ble for a man to live to the age of fifty-two without ever during his whole l ife having experienced one single small success in anything that he has done? "

"My dear Mr Botibol," Clements laughed, "everyone has his little succes ses from time to time, however small they may be."

"Oh no," Mr Botibol said gently. "You are wrong. I, for example, cannot remember having had a single success of any sort during my whole life."

"Now come!" Clements said, smiling. "That can't be true. Why only this m orning you sold your business for a hundred thousand. I call that one hell o f a success."

"The business was left me by my father. When he died nine years ago, it was worth four times as much. Under my direction it has lost three-quarters of its value. You can hardly call that a success."

Clements knew this was true. "Yes, yes, all right," he said. "That may be so, but all the same you know as well as I do that every man alive has his quo ta of little successes. Not big ones maybe. But lots of little ones. I mean, a fter all, goddammit, even scoring a goal at school was a little success, a lit tle triumph, at the time; or making some runs or learning to swim. One forgets about them, that's all. One just forgets."

"I never scored a goal," Mr Botibol said. "And I never learned to swim."

Clements threw up his hands and made exasperated noises. "Yes yes, I know , but don't you see, don't you see there are thousands, literally thousands o f other things like... well like catching a good fish, or fixing the motor of the car, or pleasing someone with a present, or growing a decent row of Fren ch beans, or winning a little bet or... or... why hell, one can go on listing them for ever!"

"Perhaps you can, Mr Clements, but to the best of my knowledge, I have n ever done any of those things. That is what I am trying to tell you."

Clements put down his brandy glass and stared with new interest at the remarkable shoulderless person who sat facing him. He was annoyed and he didn't feel in the least sympathetic. The man didn't inspire sympathy. He was a fool. He must be a fool. A tremendous and absolute fool. Clements ha d a sudden desire to embarrass the man as much as he could. "What about wo men, Mr Botibol?" There was no apology for the question in the tone of his voice.

"Women?"

"Yes women! Every man under the sun, even the most wretched filthy down -and-out tramp has some time or other had some sort of silly little success with... "Never!" cried Mr Botibol with sudden vigour. "No sir, never!"

I'm going to hit him, Clements told himself. I can't stand this any longe r and if I'm not careful I'm going to jump right up and hit him. "You mean yo u don't like them?" he said.

"Oh dear me yes, of course. I like them. As a matter of fact I admire th
em very much, very much indeed. But I'm afraid... oh dear me I do not know h
ow to say it... I am afraid that I do not seem to get along with them very w
ell. I never have. Never. You see, Mr Clements, I look queer. I know I do. T
hey stare at me, and often I see them laughing at me. I have never been able
to get within... well, within striking distance of them, as you might say."
The trace of a smile, weak and infinitely sad, flickered around the corners
of his mouth.

Clements had had enough. He mumbled something about how he was sure Mr
Botibol was exaggerating the situation, then he glanced at his watch, calle
d for the bill, and he said he was sorry but he would have to get back to t
he office.

They parted in the street outside the hotel and Mr Botibol took a cab bac
k to his house. He opened the front door, went into the living-room and switc
hed on the radio; then he sat down in a large leather chair, leaned back and
closed his eyes. He didn't feel exactly giddy, but there was a singing in his
ears and his thoughts were coming and going more quickly than usual. That so
licitor gave me too much wine, he told himself. I'll stay here for a while an
d listen to some music and I expect I'll go to sleep and after that I'll feel
better.

They were playing a symphony on the radio. Mr Botibol had always been a
casual listener to symphony concerts and he knew enough to identify this a
s one of Beethoven's. But now, as he lay back in his chair listening to the
marvellous music, a new thought began to expand slowly within his tipsy mi
nd. It wasn't a dream because he was not asleep. It was a clear conscious t
hought and it was this: I am the composer of this music. I am a great compo
ser. This is my latest symphony and this is the first performance. The huge
hall is packed with people--critics, musicians and music-lovers from all o
ver the country--and I am up there in front of the orchestra, conducting.

Mr Botibol could see the whole thing. He could see himself up on the ro
strum dressed in a white tie and tails, and before him was the orchestra, t
he massed violins on his left, the violas in front, the cellos on his right
, and back of them were all the woodwinds and bassoons and drums and cymbal
s, the players watching every moment of his baton with an intense, almost a
fanatical reverence. Behind him, in the half-darkness of the huge hail, wa
s row upon row of white enraptured faces, looking up towards him, listening
with growing excitement as yet another new symphony by the greatest compos
er the world has ever seen unfolded itself majestically before them. Some o
f the audience were clenching their fists and digging their nails into the
palms of their hands because the music was so beautiful that they could har
dly stand it. Mr Botibol became so carried away by this exciting vision tha
t he began to swing his arms in time with the music in the manner of a cond

uctor. He found it was such fun doing this that he decided to stand up, fac ing the radio, in order to give himself more freedom of movement.

He stood there in the middle of the room, tall, thin and shoulderless, dressed in his tight blue double-breasted suit, his small bald head jerking from side to side as he waved his arms in the air. He knew the symphony we ll enough to be able occasionally to anticipate changes in tempo or volume, and when the music became loud and fast he beat the air so vigorously that he nearly knocked himself over, when it was soft and hushed, he leaned for ward to quieten the players with gentle movements of his outstretched hands , and all the time he could feel the presence of the huge audience behind h im, tense, immobile, listening. When at last the symphony swelled to its tr emendous conclusion, Mr Botibol became more frenzied than ever and his face seemed to thrust itself round to one side in an agony of effort as he trie d to force more and still more power from his orchestra during those final mighty chords.

Then it was over. The announcer was saying something, but Mr Botibol qu ickly switched off the radio and collapsed into his chair, blowing heavily.

"Phew!" he said aloud. "My goodness gracious me, what have I been doing !" Small globules of sweat were oozing out all over his face and forehead, trickling down his neck inside his collar. He pulled out a handkerchief and wiped them away, and he lay there for a while, panting, exhausted, but exc eedingly exhilarated.

"Well, I must say," he gasped, still speaking aloud, "that was fun. I do n't know that I have ever had such fun before in all my life. My goodness, i t was fun, it really was!" Almost at once he began to play with the idea of doing it again. But should he? Should he allow himself to do it again? There was no denying that now, in retrospect, he felt a little guilty about the w hole business, and soon he began to wonder whether there wasn't something do wnright immoral about it all. Letting himself go like that! And imagining he was a genius! It was wrong. He was sure other people didn't do it. And what if Mason had come in the middle and seen him at it! That would have been te rrible!

He reached for the paper and pretended to read it, but soon he was sear ching furtively among the radio programmes for the evening. He put his fing er under a line which said '8.30 Symphony Concert. Brahms Symphony No .2'. He stared at it for a long time. The letters in the word 'Brahms' began to blur and recede, and gradually they disappeared altogether and were replace d by letters which spelt 'Botibol'. Botibol's Symphony No .2. It was printe d quite clearly. He was reading it now, this moment. "Yes, yes," he whisper ed. "First performance. The world is waiting to hear it. Will it be as grea t, they are asking, will it perhaps be greater than his earlier work? And t he composer himself had been persuaded to conduct. He is shy and retiring,

hardly ever appears in public, but on this occasion he has been persuaded..

Mr Botibol leaned forward in his chair and pressed the bell beside the fi replace. Mason, the butler, the only other person in the house, ancient, smal l and grave, appeared at the door.

"Er... Mason, have we any wine in the house?"

"Wine, sir?"

"Yes, wine."

"Oh no, sir. We haven't had any wine this fifteen or sixteen years. Your fat her, sir..

"I know, Mason, I know, but will you get some please. I want a bottle wi th my dinner."

The butler was shaken. "Very well, sir, and what shall it be?"

"Claret, Mason. The best you can obtain. Get a case. Tell them to send it round at once."

When he was alone again, he was momentarily appalled by the simple man ner in which he had made his decision. Wine for dinner! Just like that! We ll, yes, why not? Why ever not now he came to think of it? He was his own master. And anyway it was essential that he have wine. It seemed to have a good effect, a very good effect indeed. He wanted it and he was going to have it and to hell with Mason.

He rested for the remainder of the afternoon, and at seven-thirty Mason announced dinner. The bottle of wine was on the table and he began to drin k it. He didn't give a damn about the way Mason watched him as he refilled his glass. Three times he refilled it; then he left the table saying that h e was not to be disturbed and returned to the living-room. There was quarte r of an hour to wait. He could think of nothing now except the coming conce rt. He lay back in the chair and allowed his thoughts to wander deliciously towards eight-thirty. He was the great composer waiting impatiently in his dressing-room in the concert-hall. He could hear in the distance the murmu r of excitement from the crowd as they settled themselves in their seats. H e knew what they were saying to each other. Same sort of thing the newspape rs had been saying for months. Botibol is a genius, greater, far greater th an Beethoven or Bach or Brahms or Mozart or any of them. Each new work of h is is more magnificent than the last. What will the next one be like? We ca n hardly wait to hear it! Oh yes, he knew what they were saying. He stood u p and began to pace the room. It was nearly time now. He seized a pencil fr om the table to use as a baton, then he switched on the radio. The announce r had just finished the preliminaries and suddenly there was a burst of app lause which meant that the conductor was coming on to the platform. The pre vious concert in the afternoon had been from gramophone records, but this o ne was the real thing. Mr Botibol turned around, faced the fireplace and bo wed graciously from the waist. Then he turned back to the radio and lifted

his baton. The clapping stopped. There was a moment's silence. Someone in t
he audience coughed. Mr Botibol waited. The symphony began.

Once again, as he began to conduct, he could see clearly before him the whole orchestra and the faces of the players and even the expressions on t
heir faces. Three of the violinists had grey hair. One of the cellists was very fat, another wore heavy brown-rimmed glasses, and there was a man in t
he second row playing a horn who had a twitch on one side of his face. But they were all magnificent. And so was the music. During certain impressive passages Mr Botibol experienced a feeling of exultation so powerful that it made him cry out for joy, and once during the Third Movement, a little shi
ver of ecstasy radiated spontaneously from his solar plexus and moved downw
ard over the skin of his stomach like needles. But the thunderous applause and the cheering which came at the end of the symphony was the most splendi
d thing of all. He turned slowly towards the fireplace and bowed. The clapp
ing continued and he went on bowing until at last the noise died away and t
he announcer's voice jerked him suddenly back into the living-room. He swit
ched off the radio and collapsed into his chair, exhausted but very happy.

As he lay there, smiling with pleasure, wiping his wet face, panting fo
r breath, he was already making plans for his next performance. But why not do it properly? Why not convert one of the rooms into a sort of concert-ha
ll and have a stage and row of chairs and do the thing properly? And have a gramophone so that one could perform at any time without having to rely on the radio programme. Yes by heavens, he would do it!

The next morning Mr Botibol arranged with a firm of decorators that the largest room in the house be converted into a miniature concert-hall. Ther
e was to be a raised stage at one end and the rest of the floor-space was t
o be filled with rows of red plush seats. "I'm going to have some little co
ncerts here," he told the man from the firm, and the man nodded and said th
at would be very nice. At the same time he ordered a radio shop to instal a
n expensive self-changing gramophone with two powerful amplifiers, one on t
he stage, the other at the back of the auditorium. When he had done this, h
e went off and bought all of Beethoven's nine symphonies on gramophone reco
rds, and from a place which specialized in recorded sound effects he ordere
d several records of clapping and applauding by enthusiastic audiences. Fin
ally he bought himself a conductor's baton, a slim ivory stick which lay in a case lined with blue silk.

In eight days the room was ready. Everything was perfect; the red chairs, the aisle down the centre and even a little dais on the platform with a brass rail running round it for the conductor. Mr Botibol decided to give the first concert that evening after dinner.

At seven o'clock he went up to his bedroom and changed into white tie an
d tails. He felt marvellous. When he looked at himself in the mirror, the si

ght of his own grotesque shoulderless figure didn't worry him in the least. A great composer, he thought, smiling, can look as he damn well pleases. People expect him to look peculiar. All the same he wished he had some hair on his head. He would have liked to let it grow rather long. He went downstairs to dinner, ate his food rapidly, drank half a bottle of wine and felt better still. "Don't worry about me, Mason," he said. "I'm not mad. I'm just enjoying myself."

"Yes, sir."

"I shan't want you any more. Please see that I'm not disturbed." Mr Botibol went from the dining-room into the miniature concert-hall. He took out the records of Beethoven's First Symphony, but before putting them on the gramophone, he placed two other records with them. The one, which was to be played first of all, before the music began, was labelled 'prolonged enthusiastic applause'. The other, which would come at the end of the symphony, was labelled 'Sustained applause, clapping, cheering, shouts of encore'. By a simple mechanical device on the record changer, the gramophone people had arranged that the sound from the first and the last records--the applause --would come only from the loudspeaker in the auditorium. The sound from all the others--the music--would come from the speaker hidden among the chairs of the orchestra. When he had arranged the records in the concert order, he placed them on the machine but he didn't switch on at once. Instead he turned out all the lights in the room except one small one which lit up the conductor's dais and he sat down in the chair up on the stage, closed his eyes and allowed his thoughts to wander into the usual delicious regions; the great composer, nervous, impatient, waiting to present his latest masterpiece, the audience assembling, the murmur of their excited talk, and so on. Having dreamed himself right into the part, he stood up, picked up his baton and switched on the gramophone.

A tremendous wave of clapping filled the room. Mr Botibol walked across the stage, mounted the dais, faced the audience and bowed. In the darkness he could just make out the faint outline of the seats on either side of the centre aisle, but he couldn't see the faces of the people. They were making enough noise. What an ovation! Mr Botibol turned and faced the orchestra. The applause behind him died down. The next record dropped. The symphony began.

This time it was more thrilling than ever, and during the performance he registered any number of prickly sensations around his solar plexus. Once, when it suddenly occurred to him that the music was being broadcast all over the world, a sort of shiver ran right down the length of his spine. But by far the most exciting part was the applause which came at the end. They cheered and clapped and stamped and shouted encore! encore! encore! and he turned towards the darkened auditorium and bowed gravely to the left and r

ight. Then he went off the stage, but they called him back. He bowed severa l more times and went off again, and again they, called him back. The audie nce had gone mad. They simply wouldn't let him go. It was terrific. It was truly a terrific ovation.

Later, when he was resting in his chair in the other room, he was still en joying it. He closed his eyes because he didn't want anything to break the spe ll. He lay there and he felt like he was floating. It was really a most marvel lous floating feeling, and when he went upstairs and undressed and got into be d, it was still with him.

The following evening he conducted Beethoven's--or rather Botibol's--Se cond Symphony, and they were just as mad about that one as the first. The n ext few nights he played one symphony a night, and at the end of nine eveni ngs he had worked through all nine of Beethoven's symphonies. It got more e xciting every time because before each concert the audience kept saying, 'H e can't do it again, not another masterpiece. It's not humanly possible.' B ut he did. They were all of them equally magnificent. The last symphony, th e Ninth, was especially exciting because here the composer surprised and de lighted everyone by suddenly providing a choral masterpiece. He had to cond uct a huge choir as well as the orchestra itself, and Benjamino Gigli had f lown over from Italy to take the tenor part. Enrico Pinza sang bass. At the end of it the audience shouted themselves hoarse. The whole musical world was on its feet cheering, and on all sides they were saying how you never c ould tell what wonderful things to expect next from this amazing person.

The composing, presenting and conducting of nine great symphonies in a s many days is a fair achievement for any man, and it was not astonishing that it went a little to Mr Botibol's head. He decided now that he would o nce again surprise his public. He would compose a mass of marvellous piano music and he himself would give the recitals. So early the next morning h e set out for the show room of the people who sold Bechsteins and Steinway s. He felt so brisk and fit that he walked all the way, and as he walked h e hummed little snatches of new and lovely tunes for the piano. His head w as full of them. All the time they kept coming to him and once, suddenly, he had the feeling the thousands of small notes, some white, some black, w ere cascading down a chute into his head through a hole in his head, and t hat his brain, his amazing musical brain, was receiving them as fast as th ey could come and unscrambling them and arranging them neatly in a certain order so that they made wondrous melodies. There were Nocturnes, there we re Etudes and there were Waltzes, and soon, he told himself, soon he would give them all to a grateful and admiring world. When he arrived at the pi ano-shop, he pushed the door open and walked in with an air almost of conf idence.. He had changed much in the last few days. Some of his nervousness had left him and he was no longer wholly preoccupied with what others tho

ught of his appearance. "I want," he said to the salesman, "a concert gran
d, but you must arrange it so that when the notes are struck, no sound is produced."

The salesman leaned forward and raised his eyebrows.

"Could that be arranged?" Mr Botibol asked.

"Yes, sir, I think so, if you desire it. But might I inquire what you intend
to use the instrument for?"

"If you want to know, I'm going to pretend I'm Chopin. I'm going to sit
and play while a gramophone makes the music. It gives me a kick." It came
out, just like that, and Mr Botibol didn't know what had made him say it. B
ut it was done now and he had said it and that was that. In a way he felt r
elieved, because he had proved he didn't mind telling people what he was do
ing. The man would probably answer what a jolly good idea. Or he might not.
He might say well you ought to be locked up.

"So now you know," Mr Botibol said.

The salesman laughed out loud. "Ha ha! Ha ha ha! That's very good, sir.
Very good indeed. Serves me right for asking silly questions." He stopped su
ddenly in the middle of the laugh and looked hard at Mr Botibol. "Of course,
sir, you probably know that we sell a simple noiseless keyboard specially f
or silent practising."

"I want a concert grand," Mr Botibol said. The salesman looked at him ag
ain.

Mr Botibol chose his piano and got out of the shop as quickly as possib
le. He went on to the store that sold gramophone records and there he order
ed a quantity of albums containing recordings of all Chopin's Nocturnes, Et
udes and Waltzes, played by Arthur Rubinstein.

"My goodness, you are going to have a lovely time!"

Mr Botibol turned and saw standing beside him at the counter a squat, sho
rt-legged girl with a face as plain as a pudding.

"Yes," he answered. "Oh yes, I am." Normally he was strict about not spe
aking to females in public places, but this one had taken him by surprise.

"I love Chopin," the girl said. She was holding a slim brown paper bag wi
th string handles containing a single record she had just bought. "I like him
better than any of the others."

It was comforting to hear the voice of this girl after the way the piano
salesman had laughed. Mr Botibol wanted to talk to her but he didn't know wha
t to say.

The girl said, "I like the Nocturnes best, they're so soothing. Which are y
our favourites?"

Mr Botibol said, "Well... " The girl looked up at him and she smiled ple
asantly, trying to assist with his embarrassment. It was the smile that did
it. He suddenly found himself saying, "Well now, perhaps, would you, I wonde
r... I mean I was wondering... " She smiled again; she couldn't help it this

time. "What I mean is I would be glad if you would care to come along some time and listen to these records."

"Why how nice of you." She paused, wondering whether it was all right. "You really mean it?"

"Yes, I should be glad."

She had lived long enough in the city to discover that old men, if they are dirty old men, do not bother about trying to pick up a girl as unattractive as herself. Only twice in her life had she been accosted in public and each time the man had been drunk. But this one wasn't drunk. He was nervous and he was peculiar-looking, but he wasn't drunk. Come to think of it, it was she who had started the conversation in the first place. "It would be lovely," she said. "It really would. When could I come?"

Oh dear, Mr Botibol thought. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.

"I could come tomorrow," she went on. "It's my afternoon off."

"Well, yes, certainly," he answered slowly. "Yes, of course. I'll give you my card. Here it is."

"A. W. Botibol," she read aloud. "What a funny name. Mine's Darlington. Miss L. Darlington. How d'you do, Mr Botibol." She put out her hand for him to shake. "Oh I am looking forward to this! What time shall I come?"

"Any time," he said. "Please come any time."

"Three o'clock?"

"Yes. Three o'clock."

"Lovely! I'll be there."

He watched her walk out of the shop, a squat, stumpy, thick-legged little person and my word, he thought, what have I done! He was amazed at himself. But he was not displeased. Then at once he started to worry about whether or not he should let her see his concert-hall. He worried still more when he realized that it was the only place in the house where there was a gramophone.

That evening he had no concert. Instead he sat in his chair brooding about Miss Darlington and what he should do when she arrived. The next morning they brought the piano, a fine Bechstein in dark mahogany which was carried in minus its legs and later assembled on the platform in the concert hall. It was an imposing instrument and when Mr Botibol opened it and pressed a note with his finger, it made no sound at all. He had originally intended to astonish the world with a recital of his first piano compositions--a set of Etudes--as soon as the piano arrived, but it was no good now. He was too worried about Miss Darlington and three o'clock. At lunch-time his trepidation had increased and he couldn't eat. "Mason," he said, "I'm, I'm expecting a young lady to call at three o'clock."

"A what, sir?" the butler said.

"A young lady, Mason."

"Very good, sir."

"Show her into the sitting-room."

"Yes, sir."

Precisely at three he heard the bell ring. A few moments later Mason was showing her into the room. She came in, smiling, and Mr Botibol stood up and shook her hand. "My!" she exclaimed. "What a lovely house! I didn't know I was calling on a millionaire!"

She settled her small plump body into a large armchair and Mr Botibol sat opposite. He didn't know what to say. He felt terrible. But almost at once she began to talk and she chattered away gaily about this and that for a long time without stopping. Mostly it was about his house and the furniture and the carpets and about how nice it was of him to invite her because she didn't have such an awful lot of excitement in her life. She worked hard all day and she shared a room with two other girls in a boarding-house and he could have no idea how thrilling it was for her to be here. Gradually Mr Botibol began to feel better. He sat there listening to the girl, rather liking her, nodding his bald head slowly up and down, and the more she talked, the more he liked her. She was gay and chatty, but underneath all that any fool could see that she was a lonely tired little thing. Even Mr Botibol could see that. He could see it very clearly indeed. It was at this point that he began to play with a daring and risky idea.

"Miss Darlington," he said. "I'd like to show you something." He led her out of the room straight to the little concert-hall. "Look," he said.

She stopped just inside the door. "My goodness! Just look at that! A theatre! A real little theatre!" Then she saw the piano on the platform and the conductor's dais with the brass rail running round it. "It's for concerts!" she cried. "Do you really have concerts here! Oh, Mr Botibol, how exciting!"

"Do you like it?"

"Oh yes!"

"Come back into the other room and I'll tell you about it." Her enthusiasm had given him confidence and he wanted to get going. "Come back and listen while I tell you something funny." And when they were seated in the sitting-room again, he began at once to tell her his story. He told the whole thing, right from the beginning, how one day, listening to a symphony, he had imagined himself to be the composer, how he had stood up and started to conduct, how he had got an immense pleasure out of it, how he had done it again with similar results and how finally he had built himself the concert-hall where already he had conducted nine symphonies. But he cheated a little bit in the telling. He said that the only real reason he did it was in order to obtain the maximum appreciation from the music. There was only one way to listen to music, he told her, only one way to make yourself listen to every single note and chord. You had to do two things at once. You had to