



ROGUE MALE

GEOFFREY
HOUSEHOLD

INTRODUCTION BY
VICTORIA NELSON

GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD (1900–1988) was born in Bristol, England, and educated at Magdalen College, Oxford, after which he traveled widely in Europe and took jobs in a range of fields, including banking in Romania and banana importing in France and Spain. Drawn to America by the Romanian-American woman who was to become the first of his two wives, Household worked there on a children's encyclopedia and wrote radio plays for children before resuming his extensive travels as a salesman for a printer's ink company. He had also begun to publish stories in *The Atlantic*, and by 1935 was able to devote himself to writing full-time. His first book, *The Terror of Villadonga* (aka *The Spanish Cave*), written for children, came out in 1936 and was quickly followed by two novels for adults, *The Third Hour* and *Rogue Male*, which was a runaway success. Household served as a security officer in the British military during World War II and was stationed in Greece, Central Europe, and the Middle East. After the war, he returned to England and continued his career as a writer. His works include eight collections of short stories, four books for children, an autobiography, *Against the Wind*, and twenty-two novels, including *Dance of the Dwarfs* and *Watcher in the Shadows*.

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NEW YORK REVIEW BOOKS



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Introduction: *Gone to Earth*

An embodiment of that myth of foreigners, the English gentleman, the gentle Englishman. I will not kill; to hide I am ashamed. So I endure without object.

—Rogue Male

At the heart of the prototypical Geoffrey Household tale is a wilderness lair, often a cave, where a hunted man seeks sanctuary from his pursuers. In Household's best-known novel, *Rogue Male*, the story's narrator has painstakingly enlarged his cave from a rabbit hole in the sandstone bank bordering a sunken lane hidden under thick hedges in the Dorset country-side. At his most desperate moment, imprisoned by an implacable pursuer and suffocating in the accumulated fumes of his own excrement, he confides to his journal:

Space I have none. The inner chamber is a tumbled morass of wet earth which I am compelled to use as a latrine. I am confined to my original excavation, the size of three large dog-kennels, where I lie on or inside my sleeping-bag.... Now luck, movement, wisdom, and folly have all stopped. Even time has stopped, for I have no space.

The trapped man has left our world for the timeless allegorical realm—underlined by his own namelessness and that of the man he chose to hunt—of Kafka's burrow. Now, with a hint of the cave mysticism of Empedocles, his bolt-hole will become a place of incubation where his metamorphosis into an animal makes possible the birth of his true self.

At the same time as it neatly conflates the rules of the herd with those of human society, this book's title (and its hero's sole sobriquet) lays down the blueprint for many of Household's subsequent works: through circumstances not of his own making, a man becomes the quarry either of bad men or of society's representatives, or both at the same time. In the course of a relentless and deadly chase he must flee civilization into nature, where he is forced to live like the *wodwose*, the mythical wild man of the woods. The climax is typically a duel between the pursued man and his equally matched adversary, who swap roles of hunter and hunted until the protagonist rises heroically from the bottom to successfully dispatch his opposite number. Even the lesser and more reflexive examples of this writer's unique genre (the label "wilderness procedural" doesn't quite do it justice) never fail to capture the vivid immediacy of the chase and its natural setting.

Notable also is the attractive character, effortlessly conveyed by Household, of his protagonist, who is typically a "Latinised Englishman." The bicultural identity of this fictional alter ego results from genes (the Ecuadorian-English Claudio Howard-Wolferstan of *Fellow Passenger*, the Basque-English eponymous hero of *The Lives and Times of Bernardo Brown*), upbringing (Owen Dawnay, Argentinian-born English botanist of *Dance of the Dwarfs*), costume and cosmetics (the narrator of *Rogue Male*

in its concluding pages), or simply personal inclination (Household himself). The common denominator among these men of wildly different class and ethnic background is the practice (as Household noted in his 1958 autobiography *Against the Wind*) of “courtesy between man and man whatever the difference in education and income.” All belong to that elite category—determined by code of honor, spirit of fellowship, and an indefinable *joie de vivre*—identified as “Class X” by the narrator of *Rogue Male*, who reflects in the course of his deadly hide-and-seek scramble across the English countryside:

I should like some socialist pundit to explain to me why it is that in England a man can be a member of the proletariat by every definition of the proletariat (that is, by the nature of his employment and his poverty) and yet obviously belong to Class X, and why another can be a bulging capitalist or cabinet minister or both and never get nearer to Class X than being directed to the Saloon Bar if he enters the Public.

The first and most notable member of this international brotherhood was a real Spaniard whom Household encountered in his early days as a commercial traveler. After sharing a table and a few liters of wine in a Toledo café, he discovered that this “citizen of Christian birth and exquisite breeding who did not find it necessary to wear a collar and tie” had secretly paid the bill upon leaving. Such an act of quiet courtesy from a person of very limited means struck Household deeply, leading him to a small epiphany of unity with Spain and a decision to make the acquisition of “courtliness” his personal goal. This moment of solidarity would burgeon into a unity with a cosmopolitan league of Class Xers—dashing, often raffish, always courtly *pícaros*, from Polish aristocrats to black Cuban taxi drivers—whom Household would meet again and again in his travels through Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America (north of Mexico the count drops sharply) during a peripatetic life that clearly informed the picaresque structure of his fiction.

Born in Bristol at the turn of the last century, Geoffrey Household was the son of a lawyer who later became secretary of education for Gloucestershire. There were family memories of Bilney, the estate in Norfolk his merchant great-grandfather had acquired and his grandfather lost. At Magdalen College, Oxford, where he took a double First in Classics and English and aspired to be a poet, he also claims to have shared with a friend “an almost oriental dislike of any intellectual, athletic, political or social activities.” Noting this quality in the young man along with his keen interest in shooting, the friend’s father (clearly an early member of the club) offered Geoffrey a post in the Ottoman Bank in Bucharest, an experience that first awakened in him “the civilized European who lies, half a litre below the surface, in the average introverted Englishman.”

After Bucharest, Household became a representative for Elders & Fyffes, banana vendors for the United Fruit Company, which led him to his deep encounter with Spain, chiefly in Bilbao and the Basque country, whose inhabitants were to figure frequently in his fictions. He met and married a Romanian-born American, Elisaveta Kopelanoff, who encouraged his first attempts at writing. After a stint in New York rewriting articles for a children’s encyclopedia, then in London writing children’s

historical plays for the BBC, he advertised himself, accurately and memorably, as an “Englishman with no national prejudices” and was hired by the printer’s ink manufacturers John Kidd & Co., who sent him first to the Middle East and then to his last great regional love affair, with Latin America. In the New World, Household consolidated his personal ideal of the Latinized Englishman “accepting unhurriedly the local courtesies and conventions,” a role he would carry through his service first as fledgling saboteur and then as field security officer in World War II.

Household was sent to Bucharest and then to Greece, where one cannot help wondering if his path crossed that of the notable English *pícaro* Patrick Leigh Fermor, whose own life, from a teenage walking trip across Europe to Constantinople in the 1930s to his lighthearted caper of kidnapping a German general in Crete during the war, seems to leap straight from the pages of a Household novel. Later postings included Cairo and Jerusalem, where Household met his second wife, Ilona Gutmán, a Hungarian national with whom he settled into a happy marriage, producing three children whose cultural and genetic blend must have been a source of particular satisfaction to their father.

Rogue Male is Household’s best-known work. Published in 1939 and made twice into a film (Fritz Lang’s *Man Hunt* in 1942 and a television movie, scripted by Frederic Raphael and starring Peter O’Toole, in 1976), it was his second adult novel after *The Third Hour* and the children’s adventure novel *The Spanish Cave* (first published as *The Terror of Villadonga* in 1936, the same year that his first story, “The Salvation of Pisco Gabar,” appeared in the pages of *The Atlantic Monthly*). A less successful late sequel, *Rogue Justice* (1982), dots the i’s and crosses the t’s of its austere predecessor by giving the hero a name and a suitably bicultural identity (an Austrian countess for a mother).

The story opens as its narrator recounts in an offhand way how he decided on a sportsman’s whim to walk south across the border from Poland and stalk “the biggest game on earth,” an unnamed dictator who is clearly Hitler. Caught with the “great man” squarely in his telescopic sights, tortured outrageously and left for dead, he makes a daring escape back to England only to discover he’s still an outlaw, relentlessly pursued by the dictator’s minions and his own country’s police. After he determines he must go to ground like the hunted animal he is, a night spent on Wimbledon Common marks his first step down the evolutionary ladder to abjection and ultimate enlightenment. From there he makes his way to Dorset, then “from Dorset to the western corner of the county, and from that to four square miles” of countryside and his ultimate hiding place, the strip of ancient lane on a remote hillside.

It might seem incongruous that Household situated the stark encounter with Nature and human predators that ensues in a domesticated landscape to which the adjective “tame” is routinely appended. (Of the same Dorset countryside, the hero of *Bernardo Brown* notes: “Tame it was, but tame as some glossy, splendid animal conscious of love and answering.”) Robert MacFarlane, who has traced the novel’s fictional destination to a specific hillside in Dorset’s Chideock Valley, notes that it is a New World notion that wilderness must be divorced from the human. In the literature of Britain, MacFarlane says, “wildernesses have always been profoundly human landscapes.”* The lane itself, sunk fifteen feet below the level of the surrounding fields, has been “worn down by the pack horses of a hundred generations.” Even with

farmhouses lying close by, however, the old Roman road snaking the hills has been reclaimed by the local animals. In prose that hints of the mystic animism that would play an increasingly larger role in Household's later novels, we are told that in the moonlight "it was teeming with life: sheep and cows lying on it, rabbits dancing in and out of ancient pits, owls gliding and hooting over the thorn."

Our rogue male's journey into deep countryside moves him back through human history as well—from the modern world of trains and automobiles through Roman times to the world of the Paleolithic hunter. Household roots his character's visceral experience in the relationship to the earth of Stone Age hunter-gatherers for whom killing is a religious practice, a holy exchange of energies around which both hunter and hunted observe the timeless rituals of impending death. Far from being anarchic, the world of predators and prey follows strict rules of conduct. In *Dance of the Dwarfs*, the unknown hunter's "Declaration of Intent," a high-pitched whistle, delivers fear and panic, then passivity, to the central nervous system of the hunted. In the late novel *The Sending*, the protagonist Alfyf Hollaston remarks of the fear instinct: "When we were only hunted and hunters—in Europe a mere three hundred generations ago—we shared [with animals] this sixth sense which told us when we were in danger." And Charles Dennim, hero of *The Watcher in the Shadows*, says, "I believe that for the animals always, and for man sometimes, fear is only a vivid awareness of one's unity with nature."

As part of this process, the narrator of *Rogue Male* undergoes his own rite of passage from civilized man to animal "deprived of ordinary human cunning" and working from blind instinct. Gradually he takes on the attributes of a wild creature, moving so quietly he startles a fox and experiencing low-level thought transference with the feral cat he befriends. He's able to achieve this attunement to the animal world partly thanks to a previous sojourn with an African tribe. (In *The Sending*, Alfyf communes with animals because of a similar experience with an Indian tribe and a genetic gift passed down in his own family.) For Household the descent into animal nature is an ascent that allows the human animal to experience a forgotten sense of identity with nature and all things living. Only "after much meditation" can civilized man experience the "mystic vision" that is the natural resting state of animals and primitive man. When he once achieved this communion, Alfyf says in *The Sending*, "I had ceased to exist as a man; I was a molecule of the unity of earth and light."

But Household would also like us to believe that the ancient rites and practices of hunters still resonate through the quiet countryside of England. In the comic story "The Twilight of a God," a Mithras altar is uncovered in the Roman cellar jointly shared by a pub and a village butcher shop that makes outstanding sausage. (The secret ingredient is bull's blood, obtained through barely remembered rites performed on the sacrificial stone.) In *The Courtesy of Death*, a delicate parody of his own philosophy of the hunt, Household presents a Somerset group devoted to "metaphysical animism" that tries to revive, along with a sinister salutation called "the Apology," the hunting rituals of their ancestors as depicted in cave paintings they discover in the deep caverns of the Mendips.

During the relentless heat of the chase, meanwhile, and as much to his own surprise as the reader's, the true motive of *Rogue Male*'s narrator slowly emerges. (Reader,

stop here if you want to discover it for yourself.) Given the implausibility of assassination conducted as a “sporting stalk,” he protests at first, to himself as well as his initial captors, his own apolitical nature: “I haven’t any grievances myself. One can hardly count the upsetting of one’s trivial private life and plans by European disturbances as a grievance.” As he approaches the sunken lane in Dorset, however, he admits it’s a place he found while in love, and the person he loved and shared it with has perished. As the pressures of the hunt mount and the screw tightens, he must engage his adversary “Quive-Smith” in a battle of wits as the dictator’s operative conducts a Mephistophelian interrogation through the ventilator hole of his lair, using the narrator’s professed libertarian beliefs to persuade him to sign a paper confessing that he intended to assassinate the dictator with the knowledge of the English government.

For *Rogue Male*’s narrator, however, only the personal is legitimately political.* Like all Household heroes, he hates the state and respects the rights of the individual. He eschews all patriotism and believes in “dying against,” not “dying for.” Only under extreme mental duress, then, does he finally admit, to Quive-Smith and to himself, that “of course” he had meant to shoot. And with that admission comes a flood of self-knowledge about the depth of the feelings he has never fully acknowledged: his love, grief, and rage over the execution of the woman he loved by the dictator’s secret police. The man who had mocked, at the start of his adventure, the notion of “yowling of love like an Italian tenor” has been delivered into his higher, more authentic self by his deeper connection with the natural world as well as the conditions of his ordeal.

Quive-Smith, in contrast, whose courage, superior hunting skills, and intelligence superficially make him a Class Xer, is excluded from the brotherhood because of two overweening flaws—cruelty and ambition. Half English and half German, he resembles many other Household antagonists who serve as distorted mirror images of his heroes. The ex—Resistance fighter “Savarin” of *The Watcher in the Shadows* is a half-English, half-French vicomte who pursues Charles Dennim, the former Austrian aristocrat who served at Buchenwald as an English spy, for the same reason that the hero of *Rogue Male* hunted his prey—to avenge the death of a beloved woman at the hands of Hitler’s minions. Ultimately, however, the French aristocrat forfeits his membership in Class X for the same shortcomings as Quive-Smith—sadism, extremism, and political fanaticism.

In Household’s late masterpiece *Dance of the Dwarfs* (1968), the unknown adversary proves not to be human at all and delivers a particularly gruesome death to the hero and his Indian mistress. *Dance of the Dwarfs* further inverts this writer’s usual pattern to focus on the vast and chillingly impersonal wilderness of the New World, pitting the hero, Owen Dawnay, against a foe who is only gradually revealed to be a creature of the impenetrable jungle bordering the llano, the vast inland plain of Colombia.* The shared theme of sacrificing one’s life in the service of a doomed love makes *Rogue Male* and *Dance of the Dwarfs* Household’s two finest novels.

After *Rogue Male*’s narrator experiences his transcendent moment of clarity, the denouement unfolds swiftly. His prohibition against taking human life is lifted when Quive-Smith and his henchman kill the cat Asmodeus for sport and throw the body down the ventilator hole. Now that the rules of honor have been flagrantly breached, murder can be legitimized as an act of war. From the hide of his animal comrade he

fashions a lethal sling-shot as his instrument of vengeance, and once this score has been settled he will decide to take on his original quarry once more and do the job properly. Offsetting this announced return to almost certain death is the good-humored in-joke with readers that closes *Rogue Male* (further proof, if needed, that Household himself is a member in good standing of Class X): the narrator appends a letter to his chronicle instructing his solicitor to have it “brushed up by some competent hack and marketed in his name.”

Robert MacFarlane rightly dubs Household the heir of Robert Louis Stevenson and John Buchan, but the scale, I think, must be tipped in favor of the egalitarian Stevenson. Buchan’s Richard Hannay is a bluff South African colonial who is patriotic in a way Household would have found highly unattractive. Household’s Englishman “with no national prejudices” is a thoughtful man of action, ethical in a way hard to codify in an imperial rulebook, democratic in a way no Boer could stomach, and frankly sensual in a way no Buchan hero ever dreamed of. Household himself cites Defoe as a prime influence on his writings, and *Rogue Male* is indeed a kind of inland *Robinson Crusoe* complete with feline Friday. The limpid style and vivid intensity of the physical descriptions compare favorably with the Old English—cadenced prose of *Pincher Martin*, William Golding’s saga of a self-deceived Robinson Crusoe marooned on a North Atlantic island of his own invention. Household’s topographic passion for the English countryside, the loving poetic accuracy of his landscapes, replete with marvelous throwaway observations (on, for example, the “gaiety of the insect world”), holds more than a few echoes of Thomas Hardy. His confessed preference for the picaresque adds the “Latinised” flavor of the land of *Lazarillo de Tormes* to his very English narratives. Taking a far more radical position than his near contemporaries Somerset Maugham and Graham Greene in their tales of “abroad,” finally, Household displays a rare identification with the non-English “Other” that anticipates the cosmopolitan postcolonial sensibility of the twenty-first century.

One suspects that Geoffrey Household, were he alive today, would be delighted by new DNA research suggesting that those of Her Majesty’s citizens whose ancestors were long-term inhabitants of the British Isles are far more genetically homogenous (forget Viking, Celt, Saxon, Norman!) than previously thought. He would be even more delighted by the likelihood that most of these people, himself included, descend from a single population of Paleolithic hunters who migrated north from the Iberian peninsula some 16,000 years ago—back in those far-off days “when men could simply walk from France, following game,” in the nostalgic words of a character in *The Courtesy of Death*—speaking a language, for the best and final touch, very much like that still current among his beloved Basques.* And it is not beyond the realm of possibility that some future spelunker in the Mendips, taking a cue from this twentieth-century romancer, will uncover a cave painting or two that brings to life again, across three hundred generations, the timeless dance of Hunter and Hunted in Household’s native land.

—VICTORIA NELSON

**Granta*, “The Wild Places,” September 2007.

*In *Against the Wind*, Household notes significantly that his own sentiment toward Nazi Germany “had the savagery of a personal vendetta.”

*In some respects, the predators in this novel resemble the worst sort of humans, including the Nazis in *Rogue Male*; they kill their own kind and kill for the pleasure of killing, acts that violate a kind of trans-species Class X code of honor.

*Stephen Oppenheimer, *The Origins of the British: A Genetic Detective Story*, quoted in Nicholas Wade, “English, Irish, Scots: They’re All One, Genes Suggest,” *The New York Times*, March 5, 2007.

ROGUE MALE

To Ben
who knows what it feels like

‘The behaviour of a rogue may fairly be described as individual, separation from its fellows appearing to increase both cunning and ferocity. These solitary beasts, exasperated by chronic pain or widowerhood, are occasionally found among all the larger carnivores and graminivores, and are generally male, though, in the case of hippopotami, the wanton viciousness of old cows is not to be disregarded.’

I cannot blame them. After all, one doesn't need a telescopic sight to shoot boar and bear; so that when they came on me watching the terrace at a range of five hundred and fifty yards, it was natural enough that they should jump to conclusions. And they behaved, I think, with discretion. I am not an obvious anarchist or fanatic, and I don't look as if I took any interest in politics; I might perhaps have sat for an agricultural constituency in the south of England, but that hardly counts as politics. I carried a British passport, and if I had been caught walking up to the House instead of watching it I should probably have been asked to lunch. It was a difficult problem for angry men to solve in an afternoon.

They must have wondered whether I had been employed on, as it were, an official mission; but I think they turned that suspicion down. No government—least of all ours—encourages assassination. Or was I a free-lance? That must have seemed very unlikely; anyone can see that I am not the type of avenging angel. Was I, then, innocent of any criminal intent, and exactly what I claimed to be—a sportsman who couldn't resist the temptation to stalk the impossible?

After two or three hours of their questions I could see I had them shaken. They didn't believe me, though they were beginning to understand that a bored and wealthy Englishman who had hunted all commoner game might well find a perverse pleasure in hunting the biggest game on earth. But even if my explanation were true and the hunt were purely formal, it made no difference. I couldn't be allowed to live.

By that time I had, of course, been knocked about very considerably. My nails are growing back but my left eye is still pretty useless. I wasn't a case you could turn loose with apologies. They would probably have given me a picturesque funeral, with huntsmen firing volleys and sounding horns, with all the big-wigs present in fancy dress, and put up a stone obelisk to the memory of a brother sportsman. They do those things well.

As it was, they bungled the job. They took me to the edge of a cliff and put me over, all but my hands. That was cunning. Scrabbling at the rough rock would have accounted—near enough—for the state of my fingers when I was found. I did hang on, of course; for how long I don't know. I cannot see why I wasn't glad to die, seeing that I hadn't a hope of living and the quicker the end the less the suffering. But I was not glad. One always hopes—if a clinging to life can be called hope. I am not too civilized to be influenced by that force which makes a rabbit run when a stoat is after him. The rabbit doesn't hope for anything, I take it. His mind has no conception of the future. But he runs. And so I hung on till I dropped.

I was doubtful whether I had died or not. I have always believed that consciousness remains after physical death (though I have no opinion on how long it lasts), so I thought I was probably dead. I had been such a hell of a time falling; it didn't seem reasonable that I could be alive. And there had been a terrifying instant of pain. I felt as if the back of my thighs and rump had been shorn off, pulled off, scraped off—off, however done. I had parted, obviously and irrevocably, with a lot of my living matter.

My second thought was a longing for death, for it was revolting to imagine myself still alive and of the consistency of mud. There was a pulped substance all around me, in the midst of which I carried on my absurd consciousness. I had supposed that this

bog was me; it tasted of blood. Then it occurred to me that this soft extension of my body might really be bog; that anything into which I fell would taste of blood.

I had crashed into a patch of marsh; small, but deep. Now, I think that I am alive—today, that is, for I still hesitate to describe myself as alive with any permanency—because I couldn't see or feel how much damage had been dealt. It was dark, and I was quite numb. I hauled myself out by the tussocks of grass, a creature of mud, bandaged and hidden in mud. A slope of scree rose sharply from the marsh. I had evidently grazed it in my fall. I didn't feel the pain any longer. I could persuade myself that I was no more seriously hurt than when they put me over the cliff; so I determined to move off before they came to find my body.

I had, though I didn't then know it, a good deal of time to play with; they hadn't any intention of finding my body until it was stiff and there were independent witnesses with them. The unfortunate brother sportsman would be accidentally discovered with his corpse undisturbed, and the whole history of his fate perfectly plain on the nasty sloping rock from which he had slipped.

The country at the foot of the cliff was open woodland. I remember nothing except that there were thin shadows and thick shadows. The image in my mind is so vague that they might have been coverts or clouds or waves of the sea. I walked about a mile, I suppose, and chose a thick darkness to faint in. I came to a sort of consciousness several times during the night, but let it slide away. I wasn't returning to this difficult world till dawn.

When it was light, I tried to stand on my feet, but of course I couldn't. I made no second effort. Any movement of the muscles interfered with my nice cake of mud. Whenever a crust fell off I started to bleed. No, I certainly wasn't interfering with the mud.

I knew where there was water. I had never seen that stream, and my certainty of its direction may have been due to a subconscious memory of the map. But I knew where water was, and I made for it. I travelled on my belly, using my elbows for legs and leaving a track behind me like that of a wounded crocodile, all slime and blood. I wasn't going into the stream—I wouldn't have washed off that mud for anything in the world; for all I knew, my bowels were only held in by mud—but I was going to the edge.

This was the reasoning of a hunted beast; or rather, it was not reasoning at all. I don't know whether a sedentary townsman's mind would have worked the same way. I think it would, if he had been badly enough hurt. You must be badly hurt to reach the stage of extinction where you stop thinking what you ought to do, and merely do it.

I made the trail look as if I had taken to the stream. I crawled to the edge and drank, and turned myself round in a shallow, a safe two inches deep, where the signs of my wallowing would be washed out. They could track me to the cover where I had lain up for the night, and from there to the water. Where I had gone when I left the water they would have to guess.

Myself I had no doubt where I was going, and the decision must be credited to my useful ancestors. A deer would trot upstream or downstream and leave the water at some point that the hunter's nose or eyes could determine. A monkey would do nothing of the sort; he would confuse his tracks and vanish into a third dimension.

When I had turned round in the shallows, I wriggled back again—back and back

along the damned snake's track I had made. It was easy to follow; indeed it looked as definite as a country lane, for my face was only six inches above the ground. Thinking about it now, I wonder that they didn't notice, when they followed me to the stream, that some of the grass was bent the wrong way and that I must have gone back on my tracks. But who the devil would think of that? There aren't any laws on what print a man leaves when he's dragging his belly—and on such a monster of a trail there was no apparent need to look for details.

The outward journey had taken me under a stand of larch, where the earth was soft and free of undergrowth. I had brushed past the trunk of one tree which I now meant to climb. The lowest branch was within two feet of the ground; above that were another and another, sweet-smelling sooty branches as close together as the rungs of a ladder. The muscles of my hands were intact; I had gone beyond worrying about the state of surfaces.

Until I was well above the level of a man's eyes, I did not dare rest boots on branch; they would have left caked prints that no one could miss, I went up the first ten feet in a single burst, knowing that the longer I held on to a branch the less strength remained to reach the next. That half-minute was just a compelling of one hand above the other: two pistons shooting alternately from heaven knows what cylinder of force. My friends have sometimes accused me of taking pride in the maceration of my flesh. They are right. But I did not know that I could persuade myself to such agony as that climb.

The rest was easier, for now I could let my feet bear my weight and pause as long as I wished before each hoist. My legs were not limp; they were immovable. That was no disadvantage. I couldn't fall, wedged in as I was between the little branches of that prolific tree. When I climbed into the narrowing of the cone and the boughs were thicker and smaller and greener, I got jammed. That suited me well enough, so I fainted again. It was luxury, almost sin.

When I became conscious, the tree was swaying in the light wind and smelling of peace. I felt deliciously secure, for I was not looking forward at all; I felt as if I were a parasite on the tree, grown to it. I was not in pain, not hungry, not thirsty, and I was safe. There was nothing in each passing moment of the present that could hurt me. I was dealing exclusively with the present. If I had looked forward I should have known despair, but for a hunted, resting mammal it is no more possible to experience despair than hope.

It must have been the early afternoon when I heard the search-party. As they worked down the slope to the north of my tree I could watch them. The sun was in their eyes, and there was no risk of them spotting my face among the soft green feathers of the larch which I pushed aside. So far as I could tell, my legs were not bleeding; drops falling on the lower branches would be the only immediate sign of my presence. The slight bloodstains from my hands were there to be seen if anyone looked for them, but, on black boughs in the half-lit centre of a tree, not readily to be seen.

Three uniformed police were trampling down the hillside: heavy, stolid fellows enjoying the sunshine and good-humouredly following a plain-clothes man who was ranging about on my trail like a dog they had taken for a walk. I recognized him. He was the House detective who had conducted the first part of my examination. He had proposed a really obscene method of dragging the truth out of me, and had actually

started it when his colleagues protested. They had no objection to his technique, but they had the sense to see that it might be necessary for my corpse to be found and that it must not be found unreasonably mutilated.

When they came nearer I could hear scraps of their conversation. The policemen were looking for me with decent anxiety. They knew nothing of the truth, and were in doubt whether I had been man or woman, and whether the case had been accident or attempted suicide. They had been notified, I gathered, that a cry or a fall was heard in the night; then, unobtrusively guided by the detective, they had found my knapsack and the disturbance in the patch of marsh. Of course I could not work out the situation at the time. I could only receive impressions. I was growing to my tree and aware of immense good nature as I listened to them. Later on, I made sense of their words.

Seeing my reptilian trail disappear into the stand of larch, the House detective perked up and took command. He seemed certain that I should be found under the trees. He shouted to his three companions to run round to the other side in case I should escape, and himself crawled under the low boughs. He nearly gave the show away there, for I was supposed to be eagerly awaiting help; but he wanted to find me himself and alone. If I were alive, it was necessary to finish me off discreetly.

He passed rapidly beneath my tree, and on into the open. I heard him curse when he discovered that I had not stopped in the wood. Then I heard their faint voices as they shouted to one another up and down the stream. That surprised me. I had thought of the stream, naturally, as a morning's march away.

I saw no more of the hunt. A few hours later there was a lot of splashing and excitement down by the water. They must have been dragging the pools for my body. The stream was a shallow mountain torrent, but quite fast enough to roll a man along with it until he was caught by rock or eddy.

In the evening I heard dogs, and felt really frightened. I started to tremble, and knew pain again, aches and stabs and throbbings, all the symphony of pain, all my members fiddling away to the beat of my heart, on it or off it or half a bar behind. I had come back to life, thanks to that healing tree. The dogs might have found me, but their master, whoever he was, never gave them a chance. He wasn't wasting time by putting them on a trail that he could follow himself; he was casting up and down the stream.

When night fell I came down from my tree. I could stand, and, with the aid of two sticks, I could shuffle slowly forwards, flat-footed and stiff-legged. I could think, too. None of my mental activities for the past twenty-four hours might be called thinking. I had allowed my body to take charge. It knew far more about escaping and healing than I did.

I must try to make my behaviour intelligible. This confession—shall I call it?—is written to keep myself from brooding, to get down what happened in the order in which it happened. I am not content with myself. With this pencil and exercise-book I hope to find some clarity. I create a second self, a man of the past by whom the man of the present may be measured. Lest what I write should ever, by accident or intention, become public property, I will not mention who I am. My name is widely known. I have been frequently and unavoidably dishonoured by the banners and praises of the penny press.

This shooting trip of mine started, I believe, innocently enough. Like most Englishmen, I am not accustomed to enquire very deeply into motives. I dislike and

disbelieve in cold-blooded planning, whether it be suggested of me or of anyone else. I remember asking myself when I packed the telescopic sight what the devil I wanted it for; but I just felt that it might come in handy.

It is undoubtedly true that I had been speculating—a curiosity that we all share—upon the methods of guarding a great man, and how they might be circumvented. I had a fortnight's sport in Poland, and then crossed the frontier for more. I began moving rather aimlessly from place to place, and as I found myself getting a little nearer to the House with each night's lodging I became obsessed by this idea of a sporting stalk. I have asked myself once or twice since why I didn't leave the rifle behind. I think the answer is that it wouldn't have been cricket.

Police protection is based upon the assumption that an assassin is a half-crazed idiot with a clumsy, close-range weapon—the bomb, the revolver, or the knife. It is obvious that the type of man who is a really fine shot and experienced in the approaching and killing of big-game would shrink from political or any other kind of murder. He probably hasn't any grievances, and, if he had, the rifle would not occur to him as a means of redressing them. I haven't any grievances myself. One can hardly count the upsetting of one's trivial private life and plans by European disturbances as a grievance. I don't see myself yowling of love like an Italian tenor and poking at the baritone with a stiletto.

A Bond Street rifle, I say, is not a weapon that the bodyguard need consider, for the potential assassin cannot train himself to use it. The secret police, who know all about the political antecedents of anyone disaffected to the régime, are not going to allow such a man to possess a good rifle, to walk about with it, or even to turn himself into a first-class shot. So the assassin is compelled to use a weapon that can be easily concealed.

Now, I argued, here am I with a rifle, with a permit to carry it, with an excuse for possessing it. Let us see whether, as an academic point, such a stalk and such a bag are possible. I went no further than that. I planned nothing. It has always been my habit to let things take their course.

I sent my baggage home by train, and covered the last hundred miles or so on foot, travelling only with a knapsack, my rifle and sight, my maps and my field-glasses. I marched by night. During daylight I lay up in timber or heath. I have never enjoyed anything so much. Whoever has stalked a beast for a couple of miles would understand what a superbly exciting enterprise it was to stalk over a hundred passing unseen through the main herds of human beings, the outliers, the young males walking unexpectedly upon hillsides. I was killing two birds with one stone; I revived in myself a sense of adventure and—well, I don't see why I wrote two birds. There was only one bird: the fun of the stalk.

I arrived on the ground at dawn and spent the whole day in reconnaissance. It was an alarming day, for the forest surrounding the House was most efficiently patrolled. From tree to tree and gully to gully I prowled over most of the circuit, but only flat on the earth was I really safe. Often I hid my rifle and glasses, thinking that I was certain to be challenged and questioned. I never was. I might have been transparent. I have learned the trick of watching shadows, and standing motionless in such a position that they cut and dapple my outline; still, there were times when even a rhinoceros could have seen me.