

TOWN AND COUNTRY

As Paul Rossiter turned west onto the M4 motorway, the radio announced that an airliner had crashed on its way to the very holiday resort in Turkey he and his wife had booked for their holiday later in the year. The news made him feel uneasy. He switched to Classical FM but a Mozart piano concerto failed to allay a sense that the world was a more dangerous place than he had imagined.

He was an accountant, on his way on a regular assignment to audit the books of a firm in North Devon. The proprietor of the firm had been sent to England as a child in 1938 and had built up a thriving boat-building business. Although he was very old, Taylor - his name had been changed from the German name Schneider - was still very much in charge. Paul had made this journey annually for the past seventeen years.

He switched on the wipers, as a few raindrops fell from a thin gauze of cloud. Cars much smaller than the Volvo he was driving raced past. Heavy lorries overtook him. With an eye to petrol economy, he maintained a steady sixty miles per hour.

Because of noisy revellers the previous year Paul Rossiter had not booked into his usual hotel. His secretary had arranged for him instead to stay in a small cottage adjoining a local farm.

A few distant sails against a background of a blue sea greeted him as he descended the hill into Raymouth. Shortly afterwards the small harbour came into view. Following instructions he had been given, he drove beyond the boatyard, which lay to the east of the harbour, and followed a winding lane along the side of the river for half a mile. Shortly afterwards, belatedly, he saw a barred gate, carrying a sign, Jowett's Farm. He performed a series of U-turns in the narrow lane, opened the heavy gate and drove along a narrow gravel path between fields of lush green pasture in which Hereford cows were grazing.

The farmhouse, a yellow brick, red-roofed building with dormer windows, came into view. Nearby, on the other side of a line of douglas firs, were milking sheds and outbuildings with galvanised roofs. A Range Rover and a battered, mud-stained Metro stood in the drive.

When he rang the front-door bell, a man's voice called from behind some nearby fir trees: 'Hang on a minute.' Soon afterwards, a tall white-haired man with a broken nose hurried towards him through a gap in the trees.

Introducing himself as Jowett, he enquired: 'Have you come to stay at the cottage?'

'Yes, I'm Paul Rossiter. Would you care to show it to me.'

'Just wait until I go into the house and get the keys.'

Jowett returned shortly, lowered his bulky body in the passenger seat and directed Paul to drive half a mile to a brick cottage set in a small forest of trees. The front garden, Paul observed with misgivings, was overgrown with weeds.

A musty smell greeted him as they entered the cottage. The cramped living room was furnished with a grimy chintz-covered settee, a television set and some fireside chairs. Upstairs, Jowett showed him two small bedrooms and a narrow bathroom. Although disappointed by the accommodation, Paul but decided not to complain. He would work in the evenings on the battered oak table in the living-room and make his breakfast in the tiny kitchen. Lunch, he had been told, was available in the staff canteen at Taylor's boatyard. He would take his evening meal in a local pub.

Jowett said, glancing around the room: 'The girl who does for us will come in to tidy up and make your bed. Violet is her name. She has the key. How's old is Taylor, by the way. He must be eighty if he's a day. Don't see him much these days.'

'He's fine.'

'Amazing.' Jowett said, almost resentfully. 'If I was worth what he is, I wouldn't bother with farming. Call at the house if there's anything you need. I'm a widower. I live with my son, my daughter-in-law and three grandsons.'

Amused by Jowett's underestimate of the value of many acres of farmland, a common trait in farmers, Paul hung his suits in the wardrobe and placed his shirts and underwear in the top drawer of a battered chest-of-drawers. He went downstairs, inspected the fridge and swore when he noticed that milk he had requested was absent. He examined a faded umber photograph of a Victorian family wedding hanging above the fireplace. The cottage was a strange place in which to spend a working week. But he decided to accept the situation and settled down on the settee to read *The Times*.

On his way to the village for his evening meal, he stopped at the farmhouse. A harassed-looking young man with thinning hair, wearing an apron, opened the door. On hearing about the absence of milk, he exclaimed: 'That stupid girl, Violet! I'm Jim Jowett. I'm bathing my youngest at the moment,' He gestured with wet hands. 'I'll bring you some milk and butter later on. Violet has a mind like a sieve.'

'I'll collect it when I come back from having a meal in the village,' Paul said.

'OK, Mr. Rossiter. I'll see you later on. Must dash. Young Frankie makes a helluva mess if I leave him unattended.'

In the village Paul discovered a recently-opened fish restaurant. The owner, a retired policeman from Birmingham, spoke of the delights of living by the sea. His wife, red-faced and care-worn, was doing the cooking. Paul wondered whether they had made provision for the slack period in winter when there were no tourists.

He stopped at the farmhouse on his way back to the cottage for the milk and butter. It was handed to him by a fair-headed young woman, Jim Jowett's wife.

Paul slept well that night, in spite of a strong wind that howled through the trees almost as loudly as the electric guitars that had disturbed him the previous year. The dawn chorus woke him. He lay in bed, a rare luxury, and thought about his life style in London. From this distance it seemed dull and quite pointless. At eight-thirty, he walked to the boatyard, buying a newspaper on the way.

A substantial bay-windowed house overlooking the quay served as the yacht-building firm's headquarters. He could hear the noise of hammering. Craftsmen were already at work on unfinished hulls by the dock. A steady hum of machinery issued from the nearby workshop. He crossed the narrow street and went past reception up the stairs to the main office.

Taylor, who had brought a modest measure of prosperity to the village, was a venerated, if not popular, figure. He had once said that he didn't expect to be appreciated locally until after he was dead. 'Why should they like an old foreigner?' he had once commented to Paul in his thick German accent. 'But when my son takes over it will be different. He will be like one of themselves.' Peter, his son, a graduate in marine engineering, had married a local girl. He travelled a great deal round the world seeking new orders.

Arthur Taylor was still sprightly at eighty, his complexion was ruddy, his eyes clear. A shock of intensely white hair surrounded his tanned bald head. He spent much of his time stumping round the boatyard on his short, sturdy legs supervising the work. Today he was in his office to discuss the audit. He shook Paul's hand vigorously and launched into a tirade about the unfavourable tax regime.

'Any children yet?' he asked suddenly and, answering his own question before Paul could speak, said: 'Perhaps you are right, Paul. Already there are too many people in the world.' He then went on to say that his daughter-in-law had just presented him with his fourth grandchild. 'I say to Peter: "Do you think the business can afford another one?" But, of course, he knows I'm only joking.'

An office had been set aside for Paul to work in. Taylor briefed him on the latest developments, which included the recent opening of a sales office in the South of France. He then rang for the head cashier, who arrived shortly laden with ledgers.

Paul began the annual audit.

Arriving at the cottage that evening after eating in the fish restaurant, Paul found his bed neatly made. The rooms had been tidied and dusted, the fridge replenished with butter and milk. He worked steadily until ten o'clock, then read a biography of Turing, the computer genius, for half an hour before preparing for bed. He slept badly this time. Images of the young woman who had greeted him at the farm followed him into sleep.

The following evening when he came home, he found the cottage had not been tidied. Nettled by the lack of the service he had been promised, he made his bed and washed up the few things in the sink, before resuming his work. At about half past-eight there was a knock on the door. Mrs. Jowett stood there. She apologised profusely, and handing him a bottle of milk, explained that Violet, their maid, had sprained her ankle. She offered to come in and clean up.

'It's all shipshape now,' he replied, and on a sudden impulse asked her in for a cup of coffee.

She accepted, saying with a slight Devonshire burr as she entered: 'I certainly deserve one- I've been working like a slave all day. Looks as though you've been working hard, too,' she added, indicating the pile of ledgers on the table.'

'Accountants are naturally inefficient- we never finish on time. And you- I suppose your sons have been keeping you busy.'

She replied: 'No- as a matter of fact I've been painting.' She fingered the chintz covering of the settee as she sat down.

'One of the rooms?' he enquired.

'Not the house. I'm an artist. I haven't had as much training as I'd like. But they say I'm pretty good. I'm painting a neighbour's daughter. I was commissioned to do her,' she added proudly. He noticed for the first time that her jeans were spattered with paint.

'How much would you charge to do my portrait?' he asked, jocularly.

She regarded him quizzically. He was surprised when she took his seriously and quoted a figure.

'That sounds very reasonable.'

'That would be for pastels, mind you. I charge twice that in oils.'

'Unfortunately, I doubt if I'll have the time to sit for you,' he said, as he took the milk into the kitchen.

When he returned with the coffee, Clementina said: 'I could do some sketches while you're working here in the cottage. You wouldn't even

know I was here. But, of course, you'd want to see some of my work first.'

He pondered for a moment and then decided that a portrait would make a suitable gift for his wife Hetty. She expected him to buy something for her when he was away on a long audit. But however the painting turned out, he knew that at dinner parties Hetty would say: Paul is an absolute sucker. Just look at that dreadful *thing* he bought!

Nevertheless, he said: 'OK., then, I'll have a look at your work and if I like it we'll go ahead. But I warn you I'm not very sociable when I'm working.'

'That'll suit me,' Clementina said. 'I like to concentrate when I'm doing a portrait.'

He studied her face as she sipped her coffee. The general effect was pleasing. Fair complexion, slightly tanned, flaxen hair cut short, a wide brow, and full red lips pursed speculatively. Her blue eyes had a steady gaze. He was surprised when she suddenly announced that painting was more important to her than anything in the world.

'More important than your children?'

'Children soon become independent. When I can get them off my hands, I'll do nothing else but paint.'

'What does your husband think?'

'It doesn't matter what he thinks,'

Paul diplomatically changed the subject.

Clementina was well informed about farming economics and the latest EEC regulations. She put down her cup and said: 'Now don't forget. I keep some of my work in the barn- the second one on the right through the fir trees. Have a look on your way to work tomorrow and give me a ring from the boatyard to let me know if you want to go ahead.'

Some anomalies he met during his examination of the books made him forget his promise to inspect the paintings. Arthur Taylor only partially clarified them. At midday walked back to the Jowett farm to inspect Clementina's work. Propped up against the wall of the barn he found a dozen paintings, including two of the boatyard and one of a yacht at sea. There were some portraits that summed up the characters of their subjects in rapid, confident brushstrokes. He decided that Hetty's remarks would be totally unjustified but she would make them anyway. Clementina came running through the trees. She stood close to him, her breath smelling faintly of fuschia upon his face. She said challengingly: 'Well, what do you think?'

I like them., ' He said diplomatically. ' But, of course, I can't tell whether the portraits are good likenesses.'

'How about this one, then?'

She pulled out a painting which he recognised as her father-in-law. The nose and mouth were pugnacious, the blue eyes piercing, the mane of curly white hair dramatically caught the light.

'That's very good,' he said admiringly.

'Jim thinks it awful, but I think I've got him- bad temper and all.'

'You certainly have, but will you bring out the worst traits in my character?'

'P'raps it'll do you good to see yourself through someone else's eyes. So you'll let me paint you?'

He hesitated for a moment and said: 'OK.'

'Oils or pastel?'

'Oils.'

She gave him a delighted smile and announced that she would call at the cottage at seven o'clock to start a preliminary sketch.

Absorbed in his work it had turned out to be more complicated than he had supposed he was nevertheless intensely aware of her presence as he worked at the oak table. She sat opposite him in a fireside chair, totally absorbed in sketching him. Remembering that Hetty was due to come down and stay with him at the weekend, he enquired if she would be allowed to inspect the incomplete work.

Clementina replied: 'I don't allow it as a rule. The portrait changes as I go along. What's she like your wife?'

'Hetty?' He made a note on a memo pad and then swung round on his chair. 'She's a corporate lawyer, smart, intelligent. She was giving advice to the other day.' He named the owner of a string of newspapers and radio stations.

'You like clever women, then?'

'Yes, I suppose I do. They're more stimulating than dumb blonds.'

'I'm blond.'

'Sure. But you're not dumb. You're an artist.'

'I intend to be really top-class one day.'

Clementina continued to work until the light failed.

The following morning, doubts about some items in the company's books having hardened into certainty, he arranged an interview with Arthur Taylor. Taylor put up a stubborn defence when he questioned him, insisting that they gave a true and fair representation of his trading. Paul pointed out politely that they would be unacceptable to the Inland Revenue. Eventually, Taylor backed down. Grumbling furiously, he exclaimed: 'You should be on my side. It's impossible to accumulate money any more in this country. But I suppose I'll have to accept your advice.'

Paul's conviction that his client bore him no ill will was confirmed the following day when Taylor drove him to a good hotel about twenty miles away, plied him with good food and wine and confessed that he had been led astray by a desire to leave as much money as he could to his grandchildren.

'You can still do that,' Paul pointed out.

'Not nearly as much as I'd like to leave them in this uncertain world. He added with an impish smile: 'I'll mention in my will that if it wasn't for my accountant, Paul Rossiter, I would have left them much more.'

Paul laughed and mentally decided to tell the story to his partners.

Clementina sketched him again that evening. She wore a long frock of Indian cotton that clung to her full figure. Finding her intensely attractive, he told himself that the last thing in the world he needed was an affair with a farmer's wife.

She left early, saying that she and her husband had been invited to a neighbour's house. As an afterthought she asked him to meet her at the barn the following morning on his way to work, so that she could get his colouring right by daylight. He agreed to meet her at seven-thirty, wryly amused with himself for harbouring the absurd notion that she was making a play for him.

Looking in the bathroom mirror, he saw a square, bespectacled face with a snub, undistinguished nose- a narrow moustache over a thin mouth, straight black thinning hair beginning to go grey. Nothing there, he thought, to attract a lovely young woman.

He put out the light and got into bed.

An owl hooted several times as he was about to drift into unconsciousness. The television news that had carried pictures of the Turkish aircraft disaster. Heart-rending pictures of scattered, charred luggage

and bodies being carried downhill. Lying wide awake, he suddenly felt a sense of doom. If it could happen to one innocent band of holiday-makers, it could happen to him. He tried to reassure himself with the thought that lightning never strikes twice in the same place. Eventually, he comforted himself with the thought that it wouldn't matter very much. He and Hetty had no children. He found himself envying Taylor. His reason for trying to cheat the Inland Revenue he was doing it for his grandchildren had logic if not morality.

Looking back, his own life now seemed empty and futile. He had always been totally predictable and conventional. He had lived with Hetty for a while and later married her because she said it would please her parents. Recently, impressed by the wealth and opulence of the City moguls she worked for, she had made cutting remarks about his unwillingness to become an entrepreneur, take chances and make money. He had tried several times unsuccessfully to explain that this was his nature, that he couldn't change. He dreamed that the aircraft in which he and Hetty were travelling crashed into a mountain but that he miraculously survived.

The following morning he met Clementina in the barn. The sun was dazzling as it cleared the summits of the nearby hills. She asked him to sit in a garden chair and became immersed in the problem of finding the right light, making him move the chair around several times until she was finally satisfied. Then she began to apply colour to the sketch she had made the previous two evenings.

'Does your husband like your work,' he asked after a while.

'He says it's not bad. He does a bit of sculpture himself.'

'Is he good?'

'Terrible! You can see one of his works overlooking the water, if you turn right instead of left when you go to Raymouth. He's a fanatic.'

'Why do you say that?'

She paused, her brush in mid air.

'He's got religion badly.'

'Religion has inspired a lot of artists.'

'Not like him, though. You go and see it one day. It's an ugly-looking thing.'

She resumed her painting becoming so intent on her work that at one stage, clutching at her blouse with her free hand, she partly exposed her breasts. He decided that she was older than he had at first thought. Remembering that she had given birth to three children, he felt unaccountably moved. He stood up suddenly and announced it was time for him to go to work.

She said abstractedly: 'Right. Could you come here again same time tomorrow morning? It's beginning to come right. Your wife's going to like it. She's coming on Saturday, is that right?'

'That's right.'

'It won't be ready then, but I might let her take a peek at it.'

He picked up his briefcase and began to walk to the boatyard. Remembering Clementina's unflattering remark concerning her husband's sculpture, he turned right on reaching the gate. About a hundred yards further on saw a statue representing the Crucifixion on some high ground overlooking the inlet. He hadn't seen noticed it on arrival at the farm. It was a twisted, spindly eight-feet high figure cast in bronze. The face seemed hollow, emaciated and sad. A great deal of work had gone into the project but Clementina's description was correct it was totally lacking in artistic merit.

Turning back towards the village, he had to admit that it pleased him that there was discord between husband and wife. She had touched some profound chord in his being and he wished to make love to her at the same time knowing that it would be sheer folly to do so. It would not only create a scandal in this small community but might also affect his firm's contract with the boatyard. He couldn't stop himself from thinking about Clementina throughout the day. During the course of a working lunch with Taylor in the fish restaurant the old man commented that he looked tired and asked if he was sleeping well in the cottage.

'I thought it would be peaceful here,' Paul replied cautiously, 'Perhaps it's a little too peaceful. I'm used to a background of urban noise'.

He slept badly again that night. The image of Clementina haunted him. He wondered whether she had deliberately tugged her shirt aside to seduce him. He thought: if Hetty and I were killed in a few week's time on our way to Turkey what difference would it make if I had enjoyed a wild fling with Clementina? His father, a religious man, had told him it was a man's duty to pray every day, because no man knew which day on earth would be his last. Making love to Clementina would be almost an act of prayer an atonement for having in the past suppressed his natural instincts.

He smiled at his reasoning, knowing it was false and disingenuous. Shortly afterwards he fell asleep.

The following morning it was raining heavily. He put on a raincoat and drove down to the barn. There was no sign of Clementina. He was about to leave when he saw her running towards him with a blanket over her head to protect her from the rain. She threw him a challenging glance as she arrived at the barn. He removed the blanket from behind her head and as she held up her glistening wet face towards him, he bent down and kissed her. She pressed herself against him, then dragged him into the darkness of the barn.

The violent love-making in the straw which followed left him fully spent. Clementina, wiping herself afterwards, said with a smile. 'Don't think it will always be fireworks like that. But I haven't slept with my husband this last six months. Not since we had a row about religion. But it will always be good between us two. I just knew when I first set eyes on you.'

'Why me?' he asked, in some bewilderment.

'You're just like a man I fell in love with when I was sixteen. I suppose that's about it.'

'So what are we going to do?'

She shrugged and began to button up her dress.

'It's up to you. I'll divorce Jim, if you'll divorce your wife.'

'I'm not sure I want to....' He added hastily: 'But I'm crazy about you, Clementina. I'll come down here whenever I can.'

Clementina stood up.

'I won't put pressure on you. I'd never do that. You must act according to your conscience. But I'm not sorry even if you are. It was lovely. I'll be your mistress, if you like.'

'He looked at his watch.

Clementina said: 'It's too late for a sitting. But I'll come and see you in the cottage tonight.'

'Won't your husband be suspicious?'

She replied scornfully: 'I don't care.'

'What about your children?'

'I'll see they come to no harm. It's good for children to be independent.'

Before leaving, he went over to examine the painting. It was very flattering. It was obvious that Clementina saw him as younger and more handsome than he was. How could she possibly see him that way? Life, he decided, was a total illusion. But if only love was real, why not grab it while one could.

By Friday night he was in a state of mental turmoil. He could not believe that his life had changed so remarkably in such a short space of time. Clementina was plainly in love with him and he with her. Seeking time in which to collect his thoughts, he telephoned Hetty and told her that he had come across unexpected discrepancies in the books and she should not come down because he would be too busy. He urged her to go out and enjoy herself instead.

He was walking towards the gated entrance to the farm, when he heard someone jogging after him. The elder Jowett, breathless from running, was approaching him from behind.

He said: 'Jim knows that you're carrying on with with his wife.'
There seemed little point in denial.

'I'm not getting out my shotgun, if that's what you're frightened of.'

'I'm relieved to hear it', Paul replied.

'The plain fact is, my son is not far short of certifiable.'

'Has he seen a doctor?'

'Plenty of them. All they can say is that he's mentally disturbed. Schizophrenia. It sometimes comes out in the way of religious mania. He won't sleep with his wife any more. Says he's been forbidden. He has his own special chapel inside the house, where he prays every minute of the day when he's not looking after the kids or helping on the farm.'

'Doesn't Clementina look after the kids?'

'Not much. She says keeping Jim busy looking after his children is good for him. Of course, she's half mad herself, what with her painting an' that. But I have to admit that she's had a lot to put up with. He spent a fortune having that statue cast and put up on its pedestal. Anyway, I thought I'd better put you in the picture.'

'Where is he at the moment?'

'He's upstairs praying for guidance. But you should look out. I know he's my son but it's my duty to tell you to be careful.'

'Thanks, Mr Jowett,' Paul said and experienced a tremor of fear. The old man returned to the farmhouse.

Paul continued on his way to the shipyard. As he walked he realised that his life was in danger Jowett must have good reason for issuing the warning. He must know what his own son was capable of. But he had no regret for having made love to a beautiful, warm-blooded woman whose artist's eye had, through some extraordinary chance, turned him a desirable, sexy icon.

The weather improved during the day. He worked hard at the audit, all the while trying to devise a strategy of survival.

As he walked back to the farm, a balmy breeze blowing off the sea and a cloudless sky did little to ease his concern. It seemed impossible that this thing had happened to him. He was about to break up a marriage. It went against the grain he did not want to make other people unhappy. But although scared, he felt desperately sorry for Jim Jowett. Was he mad enough to try to kill him? Old Jowett had mentioned a shotgun. The easy way out would be to return to London. But he was only just over halfway through the audit. In any case, Clementina had caused a such a

typhoon of delight to blow through his being that he felt totally transformed. He experienced an elemental urge to hold onto what he had gained.

Nevertheless, on his return to the farm that night he was fearful of the forces he had unleashed. Clementina reassured him. She told him she had taken the precaution of hiding the shotgun cartridges when her husband's illness had been diagnosed.

They made love on the narrow bed. She whispered afterwards: 'The fireworks was just as lovely this time' and sighed contentedly.'

She assured him, when she left that she loved him and wouldn't let him go.

But his anxiety returned as soon as she had gone.

As a precaution the following morning, instead of walking to the boatyard, he took the car. As he arrived at the barred gate, Jim Jowett appeared from behind a tree, looking distraught and wild-eyed.

'I've been waiting to have a talk with you, Mr. Rossiter.'

Paul replied through the partially-opened driver's window, slipping the car into reverse gear, 'Shall we discuss what's happened in a civilized manner?'

'Sure. Did she tell you I have to take pills?'

'Your father told me.'

'It's a terrible illness, schizophrenia. That's what I've got.'

'I'm aware of that,' Paul replied. He was beginning to feel a sense of relief as it became clear that he would not have to defend himself.

'The awful thing is,' Jim Jowett said, tragically, 'they think I'm devoted to Christ just because I'm sick. But it has nothing to do with that. Everybody is supposed to give his life to Christ whether he's ill or not.'

Paul nodded emphatic agreement.

'The thing is,' Jowett went on, 'you've got to be positive in what you do. I decided before I was told I had this illness that I would devote myself to God and not waste my energies on sex. You understand?'

Paul nodded again.

'Have you seen my statue?' Jim enquired eagerly. Without waiting for an answer, he said: 'Come and take a look at it.'

He opened the gates, to allow Paul to drive his car out of the field. As soon as Paul had parked it on a grass verge, he walked with him to the statue.

It stood on a twenty-foot high grassy knoll. They stood gazing up at it.

'What do you think?' Jim asked him.

'It very obviously expresses your deepest feelings,' Paul said cautiously. 'Did it take you long?'

'Eighteen months,' Jim said proudly. He launched enthusiastically into an account of the technical problems he had encountered, enlarging on the statue's weight, its cost and the extreme difficulties experienced by the gang of workmen in hoisting it up to its present position.

'Here, come on up. I want to show you something.'

Convinced by now that he was meant no harm, Paul followed Jim up the steep slope, until they both stood by the bronze stature, which at close quarters seemed somewhat less ugly.

'I had a lot of trouble with the town council,' Jim Jowett was saying. 'But they were finally won over by the fact that our vicar approved- and in any case it's on our land. Unfortunately, Clementina doesn't like it,' he added with a troubled expression.

'Pioneers in art are often misunderstood,' Paul remarked, tactfully. He looked at his watch.

They both turned to face on another. A strange expression appeared on Jim Jowett's face. His eyes narrowed and his mouth had twisted into a sardonic smile. For one tense moment Paul was convinced that he was about to hit him. He raised his hands defensively. As he did so Jim Jowett apparently expecting a blow, launched himself in slow motion off the mound. He tumbled over backwards and landed in an awkward heap on the gravelly soil below. Paul, at first amused at what appeared to be a minor fall, called down: 'Are you okay?'

Jim Jowett remained motionless.

Paul took the easier descent down the slope at the back of the statue and raced round to where Jowett lay still. His head was lying to one side and his face was ashen. Paul felt for a pulse. There was none. His neck had been broken by the fall.

He drove back to the farmhouse, burst through the open front door, and finding Clementina in the kitchen, told her to dial for an ambulance. As soon as she had telephoned she returned with him to the scene of the accident. She knelt down and cradled her husband's head in her arms.

'I didn't fight with him. He just fell off,' he muttered, as they waited. 'I'm sure they'll say I murdered him.'

'It makes no difference.' she said. 'I'll stick by you whatever happens.'

He realised that she didn't believe him. His single act of infidelity had made him a murderer as well as an adulterer. His sense of guilt was so acute that he cried. He wiped away the tears before Clementina noticed.

There would be an inquest he was told by the police at which he would be asked to appear. Soon, he discovered with immense relief that he was not under suspicion. Jowett senior invited him to the farmhouse and declared that he believed his story. His son had never been violent, nor did he believe that Paul would have deliberately pushed him off. 'Chances are a million to one that falling down a grassy slope like that would kill anyone. But million to one chances do happen. That's why people win the Lottery.'

He poured out full tumblers of whiskey and and sighed, saying: 'Don't know why he got that way. There was nothing like it before in the family.'

Paul had the impression that he was relieved at no longer having the stain of mental illness in the family. But he moderated his criticism as he realised that Jim Jowett's illness must have created enormous tensions in the farmhouse.

After a while, Jowett addressed Paul: 'So what's going to happen between you and Clementina?'

Paul didn't answer.

He could think of only one person who might help him with that question. Since Arthur Taylor knew that Paul would keep intact his business secrets, he would entrust Taylor with the secret of what had happened between him and Clementina Jowett.

He took the old man out to dinner.

Taylor listened attentively as Paul described his turbulent emotions during the past few days. He had had never been so eager to bare his soul.

Puckering up his face, the old man said at the end of the meal, when Paul ordered brandy: 'Are you in love with her?'

'Oh, absolutely. I'm besotted with her.'

'What about your wife?'

She won't pine away. She's a workaholic. I was never more than a minor part of her life.'

'It'll be much the same if you marry Clementina. She'll make you look after her family while she's busy at her easel.'

'I don't mind. I'm going to come and live down here.'

Arthur Taylor's eyes flickered in disbelief.

Then he said: 'It's very sad. But there you are. That young man sacrificed himself at the foot of his own statue. You'll sacrifice yourself for Clementina's obsession with art. People crucify themselves whether in the town and the country.'

He leaned forward until his face was close to Paul's.

'And I'll tell you this giving advice on how to deal with the Inland Revenue is much easier than giving advice on affairs of the heart.'