.’

‘Lawrence had it himself,’ Alice interrupted. And added conscientiously: ‘On one side of his complex nature, that is.’

‘Birkin,’ Gavin continued, ‘invites this girl he’s going to have his ultimate marriage with to agree that humanity is dry-rotten, and that healthy young men and women are in fact apples of Sodom with insides full of bitter, corrupt ash. Humanity is a huge aggregate lie, and things would be better if every human being perished tomorrow. He asks her – this girl he’s going to sleep with, mind you – whether she doesn’t find this a beautiful clean thought. No more people. Just uninterrupted grass, and a hare sitting up.’

‘A hare sitting up?’ Toby asked. ‘And nobody with a gun?’

‘The beast will degenerate,’ Arthur said. ‘Nothing to bolt from.’

‘And there’s a good deal more of it,’ Gavin went on. ‘Birkin is fanatical. He says he would be ready to die like a shot, to know that the earth would really be swept clean of people. The question is: is there a real mentality like that, or is Lawrence just making it up?’ He turned to Juniper, as if in direct challenge. ‘What do you think, sir?’

‘I think that Birkin is putting in rather a tall order. In point of discrimination, I mean. You remember that we were talking about that? Well, it seems that nowadays getting rid of the human beings wouldn’t be too difficult. But I’m not so sure about sparing the hare, or even the grass.’

'Who cares?' Jean asked. 'A lot of *Women in Love* is quite terrific. But Birkin on the hares and the grass is sentimental tosh. I remember Bertrand Russell doing a radio talk about the bomb, and saying something about the innocent birds and trees. Perhaps there are people with whom that sort of thing goes home. But – although, as it happens, I'm rather keen on birds – I'm not one of them. This strikes me as a human world, or nothing.' Jean paused, as if uncertain about her own logic. 'Alice, what do you think?'

'About Birkin in the novel? I remember him as quite harmless. A harmless bore. Nobody who poured out that sort of talk would ever be a danger to anybody. There's a place in the book where some irritated female hits him over the head with a paperweight or something. But all he does in reply is to go out and climb a hill and take his clothes off and roll in the flowers. Ferdinand the Bull couldn't be more innocuous.'

'But if this Birkin,' Toby said, 'believed himself to be an out-and-out do-gooder, full of an exalted love of, and belief in, humanity? If he was a type who is quite noisy in *that* way – but really because he is smothering a still small voice inside himself that is taking the corrupt ash and apples of Sodom line –'

'Over-compensating,' Alice interrupted happily. 'Then, of course, he'd be a frightful danger. Birkin mustn't have the bomb.'

'Birkin didn't *know* about the bomb,' Toby said. 'The interesting – and perhaps daunting – fact is precisely *that*.'

Juniper looked at Toby curiously. He still felt that this long-limbed loungeur was, intellectually, the pick of the bunch. 'How do you make that out?' he asked.

'There's something that all the little books, and all the little lectures, tell you about Lawrence. He was a prophet. Wasn't somebody talking about Bertrand Russell? Well, he says that Lawrence had developed the whole philosophy of Fascism before the politicians had thought of it. And with the bomb, you see, it's rather the same. Nobody had dreamed of anything that could wipe out the human race –'

‘Martians,’ Arthur interrupted. ‘There was already lots of science fiction of that sort.’

‘Well, yes – but that’s a special case, and merely fantastic. My point is that here is Lawrence’s Birkin brooding over the image of something which comes within the bounds of sober possibility thirty years later. I don’t like it. I’m not sure it doesn’t frighten me.’

‘Of course,’ Alice said, ‘it might be a sort of dream-prophecy, all disguised and inside out. It may really be the hares that are wiped out. There was that disease that nearly annihilated the rabbit.’

‘And *that*,’ Toby said robustly, ‘brings up another topic. Bacteriological warfare. Cheaper by a long way, I imagine. But whether it can be used so as not to bounce, I don’t know.’ He looked across the compartment at Juniper. ‘Have you any information on that, sir?’

‘None whatever.’

For a moment there was the effect of a full stop. Juniper realized that he must have spoken abruptly.

‘I imagine,’ Alice said, ‘that it’s even more hush-hush than bombs. If it really exists.’

‘I think it exists,’ Juniper said, more mildly. ‘In fact, I have a brother who has some information about it. But he never makes it a subject of discussion. No doubt that’s because it’s as hush-hush as can be.’

‘And perhaps,’ Jean said, ‘because it’s about the very nastiest thing that can be thought of? Just as an idea, it seems even nastier than the bomb.’

Juniper nodded. ‘I quite agree. At a first glance, the possibility of responsible scientists lending themselves to such investigations seems merely fantastic. And yet one can see how it is. The threat is judged to exist. Means of defence against it must be considered. And so the field, the area of study and experiment, is established.’

‘And something else is established too.’ Jean’s voice shook a little. ‘That we really are the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.’

Once more there was the slightly awkward pause that Jean was apt to induce. Alice turned quickly to Arthur. 'Jonathan Swift again,' she said kindly. 'That Balliol man.'

'God be with you, Balliol men,' Gavin quoted solemnly.

They all laughed quickly. Only Juniper – perhaps because he was not young and no longer much subject to the sudden touch of cold fear – alone remained grave.

'Swift on the vermin is all right,' he said. 'But Shakespeare's more succinct.'

'Yes, sir?' Arthur Ferris, as if suddenly reminded of old pupillary days at Splaine Croft, had turned to him expectantly.

'It's a simple statement about self-destruction and the evil in the heart of man:

*Our natures do pursue,  
Like rats that ravin down their proper bane,  
A thirsty evil; and when we drink we die.*

I can't remember who is speaking – and it's not important. What the lines carry does seem to me important, and I've often been haunted by them.'

Everybody looked at Juniper curiously – as if after this he must have something more to say. But he remained silent. And presently, as the train ran into Paddington, he did no more than exchange a few words with Ferris as an old Splaine boy. He knew that the talk of these casual travelling companions, unlike the lines from *Measure for Measure*, would soon pass out of his head. He knew that he would probably never again set eyes on Toby, Arthur, and the rest of them. But for a little time, at least, the encounter had disturbed him.

And he knew that it was because he had mentioned his brother – had fingered, in his own mind, an area where a great uneasiness lay.

He took a taxi across to Waterloo – although the tube would have been quite as quick. The taxi provided the feeling, if not the reality, of haste. And he didn't want to look at London, still less to run into any

London acquaintance. He just wanted to get quickly to Splaine Croft. It was neurotic, he knew, his recurrent sense of the place as a refuge – precisely as neurotic as the disposition that worried him in his brother. If he really gave the impulse rein, he would be in as desperate a case as those obsessional scholars who scarcely dare venture out of the great womb-like museums and libraries. Whereas Splaine wasn't really a bit like that. It was a place where quite an aggressively creative job was done – both on young bodies and young minds. Even now, in the middle of the holidays, there would be things to tackle as soon as he got back there. If it spelt anything, it spelt sanity. That, for him, was its governing idea – that, or it failed him utterly. So it would be a pity, after just these three days at Oxford, to make his return to that sanity by a route that took him, so to speak, right round the bend.

The trouble, of course, was this family complex, as it must be called. Look how it had been touched off on the train. And needlessly, likely enough. As so often before.

But although he had taken a taxi from Paddington to Waterloo, he walked – comfortably enough, with no more than his outsize briefcase – from Splaine Junction to the school. He liked particularly the short tramp through the village. Tiny though the place was, there might be half a dozen people with whom to pass a confident time of day. He liked the smell of the smithy – a smell that still came straight out of childhood. He liked, in the window of the dairy, the enormous and highly polished milk can that never ceased to enchant the boys when they came down to spend their pocket money. It had an elaborately engraved inscription: *Special Cows kept for Invalids and Infants*. There was a tradition of daring new boys to go in and ask if they might see the special cows. Juniper supposed that once the special cows must really have existed – for commercial ballyhoo had been only in its infancy when that legend had been engraved on the shining metal. But what had been special about them? There was a real subject for research in that.

Juniper turned through the lodge gates and gave a wave to Currill, the groundsman, who was putting in a little work in his own neat

garden. The roof of the school – a pleasant tumble of quite spurious Tudor gables – appeared for a moment through a gap in the trees. Then it vanished until Juniper came round the last sweep of the drive. He heard boys' voices from one of the broad tiled verandas. Yes, there they were, the little holiday crowd: three regulars whose parents were in Africa or the Far East – distinguishable by their regulation blue corduroy shorts and windcheaters – and along with them eight or nine holiday visitors, recruited to help with the overheads. But recruited, too, to keep the place alive other than at the purely economic level. Splaine Croft was a dismal place without boys: a slightly vulgar Edwardian country house degraded into a derelict barracks. But when the boys were there, you didn't notice how the once handsome appointments had been kicked to bits – or you didn't notice, provided you had a taste for boys mucking around. In term-time there were seventy-eight of them. And almost all the time, they seemed to be tumbling about in form-rooms or corridors or the stable-yard or the playing fields. There couldn't be less regimentation anywhere in England. It was surprising that they did rather well.

The boys playing on the veranda looked up only for a moment as Juniper climbed the steps to the front door. They knew that the headmaster, although a noticing sort of person, hadn't much fancy for being noticed; he preserved with his pupils, precisely as he did with his staff, the sort of courteous aloofness into which some men grow with middle age. So, entirely unselfconsciously, the boys went on with their game. They were playing marbles.

No doubt – Juniper thought as he opened the door and stepped into the familiar cavernous hall – there were prep schools at which marbles would be terribly infra dig. But not here. Every year they had their regular two weeks craze before being succeeded by something else. What usually came after marbles was lead bombs.

Yes – bombs. Juniper frowned as he remembered his railway journey. But at Splaine Croft a bomb meant a species of plummet at the end of a string, cut horizontally in two to permit the insertion of the sort of cap commonly fired in a toy pistol. You let the bomb drop sharply on a hard surface, and a satisfactory explosion was the result.

## HARE SITTING UP

Splaine boys had never heard real bombs drop. They were too young. But that didn't hold of boys of public-school age, and still less of his late travelling companions. Among people of that generation one must occasionally meet, without being aware of it, young men and women who, as small children, had seen parents or brothers or sisters –

Juniper didn't continue the thought. There were matters in his own experience that must excuse his turning ostrich from time to time. I am a schoolmaster now, he told himself, with a defined and compassable constructive job. Of course, it's a job among the savages – for what are small boys if not that? And savages like a big bang, or at least a middle-sized one in a lead plummet. Or do they? Isn't it a compulsion, rather than a liking? In Oxford, only the day before, he had made the acquaintance of a master from a large midland grammar-school. And this man had told him that almost the only thing the common run of older boys now read is war books. Fictionalized accounts of war in the jungle, of savage guerilla fighting, of men driven to starvation and the verge of madness in prison camps: these easily headed the list. Pleasure was an ambiguous word, surely, to apply to what they got from such stuff. It looked as if the little boys with their bombs and the big boys with their paperbacks were alike trying to get rid, in fantasy, of kinds of fear, of horror, lodged – well, say lodged obstinately by this time in the consciousness of the race...

A schoolmaster, he repeated to himself. That's me. Plain Miles Juniper, responsible for these boys, and doing what I can. Perhaps one can tutor it out of them: the fear and what plants it there – the darkness in the heart of man. It's not a very good bet. But try it.

A bell clanged harshly above the stables.

The bell clanged as usual. In term-time the racket made by the seventy-eight boys would have increased for a moment as if challenged by it – and then there would have been a quick diminuendo as the assistant masters emerged from common room and took charge. But now it was merely calling the holiday bunch to tea. And there were no masters left at the school; only a couple of undergraduates doing a

holiday job in order – Juniper suspected – to buy themselves unnecessary luxuries, or to be able to go off to Switzerland and break their legs at Christmas. But they were nice enough lads, and they had plenty of time for reading, supposing them to be inclined that way. A small domestic staff – skeletal, invisible, and entirely competent – ran the place. Apart from that, there was only the school secretary, old Miss Grimstone. And here she was – arthritic and myopic but formidable – emerging from her den-like office.

‘A visitor,’ Miss Grimstone said. ‘Mr Clwyd.’

Juniper looked rather warily at the secretary. There was always a ring of challenge in her ancient voice.

‘Mr what?’ he asked.

‘C-L-W-Y-D. He was most anxious to spell it out. I suppose he’s a prospective parent.’

‘We don’t often get Welsh boys at Splaine.’

Miss Grimstone shook her head. ‘Well, at least he’s not discernibly Welsh. And I only suppose that he’s a parent. He seems a little old for it. A grandfather, perhaps, and thinking of making advance payments by covenant.’ Miss Grimstone gave a low chuckle. She was one eminently well-informed on the financial aspect of private education.

‘Tax fiddle of some kind? I don’t like that sort. But I suppose we can’t send him away.’

‘Certainly we can’t.’ Miss Grimstone was indignant. ‘Those arrangements are perfectly legal and proper. Nobody is obliged to regulate his monetary affairs so as positively to attract taxation. And if people have to educate each other’s children in order *not* to attract it, that is the mere folly of government. And Mr Clwyd is most distinguished. He has a small white beard.’

‘Bother his beard. It’s probably a fake, like his expense account. And he’s just waiting? I certainly made no appointment with him.’

‘People do sometimes remember hearing of the school when motoring past, and call in. That’s how we got Lord Scattergood’s boy.’

‘Bother Lord Scattergood’s boy. This Clywd has come by car?’

## HARE SITTING UP

‘A Rolls, Mr Juniper. And with a chauffeur. The man has taken it round to the kitchens and is being given tea. Mr Clwyd himself declined.’

‘Well, I suppose I must show him round, and so forth. Has he been waiting long?’

‘Less than twenty minutes. I rang through to the station and made sure you had come off the train. And now I must be getting back to next term’s bills.’

Miss Grimstone turned away and hobbled into her office. Juniper paused for a moment to collect himself. Splaine Croft was far from crying out for pupils. So he didn’t feel at all like a spider luring the bearded Clwyd into his parlour. This fact made him all the more civil to his visitor when he walked into the study and encountered him. ‘Mr Clwyd?’ he said politely.

Mr Clwyd, who had been reading *The Times*, rose and bowed. ‘Mr Juniper?’

‘Yes. And I’m so sorry I wasn’t in when you called. Do you smoke?’ And Juniper pushed forward a cigarette box.

‘Thank you, no.’ Mr Clwyd was a person of gravity. He possessed a searching but inoffensive gaze which he directed upon Juniper with unabashed frankness. ‘I apologize for coming in out of the blue.’

‘Not at all.’ Juniper, feeling it fair to answer scrutiny with scrutiny, took a good straight look at Clwyd. The beard was a beautifully trimmed affair. At the same time it was in some obscure way ever so faintly unexpected. Apart from this, Juniper’s impression was entirely favourable. He felt he knew at once what sort of parent or grandparent Clwyd would be. He wouldn’t be a pest, but he would expect a good deal. Nor would he waste time in seeing that he got it. He might be – at a guess – chairman of one of the joint stock banks. He had a timetable for today and every other day, and he had the art of conducting in apparent leisure interviews which he knew would in fact end in twelve or in twenty-five minutes’ time. Juniper decided to cut out any remarks about the weather.

‘How can I help you?’ he asked. It was the association with banking that prompted him to this form of words. His own bank manager said just that.

‘You can show me your cricket field.’

‘Why – certainly.’ Juniper rose, greatly surprised. He knew that there were prospective parents capable of beginning their investigations decidedly on the athletic side, but it hadn’t struck him that Mr Clwyd – who so clearly belonged if not to the intellectual at least to the managerial classes – might be one of them. ‘We can go out by this window. There’s a sett of badgers in the corner over by Splaine Wood, if you’re interested in that sort of thing. And as for the pitch – well, it’s not too bad. I’ve got a very reasonable groundsman now, I’m glad to say.’

With this and other professional patter, Juniper led the way into the open air. Mr Clwyd was seriously attentive – but less, Juniper felt, to the substance of the information he was receiving than to the manner in which it was being offered to him. Clwyd walked with deliberation; he carried an umbrella and gloves; he wore a bowler hat not very well accommodated to a summer afternoon in the country. But, despite all this, there was again the impression that he was very little disposed to waste time. He might almost have been in a hurry – and in a hurry to size Juniper up. Juniper didn’t reflect that his awareness of this in his visitor was the consequence of a not wholly common acuteness of perception in himself. And although there was something in the situation that made him indefinably uneasy, he nevertheless continued with what he privately called sales talk – and still on the assumption that Mr Clwyd was chiefly, or even exclusively, interested in games. They had beaten their chief rivals, Merton House, handsomely this year. And next year it looked as if they were going to have a really promising slow bowler.

Mr Clwyd gave these remarks his attention until they reached the actual pitch. He even prodded the pitch in a considering way with his umbrella. Then he spoke again for the first time since they had left the study.

## HARE SITTING UP

‘Mr Juniper, my name isn’t Clwyd. Nor is this my beard. I’m not sure you haven’t guessed as much.’

Juniper was sufficiently perturbed to come abruptly to a halt. And at this the man who was not Mr Clwyd came to a halt too, raised his umbrella and pointed it towards the nearer horizon. He might have been engaged in some polite topographical inquiry.

‘I’m afraid I don’t understand you, sir.’ Juniper spoke with a proper stiffness. He was quite sure that his visitor wasn’t mad, and he saw no occasion for tenderness. ‘Are we not wasting each other’s time?’

‘I propose to waste as little time as possible. Mr Juniper, I have asked you to bring me out to your cricket field because it is a spot where we quite certainly can’t be overheard.’ The visitor paused, made a half turn, and this time pointed with the same air of courteous interest to a nearby spinney. ‘It’s most unlikely that we are being watched, but you will have to forgive this professional pantomime, all the same.’

‘Do I understand that you are an actor, sir?’ It was in as chilly a tone as he could manage that Juniper asked this question. He was beginning to feel angry – angry and, he had to admit to himself, alarmed. It was the same alarm – to be more frank, it was the same acute private anxiety – that had welled up into consciousness during his railway journey.

‘No, not an actor.’ The man who had called himself Clwyd was looking at Juniper steadily. ‘I am a policeman,’ he said. ‘My name is Appleby.’