GRAHAM GREENE

Brighton Rock

BRIGHTON ROCK

Graham Greene was born in 1904 and educated at Berkhamsted School, where his father was the headmaster. On coming down from Balliol College, Oxford, where he published a book of verse, he worked for four years as a sub-editor on *The Times*. He established his reputation with his fourth novel, *Stamboul Train*, which he classed as an 'entertainment' in order to distinguish it from more serious work. In 1935 he made a journey across Liberia, described in *Journey Without Maps*, and on his return was appointed film critic of the *Spectator*. In 1926 he had been received into the Roman Catholic Church and was commissioned to visit Mexico in 1938, and report on the religious persecution there. As a result he wrote *The Lawless Roads* and, later, *The Power and the Glory*.

Brighton Rock was published in 1938, and in 1940 he became literary editor of the *Spectator*. The next year he undertook work for the Foreign Office and was sent out to Sierra Leone in 1941–3. One of his major post-war novels, *The Heart of the Matter*, is set in West Africa and is considered by many to be his finest book. This was followed by *The End of the Affair*, *The Quiet American*, a story set in Vietnam, *Our Man in Havana* and *A Burnt-Out Case*. Many of his novels and short stories have been filmed and *The Third Man* was written as a film treatment. His other books include *The Honorary Consul* (1973), *Lord Rochester's Monkey* (1974), *An Impossible Woman: The Memories of Dottoressa Moor of Capri* (editor, 1975), *The Human Factor* (1978), *Doctor Fischer of Geneva or The Bomb Party* (1980), *Monsignor Quixote* (1982), *J'Accuse: The Dark Side of Nice* (1982), *Getting to Know the General* (1984) and *The Tenth Man* (1985). He has also published two volumes of autobiography, *A Sort of Life* (1971) and *Ways of Escape* (1980).

In all Graham Greene has written some thirty novels, 'entertainments', plays, children's books, travel books, and collections of essays and short stories. He was made a Companion of Honour in 1966.

Many of Graham Greene's books are published in Penguins.

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'This were a fine reign:
To do ill and not hear of it again.'
THE WITCH OF EDMONTON

PART ONE

1

HALE knew, before he had been in Brighton three hours, that they meant to murder him. With his inky fingers and his bitten nails, his manner cynical and nervous, anybody could tell he didn't belong – belong to the early summer sun, the cool Whitsun wind off the sea, the holiday crowd. They came in by train from Victoria every five minutes, rocked down Queen's Road standing on the tops of the little local trams, stepped off in bewildered multitudes into fresh and glittering air: the new silver paint sparkled on the piers, the cream houses ran away into the west like a pale Victorian water-colour; a race in miniature motors, a band playing, flower gardens in bloom below the front, an aeroplane advertising something for the health in pale vanishing clouds across the sky.

It had seemed quite easy to Hale to be lost in Brighton. Fifty thousand people besides himself were down for the day, and for quite a while he gave himself up to the good day, drinking gins and tonics wherever his programme allowed. For he had to stick closely to a programme: from ten till eleven Queen's Road and Castle Square, from eleven till twelve the Aquarium and Palace Pier, twelve till one the front between the Old Ship and West Pier, back for lunch between one and two in any restaurant he chose round the Castle Square, and after that he had to make his way all down the parade to the West Pier and then to the station by the Hove streets. These were the limits of his absurd and widely advertised sentry-go.

Advertised on every *Messenger* poster: 'Kolley Kibber in Brighton today.' In his pocket he had a packet of cards to distribute in hidden places along his route; those who found them would receive ten shillings from the *Messenger*, but the big prize was reserved for whoever challenged Hale in the proper form of words and with a copy of the *Messenger* in his hand: 'You are Mr Kolley Kibber. I claim the *Daily Messenger* prize.'

This was Hale's job to do sentry-go, until a challenger

released him, in every seaside town in turn: yesterday Southend, today Brighton, tomorrow –

He drank his gin and tonic hastily as a clock struck eleven and moved out of Castle Square. Kolley Kibber always played fair, always wore the same kind of hat as in the photograph the *Messenger* printed, was always on time. Yesterday in Southend he had been unchallenged: the paper liked to save its guineas occasionally, but not too often. It was his duty today to be spotted – and it was his inclination too. There were reasons why he didn't feel too safe in Brighton, even in a Whitsun crowd.

He leant against the rail near the Palace Pier and showed his face to the crowd as it uncoiled endlessly past him, like a twisted piece of wire, two by two, each with an air of sober and determined gaiety. They had stood all the way from Victoria in crowded carriages, they would have to wait in queues for lunch, at midnight half asleep they would rock back in trains to the cramped streets and the closed pubs and the weary walk home. With immense labour and immense patience they extricated from the long day the grain of pleasure: this sun, this music, the rattle of the miniature cars, the ghost train diving between the grinning skeletons under the Aquarium promenade, the sticks of Brighton rock, the paper sailors' caps.

Nobody paid any attention to Hale; no one seemed to be carrying a *Messenger*. He deposited one of his cards carefully on the top of a little basket and moved on, with his bitten nails and his inky fingers, alone. He only felt his loneliness after his third gin; until then he despised the crowd, but afterwards he felt his kinship. He had come out of the same streets, but he was condemned by his higher pay to pretend to want other things, and all the time the piers, the peepshows pulled at his heart. He wanted to get back – but all he could do was to carry his sneer along the front, the badge of loneliness. Somewhere out of sight a woman was singing, 'When I came up from Brighton by the train': a rich Guinness voice, a voice from a public bar. Hale turned into the private saloon and watched her big blown charms across two bars and through a glass partition.

She wasn't old, somewhere in the late thirties or the early forties, and she was only a little drunk in a friendly accom-

modating way. You thought of sucking babies when you looked at her, but if she'd borne them she hadn't let them pull her down: she took care of herself. Her lipstick told you that, the confidence of her big body. She was well-covered, but she wasn't careless; she kept her lines for those who cared for lines.

Hale did. He was a small man and he watched her with covetous envy over the empty glasses tipped up in the lead trough, over the beer handles, between the shoulders of the two serving in the public bar. 'Give us another, Lily,' one of them said and she began, 'One night – in an alley – Lord Rothschild said to me.' She never got beyond a few lines. She wanted to laugh too much to give her voice a chance, but she had an inexhaustible memory for ballads. Hale had never heard one of them before. With his glass to his lips he watched her with nostalgia: she was off again on a song which must have dated back to the Australian gold rush.

'Fred,' a voice said behind him, 'Fred.'

The gin slopped out of Hale's glass on to the bar. A boy of about seventeen watched him from the door – a shabby smart suit, the cloth too thin for much wear, a face of starved intensity, a kind of hideous and unnatural pride.

'Who are you Freding?' Hale said. 'I'm not Fred.'

'It don't make any difference,' the boy said. He turned back towards the door, keeping an eye on Hale over his narrow shoulder.

'Where are you going?'

'Got to tell your friends,' the boy said.

They were alone in the saloon bar except for an old commissionaire, who slept over a pint glass of old and mild. 'Listen,' Hale said, 'have a drink. Come and sit down over here and have a drink.'

'Got to be going,' the boy said. 'You know I don't drink, Fred. You forget a lot, don't you?'

'It won't make any difference having one drink. A soft drink.'

'It'll have to be a quick one,' the boy said. He watched Hale all the time closely and with wonder: you might expect a hunter searching through the jungle for some half-fabulous beast to look like that – at the spotted lion or the pygmy elephant – before the kill. 'A grape-fruit squash,' he said.

'Go on, Lily,' the voices implored in the public bar. 'Give us another, Lily,' and the boy took his eyes for the first time from Hale and looked across the partition at the big breasts and the blown charm.

'A double whisky and a grape-fruit squash,' Hale said. He carried them to a table, but the boy didn't follow. He was watching the woman with an expression of furious distaste. Hale felt as if hatred had been momentarily loosened like handcuffs to be fastened round another's wrists. He tried to joke, 'A cheery soul.'

'Soul,' the boy said. 'You've no cause to talk about souls.' He turned his hatred back on Hale, drinking down the grape-fruit squash in a single draught.

Hale said, 'I'm only here for my job. Just for the day. I'm Kolley Kibber.'

'You're Fred,' the boy said.

'All right,' Hale said, 'I'm Fred. But I've got a card in my pocket which'll be worth ten bob to you.'

'I know all about the cards,' the boy said. He had a fair smooth skin, the faintest down, and his grey eyes had an effect of heartlessness like an old man's in which human feeling has died. 'We were all reading about you,' he said, 'in the paper this morning,' and suddenly he sniggered as if he'd just seen the point of a dirty story.

'You can have one,' Hale said. 'Look, take this *Messenger*. Read what it says there. You can have the whole prize. Ten guineas,' he said. 'You'll only have to send this form to the *Messenger*.'

'Then they don't trust you with the cash,' the boy said, and in the other bar Lily began to sing, 'We met – 'twas in a crowd – / and I thought he would shun me.' 'Christ,' the boy said, 'won't anybody stop that buer's mouth?'

'I'll give you a fiver,' Hale said. 'It's all I've got on me. That and my ticket.'

'You won't want your ticket,' the boy said.

'I wore my bridal robe, and I rivall'd its whiteness.'

The boy rose furiously, and giving way to a little vicious spurt of hatred – at the song? at the man? – he dropped his empty glass on to the floor. 'The gentleman'll pay,' he said to

the barman and swung through the door of the private lounge. It was then Hale realized that they meant to murder him.

'A wreath of orange blossoms,
When next we met, she wore;
The expression of her features
Was more thoughtful than before.'

The commissionaire slept on and Hale watched her from the deserted elegant lounge. Her big breasts pointed through the thin vulgar summer dress, and he thought: I must get away from here, I must get away: sadly and desperately watching her, as if he were gazing at life itself in the public bar. But he couldn't get away, he had his job to do: they were particular on the *Messenger.* It was a good paper to be on, and a little flare of pride went up in Hale's heart when he thought of the long pilgrimage behind him: selling newspapers at street corners, the reporter's job at thirty bob a week on the little local paper with a circulation of ten thousand, the five years in Sheffield. He was damned, he told himself with the temporary courage of another whisky, if he'd let that mob frighten him into spoiling his job. What could they do while he had people round him? They hadn't the nerve to kill him in broad day before witnesses; he was safe with the fifty thousand visitors.

'Come on over here, lonely heart.' He didn't realize at first she was speaking to him, until he saw all the faces in the public bar grinning across at him, and suddenly he thought how easily the mob could get at him with only the sleeping commissionaire to keep him company. There was no need to go outside to reach the other bar, he had only to make a semicircle through three doors, by way of the saloon bar, the 'ladies only'. 'What'll you have?' he said, approaching the big woman with starved gratitude. She could save my life, he thought, if she'd let me stick to her.

'I'll have a port,' she said.

'One port,' Hale said.

'Aren't you having one?'

'No,' Hale said, 'I've drunk enough. I mustn't get sleepy.'

'Why ever not – on a holiday? Have a Bass on me.'

'I don't like Bass.' He looked at his watch. It was one o'clock. His programme fretted at his mind. He had to leave cards in every section: the paper in that way kept a check on him; they could always tell if he scamped his job. 'Come and have a bite,' he implored her.

'Hark at him,' she called to her friends. Her warm port-winey laugh filled all the bars. 'Getting fresh, eh? I wouldn't trust myself.'

'Don't you go, Lily,' they told her. 'He's not safe.'

'I wouldn't trust myself,' she repeated, closing one soft friendly cowlike eye.

There was a way, Hale knew, to make her come. He had known the way once. On thirty bob a week he would have been at home with her; he would have known the right phrase, the right joke, to cut her out from among her friends, to be friendly at a snack-bar. But he'd lost touch. He had nothing to say; he could only repeat, 'Come and have a bite.'

'Where shall we go, Sir Horace? To the Old Ship?'

'Yes,' Hale said. 'If you like. The Old Ship.'

'Hear that,' she told them in all the bars, the two old dames in black bonnets in the ladies, the commissionaire who slept on alone in the private, her own half dozen cronies. 'This gentleman's invited me to the Old Ship,' she said in a mock-refined voice. 'Tomorrow I shall be delighted, but today I have a prior engagement at the Dirty Dog.'

Hale turned hopelessly to the door. The boy, he thought, would not have had time to warn the others yet. He would be safe at lunch; it was the hour he had to pass after lunch he dreaded most.

The woman said, 'Are you sick or something?'

His eyes turned to the big breasts; she was like darkness to him, shelter, knowledge, common sense; his heart ached at the sight; but, in his little inky cynical framework of bone, pride bobbed up again, taunting him, 'Back to the womb . . . be a mother to you . . . no more standing on your own feet.'

'No,' he said, 'I'm not sick. I'm all right.'

'You look queer,' she said in a friendly concerned way.

'I'm all right,' he said. 'Hungry. That's all.'

'Why not have a bite here?' the woman said. 'You could do him a ham sandwich, couldn't you, Bell,' and the barman said, Yes, he could do a ham sandwich.

'No,' Hale said, 'I've got to be getting on.'

– Getting on. Down the front, mixing as quickly as possible with the current of the crowd, glancing to right and left of him and over each shoulder in turn. He could see no familiar face anywhere, but he felt no relief. He thought he could lose himself safely in a crowd, but now the people he was among seemed like a thick forest in which a native could arrange his poisoned ambush. He couldn't see beyond the man in flannels just in front, and when he turned his vision was blocked by a brilliant scarlet blouse. Three old ladies went driving by in an open horse-drawn carriage: the gentle clatter faded like peace. That was how some people still lived.

Hale crossed the road away from the front. There were fewer people there: he could walk faster and go further. They were drinking cocktails on the terrace of the Grand, a delicate pastiche of a Victorian sunshade twisted its ribbons and flowers in the sun, and a man like a retired statesman, all silver hair and powdered skin and double old-fashioned eyeglass, let life slip naturally, with dignity, away from him, sitting over a sherry. Down the broad steps of the Cosmopolitan came a couple of women with bright brass hair and ermine coats and heads close together like parrots, exchanging metallic confidences. '"My dear," I said quite coldly, "if you haven't learnt the Del Rey perm, all I can say –"' and they flashed their pointed painted nails at each other and cackled. For the first time for five years Kolley Kibber was late in his programme. At the foot of the Cosmopolitan steps, in the shadow the huge bizarre building cast, he remembered that the mob had bought his paper. They hadn't needed to watch the public house for him: they knew where to expect him.

A mounted policeman came up the road, the lovely cared-for chestnut beast stepping delicately on the hot macadam, like an expensive toy a millionaire buys for his children; you admired the finish, the leather as deeply glowing as an old mahogany table top, the bright silver badge; it never occurred to you that the toy was for use. It never occurred to Hale

watching the policeman pass; he couldn't appeal to him. A man stood by the kerb selling objects on a tray; he had lost the whole of one side of the body: leg and arm and shoulder, and the beautiful horse as it paced by turned its head aside delicately like a dowager. 'Shoelaces,' the man said hopelessly to Hale, 'matches.' Hale didn't hear him. 'Razor blades.' Hale went by, the words lodged securely in his brain: the thought of the thin wound and the sharp pain. That was how Kite was killed.

Twenty yards down the road he saw Cubitt. Cubitt was a big man, with red hair cut *en brosse* and freckles. He saw Hale, but he made no sign of recognition, leaning carelessly against a pillar-box watching him. A postman came to collect and Cubitt shifted. Hale could see him exchanging a joke with the postman and the postman laughed and filled his bag and all the time Cubitt looked away from him down the street waiting for Hale. Hale knew exactly what he'd do; he knew the whole bunch; Cubitt was slow and had a friendly way with him. He'd simply link his arm with Hale's and draw him on where he wanted him to go.

But the old desperate pride persisted, a pride of intellect. He was scared sick, but he told himself, 'I'm not going to die.' He jested hollowly, 'I'm not front page stuff.' This was real: the two women getting into a taxi, the band playing on the Palace Pier, 'tablets' fading in white smoke on the pale pure sky: not red-haired Cubitt waiting by the pillar-box. Hale turned again and crossed the road, made back towards the West Pier walking fast; he wasn't running away, he had a plan.

He had only, he told himself, to find a girl: there must be hundreds waiting to be picked up on a Whitsun holiday, to be given a drink and taken to dance at Sherry's and presently home, drunk and affectionate, in the corridor carriage. That was the best way: to carry a witness round with him. It would be no good, even if his pride allowed him, to go to the station now. They would be watching it for certain, and it was always easy to kill a lonely man at a railway station: they had only to gather close round a carriage door or fix you in the crush at the barrier; it was at a station that Colleoni's mob had killed Kite. All down the front the girls sat in the twopenny deck-chairs, waiting to be picked, all who had not brought their boys

with them; clerks, shop-girls, hairdressers – you could pick out the hairdressers by their new and daring perms, by their beautifully manicured nails: they had all waited late at their shops the night before, preparing each other till midnight. Now they were sleepy and sleek in the sun.

In front of the chairs the men strolled in twos and threes, wearing their summer suits for the first time, knife-edged silver-grey trousers and elegant shirts; they didn't look as if they cared a damn whether they got a girl or not, and among them Hale went in his seedy suit and his string tie and his striped shirt and his inkstains, ten years older, and desperate for a girl. He offered them cigarettes and they stared at him like duchesses with large cold eyes and said, 'I don't smoke, thenk you,' and twenty yards behind him he knew, without turning his head, that Cubitt strolled.

It made Hale's manner strange. He couldn't help showing his desperation. He could hear the girls laughing at him after he'd gone, at his clothes and the way he talked. There was a deep humility in Hale; his pride was only in his profession: he disliked himself before the glass – the bony legs and the pigeon breast, and he dressed shabbily and carelessly as a sign – a sign that he didn't expect any woman to be interested. Now he gave up the pretty ones, the smart ones, and looked despairingly down the chairs for someone plain enough to be glad of even his attentions.

Surely he thought, *this* girl, and he smiled with hungry hope at a fat spotty creature in pink whose feet hardly touched the ground. He sat down in an empty chair beside her and gazed at the remote and neglected sea coiling round the piles of the West Pier.

'Cigarette?' he asked presently.

'I don't mind if I do,' the girl said. The words were sweet like a reprieve.

'It's nice here,' the fat girl said.

'Down from town?'

'Yes.'

'Well,' Hale said, 'you aren't going to sit here alone all day, are you?'

'Oh, I don't know,' the girl said.

'I thought of going to have something to eat, and then we might –'

'*We*,' the girl said, 'you're a fresh one.'

'Well, you aren't going to sit here alone all day, are you?'

'Who said I was?' the fat girl said. 'Doesn't mean I'm going with *you*.'

'Come and have a drink anyway and talk about it.'

'I wouldn't mind,' she said, opening a compact and covering her spots deeper.

'Come along then,' Hale said.

'Got a friend?'

'I'm all alone.'

'Oh then, I couldn't,' the girl said. 'Not possibly. I couldn't leave my friend all alone,' and for the first time Hale observed in the chair beyond her a pale bloodless creature waiting avidly for his reply.

'But you'd like to come,' Hale implored.

'Oh, yes, but I couldn't possibly.'

'Your friend won't mind. She'll find someone.'

'Oh, no. I couldn't leave her alone.' She stared pastily and impassively at the sea.

'You wouldn't mind, would you?' Hale leaned forward and begged the bloodless image, and it screeched with embarrassed laughter back at him.

'She doesn't know anyone,' the fat girl said.

'She'll find somebody.'

'Would you, Delia?' The pasty girl leant her head close to her friend's and they consulted together: every now and then Delia squealed.

'That's all right then,' Hale said, 'you'll come?'

'Couldn't you find a friend?'

'I don't know anyone here,' Hale said. 'Come along. I'll take you anywhere for lunch. All I want –' he grinned miserably – 'is for you to stick close.'

'No,' the fat girl said. 'I couldn't possibly – not without my friend.'

'Well, both of you come along then,' Hale said.

'It wouldn't be much fun for Delia,' the fat girl said.

A boy's voice interrupted them. 'So there you are, Fred,'

and Hale looked up at the grey inhuman seventeen-year-old eyes.

'Why,' the fat girl squealed, 'he said he hadn't got a friend.'

'You can't believe what Fred says,' the voice said.

'Now we can make a proper party,' the fat girl said. 'This is my friend Delia. I'm Molly.'

'Pleased to meet you,' the boy said. 'Where are we going, Fred?'

'I'm hungry,' the fat girl said. 'I bet you're hungry too, Delia?' and Delia wriggled and squealed.

'I know a good place,' the boy said.

'Do they have sundaes?'

'The best sundaes,' he reassured her in his serious dead voice.

'That's what I want, a sundae. Delia likes splits best.'

'We'll be going, Fred,' the boy said.

Hale rose. His hands were shaking. This was real now: the boy, the razor cut, life going out with the blood in pain: not the deck chairs and the permanent waves, the miniature cars tearing round the curve on the Palace Pier. The ground moved under his feet, and only the thought of where they might take him while he was unconscious saved him from fainting. But even then common pride, the instinct not to make a scene, remained overpoweringly strong; embarrassment had more force than terror, it prevented him crying his fear aloud, it even urged him to go quietly. If the boy had not spoken again he might have gone.

'We'd better get moving, Fred,' the boy said.

'No,' Hale said. 'I'm not coming. I don't know him. My name's not Fred. I've never seen him before. He's just getting fresh,' and he walked rapidly away, with his head down, hopeless now – there wasn't time – only anxious to keep moving, to keep out in the clear sun; until from far down the front he heard a woman's winey voice singing, singing of brides and bouquets, of lilies and mourning shrouds, a Victorian ballad, and he moved towards it like someone who has been lost a long while in a desert makes for the glow of a fire.

'Why,' she said, 'if it isn't lonely heart,' and to his astonishment she was all by herself in a wilderness of chairs. 'They've gone to the gents,' she said.

'Can I sit down?' Hale asked. His voice broke with relief.

'If you've got twopence,' she said. 'I haven't.' She began to laugh, the great breasts pushing at her dress. 'Someone pinched my bag,' she said. 'Every penny I've got.' He watched her with astonishment. 'Oh,' she said, 'that's not the funny part. It's the letters. He'll have had all Tom's letters to read. Were they passionate? Tom'll be crazy when he hears.'

'You'll be wanting some money,' Hale said.

'Oh,' she said, 'I'm not worrying. Some nice feller will lend me ten bob – when they come out of the gents.'

'They your friends?' Hale asked.

'I met 'em in the pub,' she said.

'You think,' Hale said, 'they'll come back from the gents?'

'My,' she said, 'you don't think –' She gazed up the parade, then looked at Hale and began to laugh again. 'You win,' she said. 'They've pulled my leg properly. But there was only ten bob – and Tom's letters.'

'Will you have lunch with me now?' Hale said.

'I had a snack in the pub,' she said. 'They treated me to that, so I got something out of my ten bob.'

'Have a little more.'

'No, I don't fancy any more,' she said, and leaning far back in the deck-chair with her skirt pulled up to her knees exposing her fine legs, with an air of ribald luxury, she added, 'What a day,' sparkling back at the bright sea. 'All the same,' she said, 'they'll wish they'd never been born. I'm a sticker where right's concerned.'

'Your name's Lily?' Hale asked. He couldn't see the boy any more: he'd gone: Cubitt had gone. There was nobody he could recognize as far as he could see.

'That's what *they* called me,' she said. 'My real name's Ida.' The old and vulgarized Grecian name recovered a little dignity. She said, 'You look poorly. You ought to go off and eat somewhere.'

'Not if you won't come,' Hale said. 'I only want to stay here with you.'

'Why, that's a nice speech,' she said. 'I wish Tom could hear you – he writes passionate, but when it comes to talking –'

'Does he want to marry you?' Hale asked. She smelt of soap