VINTAGE

RUINED CITY

NEVIL SHUTE

Contents

About the Book

Through a series of mishaps, Henry Warren, a recently divorced City financier, ends up in hospital in a Northern town ruined by the closure of its shipyard. Moved by the fate of the town’s inhabitants, Warren risks his fortune and reputation to save the shipyard and restore the town to its former prosperity. In seeking to change the fate of the town, he radically changes his own.

About the Author

Nevil Shute Norway was born on 17 January 1899 in Ealing, London. After attending the Dragon School and Shrewsbury School, he studied Engineering Science at Balliol College, Oxford. He worked as an aeronautical engineer and published his first novel, *Marazan*, in 1926. In 1931 he married Frances Mary Heaton and they went on to have two daughters. During the Second World War he joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve where he worked on developing secret weapons. After the war he continued to write and settled in Australia where he lived until his death on 12 January 1960. His most celebrated novels include *Pied Piper* (1942), *No Highway* (1948), *A Town Like Alice* (1950) and *On the Beach* (1957).

Also by Nevil Shute

Novels

Marazan
So Disdained
Lonely Road
What Happened to the Corbetts
An Old Captivity
Landfall
Pied Piper
Pastoral
Most Secret
The Chequer Board
No Highway
A Town Like Alice
Round the Bend
The Far Country
In the Wet
Requiem for a Wren
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On the Beach
The Rainbow and the Rose
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Slide Rule

NEVIL SHUTE

Ruined City

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

CHAPTER I

DURING THE WINTER the pace accelerated tremendously for Mr. Henry Warren. In spite of the depression the banking house of Warren Sons and Mortimer had never had so much to do; as his marriage slid away to nothing the work piled heavily upon him.

The last fortnight was a bad one. Monday began with two conferences in the morning on the Moresley Corporation (1933) Development Loan, followed by lunch at the Savoy with Plumberg to discuss the Silver Conservation Pact. From Mr. Plumberg he went to call on Mr. Heinroth in Copthall Avenue to enlist his aid in the matter of the Finnish Equalisation Account; he found Mr. Heinroth difficult and it was not until after six o'clock that some measure of agreement was attained. He reached his office at about six-thirty and telephoned his house in Grosvenor Square about dinner; his butler told him that Mrs. Warren would be dining out.

He worked till half-past eight and dined, alone and rather extravagantly, at his club.

Tuesday continued the business of the Moresley Corporation and the Finnish Equalisation Account; the latter robbed him of his lunch. From twelve till four he was speaking on the telephone or waiting irritably for calls, calls from Helsingfors, from Stockholm, from Berlin. At four o'clock he spoke to Heinroth on the telephone, and then settled down to earnest work with all his staff to clear himself of business for the next two days. He left his office at ten minutes to nine; by ten o'clock he was at Croydon boarding the night plane for Stockholm.

He slept fitfully in the plane during the long crossing to Amsterdam in spite of the rainy, squally night. In the early hours he was awake from Amsterdam to Malmo, but in the cold grey dawn he got a little sleep between Malmo and Barkaby, the airport of Stockholm. By half-past nine he had had a cup of coffee and a shave and was in conference in a banking house in Stockholm; by one o'clock he was in the air again and on his way to Helsingfors.

He was in conference in Helsingfors from five o'clock till midnight. All the negotiations took place in German; he spoke the language competently but not fluently, and by midnight he was very tired. He rested for a few hours then, but by eight o'clock he was in the air again on the short sea crossing to Tallin, on his way down to Berlin.

He met his agent on the aerodrome at Tallin and made him travel with him on the next stage; they talked in German for an hour down to Riga. Then he went on alone, through Kaunas and Königsberg on to Berlin. He managed to sleep a little on the latter stage, and got out of the machine at Templehof dazed and unwell.

An hour later, spruce and neat, he was in conference again with his associates in Berlin; by nine o'clock he was back at the Templehof to catch the night mail plane for England. He dozed fitfully to Amsterdam, where he drank a cup of coffee with a cognac in the middle of the night; then he slept soundly, if uneasily, to Croydon. He reached his house in Grosvenor Square before the milk, before his servants were awake, slept for an hour, had a bath and dressed, and went down to his office in the City.

He did not see Elise. She did not normally appear before he left the house.

That day, Friday, was an easy day. He had a talk with Heinroth in the morning; the Finnish business moved another step upon its way. His secretary told him the result of the Council meeting of the Moresley Corporation—not so

good. The secretary had made an appointment for him to meet them that afternoon, at four o'clock.

Moody and depressed, he lunched alone. If they didn't want the money, they needn't have it. Corporations had to cut their coat according to their cloth, like other people.

They came to him in the afternoon, a deputation of three. He knew them well, these members of the Finance Committee—Sir Thomas Lambe, the chairman, whose grocer's shops extended all around the city, Mr. Tom Bullock, who had been a petty officer in the Navy and now drove a tram, and the other one whose name he never managed to remember—Mr. Bung the Brewer. He greeted them courteously and settled them with cigarettes before his massive desk. The meeting was on.

A quarter of an hour later they had reached a deadlock.

"Taking it your way, Mr. Warren," said the chairman, pink-cheeked and ruddy, "it'd mean another fourpence on the rates—after allowing for the Park receipts. The Council won't like that."

"Ratepayers won't like it, neither," said Mr. Bullock. "Not next November."

Warren said quietly, "I'm sorry, gentlemen."

There was a silence.

Mr. Bung the Brewer said wheezily, "But there's the bottle factory waiting to come to Moresley, soon as we get these sites opened up with the Western Road. There's seventy employed, right from the start."

"That's our point, Mr. Warren," said the chairman. "The development of these roads, opening up these sites, will make this productive money. We shall be paying less in outdoor relief. We shall be getting an income from the factory sites. I cannot see that there will be any need for the special fund you have in mind."

Warren said, "I appreciate all that, Sir Thomas. But if, in fact, this scheme can pay its way, I see no objection to making the interest chargeable upon the general rate."

“We don’t get nowhere, way you look at it,” said Mr. Bullock. “To develop the factory sites we’ve got to put up the rates, and if we put up the rates nobody won’t come to take up factory sites, and money’s gone for nowt.”

“That is a risk, of course,” said Warren. “But that’s your speculation.”

“Aye,” said Mr. Bullock, “I noticed that. You get your money any road, even if whole of Moresley’s on the dole.”

Warren bent forward, leaning both his elbows on the desk. “This is a bank,” he said. “I think I may say, a bank of good repute, Mr. Bullock.” A wintry smile moved across his face. “Otherwise, I am sure you gentlemen would not be here this afternoon. We take in money on deposit, and it is my business to keep that money safe. We lend it out again at small interest on good security. It is no part of our business to take risks, or to make speculations with the money deposited with us. That is not our understanding with our depositors, and that is not our policy.”

Mr. Bullock drew himself up with a certain dignity. “That’s right, Mr. Warren,” he said. “You’re a bank, and you don’t take no risk. We’ve come to you rather than to one of them fly-by-night financial houses because we’re prudent business folk in Moresley, and we knew you did the loan in Staventon. But I want you to see it as we see it in the Council chamber.”

He paused for a moment, and considered. “Three years ago we hadn’t more than fifteen hundred unemployed in all Moresley,” he said. “Last year we had seven thousand. This year, nine thousand five hundred. That’s over twelve per cent of the people of Moresley on the dole, Mr. Warren—and still going up.” He stared at him earnestly. “Moresley’s a working town—always has been. We’ve never been what they call a depressed area, or anything of that. And Moresley’s not going to become a depressed area, neither. We’re out to fight that on the Council—we won’t let that happen. But we want some help from the Bank to tide us

over, help us get these sites attractive for new factories. In Moresley we don't call that speculation. Normal development, that's what we call it. In Moresley we reckon it's the job of everyone to do what he can to get the lads back to work. Banks, and all."

There was a pause.

Warren leaned back in his arm-chair and said, "I'm sorry."

Sir Thomas said, "Um—I am afraid the Council will have difficulty in proceeding on these lines. Let me be quite clear upon the matter. You require that provision should be made for the interest to be guaranteed from the general rate, in preference to all other payments. And that a resolution should be passed by the Council to that effect before the matter can proceed further."

Warren inclined his head. "That is so, Sir Thomas. Given that resolution we can at once proceed to the details of the finance you will require."

Mr. Tom Bullock got up from his chair and stood erect. "My bloody oath," he said quietly, but firmly. "And then they write this stuff about the banks helping industry. All the bloody banks do is to help themselves."

The chairman was distressed and fluttered. "Councillor Bullock—please . . ." he said. The deputation rose to take their leave.

Mr. Warren showed them courteously to the door. "You may be right," he said to the tram driver. "But I think the business of helping the distressed areas lies more with the Government than with the banks."

He turned back into his room alone, tired and stale. He wondered what would happen at their Council meeting; he did not greatly care. He would proceed with the matter if they wished; old Mortimer, moribund in his house at Godalming, liked Corporation loans and would be pleased. Warren himself had no objection to them provided that the

money were very safe; that was the main thing in these times. But he could use the money better on the Continent.

His mind dwelt with pleasure on the Visgrad Waterworks, in Laevatia. Better than all the Corporation loans put together.

The buzzer on his desk sounded a low note. He pressed a switch, and the voice of his secretary spoke from the instrument.

“Mrs. Warren was on the telephone, sir. I told her you were in conference. Shall I get her now?”

“Please.” He was desperately tired. While he was waiting for his call he felt for a cigarette in the silver box upon his desk, fumbled a little, and dropped one upon the floor. He left it there, too tired to pick it up, took and lit another, and sank into his chair. The telephone bell rang.

His wife’s voice spoke to him. “Oh, Henry—is that you? It would be nicer if you answered me when I rang up, dear. I rang you up over half an hour ago.”

He said patiently, “I’m sorry, but I was in conference. Didn’t Miss Stephens tell you?”

“She may have done—I’m afraid I don’t pay much attention to Miss Stephens, dear. Henry, wherever have you been all this time? I haven’t seen you for eight days.”

He thought for a moment. “So long as that? Well, you were in Scotland last week, weren’t you? I was at home Monday and Tuesday nights. Then I had to go to the Continent. I’ll be dining in to-night.”

“To the Continent? Was it amusing?”

He said, “Not very. I had to go to Helsingfors—and to Berlin.”

“Oh. Such a tiresome place, Helsingfors. All trees and water, and all those Finnish people so dull. I didn’t bother to go on shore—they told me it simply wasn’t worth it. I remember we played contract all afternoon. Tommy Samson won fifteen pounds off Violet. She was furious.”

He said patiently, “I’ll be dining in to-night, dear. I’ll tell you all about it at dinner.”

She said, “Oh yes. I’ve asked one or two people in to dinner, so you can tell us all about your trip.”

His face fell. “Who’s coming?”

“Only Violet and Mary, and Sir John and Lady Cohen, and Pamela Allnut. And Jerry Shaw and Lord Cheriton.”

His brows contracted in a frown. “What do you want young Cheriton for? I didn’t know you knew him.”

“Oh, don’t be silly. Violet says he’s terribly fun-making. And besides, Sir John wants to meet him.”

It had been in Warren’s mind to tell his wife that he was dropping with fatigue, that he would dine quietly at his club, perhaps sleep there. He changed his mind. If Cohen had chickens to pluck, let him pluck them in his own house.

“All right,” he said. “I’ll be home about half-past six. Who’s the other man?”

“What other man, dear?”

His face hardened. “You’ve told me four women, and three men. You’re not having an odd number?”

“Why, no, dear. There’s Lord Cheriton, Sir John, Prince Ali, and Jerry Shaw.”

“Prince Ali Said is coming?”

“Yes, dear. I asked him.”

His face was very hard. “All right. I’ll be home at half-past six.”

He laid down the receiver and pressed the button for his confidential secretary, Mr. Thomas Morgan. “I’ve got to go over and see Heinroth, Morgan,” he said. “I shan’t be back to-day.”

He went walking down Throgmorton Street towards Heinroth’s office, tired and depressed. Two young jobbers on the steps of the exchange stopped tossing for half-crowns to watch him as he made his way through the crowd.

“Who’s that?” said one.

“That’s Henry Warren—Warren Sons and Mortimer. One of the soundest little houses in the City. He runs the business now. Don’t you know him?”

The other shook his head. “Looks as if he’d swallowed a bad oyster,” he remarked.

The other spun a coin into the air, and smiled. “So would you,” he said, “if your wife was sleeping with a black man every other night.”

His dinner party passed before Warren in a blur of fatigue. With Lady Cohen on the one hand and Pamela Allnut on the other he talked mechanically, alternately, and competently about hunting and glass furniture, about schools and ski-ing. At the far end of the table his wife sat facing him, fair, slender and vivacious, between the subaltern callowness of young Lord Cheriton and the grave dignity of the Arab in tails and white waistcoat. Both of them, he reflected, worth half a million—more perhaps. Lord Cheriton he could tolerate, but he disliked the Arab very much indeed.

He roused himself a little with the brandy, when the ladies had left the room. Cohen had moved up to Cheriton and was talking about industry. “Wonderful opportunities just now,” he was saying. “In almost every line. Every day. One can’t take all of them.”

“That’s very interesting,” said Cheriton. “You think this is the time to buy.”

“I do, most certainly. With discretion—of course.”

Warren set his glass down carefully. “You may be right,” he said carefully. “But it seems to me that you want the discretion of a nun and the vision of an archangel to buy these days.”

“I don’t agree at all,” said Cohen. “Look at gold.”

“No good looking at gold now,” said Warren. “Tell me what to look at now—not what I might have looked at six months ago.”

A shadow passed quickly across Cohen's face. Warren thought. That got him. He's got those Bulongo mines on his hands. I wonder if he wanted to shove those off on Cheriton? He might be able to. That boy is fool enough for anything.

Prince Ali Said coughed delicately. "For myself," he said, "I do not understand the Stock Exchange. I prefer to play with horses. I find that I can make money more certainly in that manner."

Warren nodded. He could respect competence in all forms. "That is because you act upon your own knowledge. It's when you start taking tips that the trouble starts."

Cheriton laughed. "Either on horses or the Stock Exchange," he said fatuously.

Warren nodded. "I'm a banker, of course. I don't take tips, and I don't make any great killings, but in my quiet way I get along all right—even in these times. But I wouldn't say this was the time to buy."

"What would you do?" asked Cohen sullenly.

Warren smiled. "I'd get a very big safe, and put it all in that—in gold—and sit on it," he said. "But real gold, I mean—none of this paper stuff."

In the dim light beyond the shaded candles, at the back of the room, Evans his butler laid silver noiselessly upon a tray, covered it with green baize, and moved silently, unnoticed, from the room. He took the tray down to his pantry, transferred it to the silver cupboard, locked it up and pocketed the key. Then he went to the housekeeper's room.

Elsie, the housemaid, was sewing by the fire. "Where's Mrs. Higgins?" he asked.

"Gone out to the pictures. Did you want her?"

He took down his pipe from the mantelpiece. "I want a box of matches."

"I've got some, Mr. Evans." She watched him while he lit his pipe. "Get any tit-bits?"

“They’re trying to swindle that young Cheriton again.”

“Not Mr. Warren?”

“No, Cohen.”

She dropped her sewing on her lap. “What did they want him to do?”

“Buy some dud mining shares, I think. Warren was trying to stall them off.”

“I’d believe anything you told me of that Cohen,” she said. “I think he’s horrible.”

He nodded slowly. “They’re a useless crowd,” he said. “I’ve been in service nearly forty years, ever since I was a little nipper in the stables. But I’ve never been in such a place as this.”

There was a little silence.

“That black man,” she said presently. “He was up there again this afternoon. With the door open, too. I do think it’s beastly.”

“It won’t last for long,” said the butler. “I reckon I know when a place is cracking up.”

He finished his pipe in silence, glanced at his watch, and went upstairs again to carry a tray of glasses, syphons, and decanters in to the big white drawing-room. Two tables of bridge were in progress, but Cohen and Cheriton were both dummy, and were talking earnestly aside, before the fire.

The evening passed for Warren in a blur of fatigue. He played efficiently and lost a little money to his guests by courtesy; one had to do that with Pamela Allnut in the game. Presently the rubbers came to an end; the final drinks, and then his guests were ready to depart.

He helped Cheriton into his coat. “It’s been pleasant meeting you again,” he said.

“A most delightful evening,” said the young man formally.

A thin smile curled round Warren’s lips. “You’ve enjoyed yourself?”

“Why—certainly.”

“I’m sorry to hear it.”

There was a momentary pause. “Well, I don’t quite know what to say to that,” said Cheriton.

“I’m sorry you came here to-night,” said Warren. “It’s been my pleasure. I hope it won’t be your loss.”

The young man stared at him reflectively. “You mean Cohen,” he said at last. “Thanks for the tip.”

“I’m afraid my guests aren’t quite your sort,” said Warren pleasantly. “I wouldn’t come again, if I were you.”

He saw the young man to the door, and turned back into the house. His wife was talking quietly to their last guest, the Arab, in the hall. They broke the talk off as he turned towards them.

“It’s been a great pleasure to have had you here this evening, Prince Ali,” he said formally. “I hope you’ll come again.” He stared reflectively at the aquiline features, the fine olive texture of the skin. “But there—I know you will.”

The olive darkened into brown. “I have never enjoyed myself so much,” said the Prince. “It was so kind of you . . .” He took his leave.

Warren turned to his wife. “Did you enjoy your party?” he enquired.

She yawned, a little sullenly. “Not a bit. I think that young Cheriton’s a crashing bore. I wouldn’t have had him, but for Violet Cohen. Said the old man wanted to meet him, or something. Why people can’t manage for themselves . . .”

Warren glanced at the petulant features of his wife. He smiled a little. “If that’s the sort of entertainment they want,” he said, “I suppose that’s what you’ve got to give them.”

They went upstairs together. “Did you meet anyone interesting in Berlin?” she asked idly.

“I was only there four or five hours. I met Heinroth’s cousin with a couple of Finns.”

“Oh. That must have been terribly fun-making for you.”

Warren went to his own room. The firelight flickered on the walls and ceiling; on a chair before the glow his pyjamas were laid out to warm. He sat down to unlace his shoes, desperately tired. As he leaned forward the stiff collar of his evening shirt cut deep into his throat; his vision blurred, and a pressure grew upon his temples. He leaned back in his chair; the pressure eased and he began to feel more normal, but now there came a persistent drumming in his ears that would not stop.

"Christ," he said half aloud. "A ruddy nigger . . ." In that he was unjust, and he knew it; among the six or seven strains that went to make Prince Ali there was no negro blood.

He got up and loosed the collar at his throat, and undressed slowly. His business worries and responsibilities surged in his mind to the surging of the blood that thundered in his ears, Heinroth and Plumberg, the Moresley Corporation and the Finnish Equalisation Account. And Ali Said leering at him down the dinner table . . . in his own house.

He must sleep. He crossed to his dressing-table and took up a small white box, opened it and took out the little vial. It was empty. He threw it in the grate and took a fresh packet from a drawer, shook out three tablets of allonal, and swallowed them.

"Sleep," he said, half aloud.

He got into his bed. Already he could feel his mind at ease; his worries were no longer the sharp torments they had been, but had become mere incidents of the day. Even Prince Ali was—an incident. He thought drowsily, as he settled in his bed, that cuckold was the word. It seemed to be the right word. He was not quite sure what a cuckold was, but it seemed probable that he was one. Even that had now no power to worry him. It was an incident, merely an incident of the day.

He did not see his wife before he went down to the office in the morning, went in the car with Donaghue, his chauffeur, as was his habit. It was a Saturday but in the years of depression that meant little to him; he had been absent from his office for two days during the week, and might have to go away again. He settled down to clear up his arrears of work with Morgan, his girl secretary, his chief accountant, and three clerks. In the middle of the afternoon he ate a sandwich, drank a whisky and soda, and went on.

Hours later he stopped, suddenly, irrationally, in the middle of a sentence as it were. “That’s enough,” he said to Morgan. “We’ll go home now.”

“As you like, sir,” said his secretary. “There are only the Czech payments to transfer. We can do those on Monday.”

“When do they fall due?”

“Not till the fourteenth.”

“Let me have them on Wednesday morning. I shan’t be here on Monday. I’m going to Hull to-morrow night with Collins—the East Yorkshire thing. Ring me ten-thirty Monday morning at the Paragon, and give me the post.”

“Very good, sir.”

Warren glanced at his watch; the winter dusk had fallen long ago; it was half-past seven. “I had no idea it was so late,” he said. On his way out he passed through the outer office; his three clerks and the girl were putting on their coats. He stopped and spoke to them. “I’m sorry I’ve been so long,” he said with formal courtesy, “and on a Saturday. Thank you for staying.” He passed on, out through the swing doors into the deserted City street.

“That’s all right, far as it goes,” said one of the clerks. “But look what time it is! Seven-thirty!”

“More hours, more money,” said another. He was a married man, and Warren paid his office overtime.

The girl pulled on her little hat. “I think he’s looking terribly tired,” she said. “Do you think all this they say

about his wife is true?”

Warren went home and dined alone. His wife, he learned, was dining out, the butler did not know with whom.

He left for Hull after lunch next day, Sunday. As the train swept northwards Warren dozed uneasily in his empty compartment, twitching in his sleep from time to time and becoming suddenly awake. He reached Hull in the evening and dined alone in the hotel. Because he wished to form his own impression of the city he had not told his business associates of his arrival. He wished to be alone that night.

It was part of his routine. He liked to be alone for his first night in a new town, especially a town where he was to do business. He walked out in the windswept, empty streets after dinner, savouring the place, the broad streets, thin alleys; the gaunt factories and the mud-filled docks. He was not pleased with what he found. After an hour’s walk he returned to the hotel having followed no conscious train of reasoning but entirely resolved that he must be careful; this was no place in which to take a chance. He felt the dominant psychology to be that of the town at the end of the road, stagnant and insular; the through traffic of the shipping, he felt, had not enlivened the place.

He went to his bed and lay restlessly awake till the small hours. Then he got up and took an allonal.

All the next day he was in conference in Hull, a difficult, unsatisfactory day spent upon a difficult and unsatisfactory business. Towards evening he delivered an ultimatum which he knew would stay the wheels of progress for six months, and left on the night train for London, tired and depressed. His car met him at King’s Cross in the winter dawn, and he went home to bathe and change, and drink a cup of coffee. Then he went down to the office.

In India, a few hours previously, a small brown man had stood in Congress for two hours and said his piece. That morning the Silver Conservation Pact lay in ruins; by eleven

o’clock Warren had Plumberg in his office, a Plumberg who talked eloquently about adjustments of a minor nature to the scheme, and whose thin hands twitched nervously as he was talking. Warren spent the day in a welter of Indian politics broken by distracting snatches of his other work; in the afternoon he went with Plumberg to the India Office and sat in conference for two hours. In the evening he got rid of Plumberg and dined with the Secretary of State for India, quietly at a club. They talked far on into the night.

Wednesday was an easy day. He spent it largely with Heinroth; the Finnish business was going smoothly to a sound conclusion. He felt that he had done a good job of work in that quarter; his visit of the previous week had facilitated matters very much. In the afternoon he rang his house, meaning to speak to Elise, to ask her to dine with him that night and do a theatre. His butler told him she had gone to Paris, with Lady Cohen.

Warren dined alone that night.

Plumberg was with him most of the next day upon his Indo-Mexican agreement, schemed to save something from the silver wreckage that lay strewn about their feet. The Moresley Corporation met, and turned down his proposals. In the evening Heinroth rang him up; his cousin was in Paris with the Finns and would appreciate a further talk. Warren decided to go there next day.

He crossed by the earliest air service, and motored into Paris from Le Bourget before ten o’clock. He sat in conference for an hour with the Finns, then left to lunch with Heinroth’s cousin, and to walk for an hour in the Bois. By four o’clock he was in conference again in the Hotel Splendide; by eight their business was concluded for the day.

“Kom,” said the leading Finn genially. “We will now eat dinner after our great labours.”

They washed and went downstairs to the public rooms. The lounge was thronged with people; in the great dining-

room the tables clustered thickly round a small bald patch of dancing-floor. They were in morning clothes, but the head waiter met them obsequiously and bowed them to a table reserved for them in an alcove, a quiet table where they could talk undisturbed. They settled to their meal, commenting now and then upon the dancers or the cabaret.

Presently Warren called the head waiter to him. “The gentleman of colour at the table over on the other side,” he said. “Prince Ali Said.”

“But certainly,” said the man. “He is a friend of monsieur?”

“An acquaintance,” said Warren carelessly. “He stays in the hotel?”

“But yes, monsieur.”

“And the lady?”

The man smiled gently. “Monsieur . . .”

“I think I have met her in England,” said Warren quietly. “If you could ascertain her name for me?”

“But certainly.”

He moved away among the crowd. In a few minutes he was back again. “Monsieur,” he said. “Her name is Miss Naughton. She is registered as British.”

“Ah, yes,” said Warren carelessly. “She stays in the same suite?”

“But certainly.”

“I am infinitely obliged.”

The man bowed himself away, and Warren turned again to his companions. “One meets so many people,” he said apologetically.

He stayed with them through a long dinner, to the coffee and cigars. At the end he made his apologies. “I must catch the morning aeroplane for London,” he said, “and I must get some sleep. We shall meet again in London, on the 20th. I shall look forward to that with great pleasure.”

He bade them good-bye, and went out to the lounge. “Prince Ali Said,” he said. “He is in his suite?”

The man lifted a telephone; Warren waited, idly studying airline and steamship posters. This was the end, he thought.

"The name, monsieur?"

"Ask if he will receive Mr. Henry Warren."

The man spoke.

"He says, if you will go up, monsieur."

He mounted swiftly in the lift; in the sitting-room of the suite the Prince received him, swarthy and immaculate in black and white. "This is indeed a pleasure, my dear Warren," he said courteously. "You are staying in this hotel?"

"No longer than I can help," said Warren. He glanced around the room, the deep carpets and the garish furniture. "I came to have a few words with my wife."

The Arab frowned in bewilderment. "Surely you are making some mistake," he said. "You will not find your wife here."

"That may be," said Warren evenly. "Because if I find her here, she will no longer be my wife."

He stared at the other reflectively. "I suppose if I were half a man I'd be knocking the stuffing out of you," he said, "or trying to. If you had been the first . . . But as it is, I think I'm through. I'm not going to make a lot of trouble over this. I'm going to get out, and leave you to it."

He smiled. "Perhaps, if my wife is not here, you would present me to Miss Naughton," he said.

"I am afraid you are completely misinformed, Mr. Warren," said the Arab. "As you can see for yourself, I am staying here alone. It is true that Miss Naughton dined with me this evening, but she has now returned to her hotel."

"In that case," said Warren, "we can take a look at the next room without disturbing her." He moved methodically from room to room, opening cupboards and examining curtains.